

THE LORD'S SERVICE
AT TRINITY REFORMED CHURCH

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Covenanting Together to the Glory of God in Martinsburg

INTRODUCTION

In a Nutshell: What We Do and Why

TRINITY REFORMED CHURCH BELIEVES THAT GOD HIMSELF HAS graciously given His saints (through His word, the Bible) the way in which He wants to be approached and adored each Sunday. The structure of our service is defined as a Covenant Renewal Service or The Lord's Service. Simply put: a covenant is a formal relationship between God and His people. It is both a time of sacrifice and offering—a time of receiving and responding.

In the Old Testament, covenant with God was renewed through the sacrificial system laid out in the books of the Law (specifically Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Leviticus is a God-breathed primer on how to worship. Though animal sacrifices have been officially vacated through the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, the *way* of sacrifice still remains. God still renews His covenant with His people by way of sacrifice. We do this by faith and through our union with Jesus Christ each Sunday. Let's see what God has to say about sacrificial worship in the New Covenant:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. (2 Corinthians 2:15-16a)

In the Old Covenant there were three major sacrifices offered for covenant renewal. In this order, they were:

1. The Purification Offering (or Sin Offering). In this offering, the bringing and slaughtering of the appropriate animal for cleansing and forgiveness is highlighted (see Leviticus 17).
2. The Ascension Offering. This offering highlights the skinning, cutting up, and washing of the appropriate sacrificial animal; and then the transformation of the entire animal by fire, consumed in the cloud of God's presence.

3. The Peace Offering (or Communion Offering). In this sacrifice, fellowship with God is communicated through the sharing of a meal with Him.

We follow this Levitical model when we renew our covenant with God each week. Why? 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11 teaches us that what was written in the Old Testament is still relevant in the New Testament. We hear in the Church today that we can worship any way we wish — but why would we choose to worship any old way when God has given us a type and structure defining how He enjoys being approached and adored? We can be certain that when we follow God's pattern for His service, He will indeed be pleased with our worship. From the Old Testament pattern, the Church (not simply TRC or the CREC, but THE Church throughout history) has established a liturgical form for covenant renewal each Sunday. We outline them with an alliteration of "C's": *Call* to worship, *Confession* of sin, *Consecration* to God, *Communion* with God, and *Commission* (this terminology is not original to TRC. See resources by James Jordan and Jeffrey Meyers in our "Recommended Reading"). This, in a nutshell, is the structure of our Lord's Day Service.

By the Spirit we are drawn into God the Father's presence to Jesus Christ. This is what happens every Lord's Day in the worship service. This is the way of sacrificial worship — united to Christ we are not only brought together by the Spirit, but by the same Spirit we are drawn into the Father's presence in His Son by cleansing, consecration, and communion.¹

¹ Meyers, Jeffrey M. *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*. Moscow: CanonPress, 2003.

Every element of the Lord's Service at Trinity Reformed Church of Martinsburg has biblical purpose and intention. Let's take a look at each section of our weekly covenant renewal service.

ONE

The Call to Worship

EACH LORD'S DAY, GOD HIMSELF CALLS HIS PEOPLE INTO HIS presence. We aren't just gathering together each week asking God to show up. God *calls* us. Though the liturgical minister voices this call, by faith the people of God should know that it is *God* who has called them. This should excite us. The King of kings, Maker and Ruler of all creation, summons us each week to worship with all of His saints on earth and in heaven.

How we respond to this call directly correlates to what we truly believe is happening each Sunday. If we come to the service on Sunday in hopes of hearing only a good sermon or to be emotionally stirred by the music, what we actually believe about worship should be examined. There are real implications when we believe that the King of the universe has summoned us into His presence for a particular purpose at a particular time.

For instance, our response to God's summons should be a punctual one. When I was a child, my brother and I played all over the neighborhood. Around 5:30 in the afternoon, we made sure we were outside in case our dad was home from work. He would stand on the front stoop and whistle for us. We knew his whistle, and we dropped everything we were doing to run for home when we heard it. We never meandered into the dining room for dinner with a "Hey pops! Sorry I'm late." Dad called. We came. How much more should

God's children anticipate His call each Sunday and make every effort to be on time! Our elders have determined that we should begin at 10:15 am. We should be seated and anticipating God's call by that time.

The fact that it is God calling us should also rouse joyful anticipation this means preparation on our part. It's best to be rested, rising in joy and not frantically rushing around, barking orders at one another. Be purposeful about the Lord's Day on Saturday night. Prepare in advance. Prepare to dress appropriately, modestly. Rise early enough to help other members of your family. Anticipate worship as a family knowing that Sunday is special and that God expects our joyful arrival. On Sunday morning, pray for God to put you and your family in the proper mindset for worship. Jeffrey Meyers offers this sample prayer as an example:

O Lord, enable me this morning to worship You sincerely and in truth. Help me, Father, to receive again Your gracious service to me in the Word and Sacraments. Assist me also so that I can give to You the kind of praise and adoration appropriate to the One who loves me, sent His Son to die for me, and continues to provide all things for me. Amen.²

In our household, we read Psalm 92 in preparation for worship. There are many Psalms that can mold our attitude and ready us for the Lord's service. No matter how we choose to prepare, our attitude should be one of joy, gratitude, and expectancy as we respond to God's call on the Lord's Day.

The call to worship begins with the minister's prayer — usually a Psalm. Dressed in white, the minister stands before the congregation as a picture of Christ, our military Commander in Chief, organizing His troops for battle. As holy warriors, we respond enthusiastically to His orders — soldiers who have no

² Ibid.

doubt they are on the winning side. At TRC, we respond to the call in joyful song. Following the song, the minister speaks a Trinitarian confession (“In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!”) reminding the church that everything in the Lord’s Service is done in relation to our three-personed God. The church responds with a hearty “Amen!” The minister then offers the salutation, “The Lord be with you.” This was a common greeting by Christians to Christians (Ruth 2:4), and through it the minister declares his intention to lead the people and demonstrates his desire that God will bless His people through his service. The people respond with “and also with you,” affirming the minister’s leadership and God’s blessing on him as well.

Next is the *votum*, a short prayer that acknowledges God’s enablement and charity in our worship (“It is good to give thanks to the Lord who made heaven and earth, to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness every night”). Finally, the call ends with an opening prayer *the collect* in which is “collected together” the petitions of the people into one common prayer. In unison, the people offer this prayer to God.

Some might be bothered by a liturgy that is this repetitious, calling it “too Catholic.” But in our individualistic society, we have a tendency toward demonizing anything repetitive or ritualistic. We fear it will make something too common, too rote, and thus nullify the importance of the rites. But repetition is a good thing. Consider G. K. Chesterton’s take on repetitious ritual:

The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some

game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore. Heaven may encore the bird who laid an egg.³

Therefore, rejoice that the Lord has ordained a way to meet with Him and that you are called to Him every Lord’s Day.

³ Chesterton, G. K. *Orthodoxy*. New York: Image Books, 1959.

TWO

Confession

IT IS LOGICAL THAT THE NEXT STEP IN OUR ORDER OF WORSHIP is confession. Having been called into the company of our Most High God, Christians are made aware of their sinfulness and guilt (Isaiah 6:5, Ezekiel 1:28, Revelation 1:17). 1 John 1:8 outs all of us: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Yet John offers us hope in the very next verse: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

But aren't we already forgiven? Absolutely! “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...” (Ephesians 1:7). “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). It's a wonderful fact that our forgiveness was obtained through the work of Jesus once and for all. It is also true that the application of that forgiveness is ongoing (1 John 1:9). We are like Peter in John 13:6-11. We've been washed completely clean in Christ, but we still need the daily and weekly dirt of the world washed from our hands and feet. And that's all of us.

So isn't my private confession enough? Why confession of sin corporately? God has called us together as His people. It's a corporate "foot washing." We confess *with one another* that we are sinners, whether we feel particularly wicked at the moment or not. It's a corporate confession that we all stand equal before the Lord Jesus Christ, all are in need of His forgiveness and grace, and that each of us has sinned in one form or another throughout the week. This is not an introspective time for condemnation. Rather it is a time for humble submission and acknowledgement of the fact that we each sin.

At the end of the corporate prayer, there is a moment of silence for private confession of particular sins. Each of us should cherish the opportunity to come clean before God. All repentance is a God-granted gift. It is a kindness from His hand to place us in right standing before Him. Right standing allows us the privilege of kneeling to ask for forgiveness of sin. In truth, the more common posture in Scripture is bowing or prostration, but it's not quite practical to lie flat at church. Therefore:

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts..." (Psalm 95:6-8a)

It's not enough to simply confess our sins though. That is why we follow confession with reception or more correctly, assurance of pardon (forgiveness). The minister directs us to stand, to lift up our heads and to hear the good news, to receive the forgiveness that is promised by God. This is a practice that has been abandoned by many churches (along with corporate confession) citing "It's just a little too Roman Catholic." The liturgical minister has no special power to remit sins and cannot personally pardon anyone.

However, his office entitles him to authoritatively proclaim God's faithfulness to forgive all those who truly repent. As a congregation, we hold forth our hands as a sign that we believe God's promise and receive His forgiveness. It is a glorious moment in the Lord's Service: Jesus cleansing each of us, and all of us. Confession and assurance of pardon is a blessing that we should anticipate with delight each Lord's Day. And appropriately, we follow forgiveness with praise through song.

THREE

Consecration

WE NOTED IN THE FIRST CHAPTER THAT THE LORD’S SERVICE IS structured by following the Old Covenant pattern of sacrificial rites. Recall the three major sacrifices that correspond to the Lord’s Day: 1) The sin offering in which forgiveness and cleansing are highlighted; 2) The ascension offering where the animal was cut up, arranged on the altar with meal, grain, or incense, and burnt up for God to eat; and 3) The peace offering where the priest and the worshiper share a meal. Having been *called* to worship and having *confessed* and received forgiveness, we are now *consecrated*. We ourselves become the ascension offering.

Just as the priestly sword is at this point trained on the sacrificial animal to prepare him for his ascent into the Lord’s presence, and the fire on the altar was stoked up to purify and transform him for fellowship with a holy God, so also now the fiery Spirit will use the Word of God during this part of our service to “chop” us up, wash us, and transform us into holy people prepared to meet our holy Lord (Hebrews 4:12; 12:14; Psalm 24:4; Ephesians 5:26-27). During this stage of the liturgy the Lord serves us through His word and we respond by obediently hearing and submitting to the priestly sword of the Spirit: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-

edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).⁴

Before we begin, let’s answer a common question about the minister who officiates. At Trinity Reformed Church at Martinsburg, the minister is dressed in a white robe. We believe the man leading the Church in worship is best identified this way as the representative and spokesman for Jesus on the Lord’s Day. Why is he wearing white? Glad you asked! Firstly, the white robe helps the worshiper to see the office of the man instead of his personality. This helps us to remember that we are not submitting to “good ‘ole buddy Joe,” but to the Lord’s chosen servant who is under divine responsibility to lead God’s people. During worship, we submit to the office – not to the man. Secondly, the minister is in a real way stepping into Christ’s sandals on the Lord’s Day. He acts and speaks for Christ to His body and bride. Though He is called to spiritual maturity and high biblical standards, this does not mean that the minister is more mature in his faith than everyone else in the congregation. His role and office is symbolic and representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. The white robe sets him *apart from* the congregation, not *above* them. Thirdly, no matter what the minister wears, it is in some way a “uniform.” Congregants will assume something about the wearer. If he’s in a suit and tie, the office can be misconstrued as more of a CEO position than a ministerial role. If he’s wearing flannel, jeans, and high-tops, he’s hip and “just like me,” and we can take what he says as mere advice from the pulpit. Clothing always says something. We desire it to

⁴ Myers, Jeffrey M. *The Lord’s Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*. Moscow: CanonPress, 2003.

say “Christ’s representative to His Bride, the Church.” Finally, we choose *white* robes because the Bible does: “Let your garments always be white,” says Ecclesiastes 9:8.

Now back to the third “C”: *Consecration*. The word “consecrate” simply means to set something or someone apart as holy to God. The next step in our order of worship is called the *Sursum Corda* – Latin for “lift up your hearts.” When the Bible uses the term “heart,” God is speaking of the center of who we are – not simply our emotions. It is here that worshipers’ spiritual eyes (by faith) are opened to see their true position in worship: in the heavenlies. With eyes of faith, we behold the roof rolled back and ourselves ushered into heavenly worship, further up and further in, before God’s throne, together with cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, and the whole Church from ages past to present. This is true whether we feel it or not. And our ascent into heaven begins with singing. It is at this point that we sing the Doxology, singing our gratitude to God for His gracious covenant with us.

Next, God declares His word to us and we hear. Law follows Grace. Now that we have experienced God’s grace through confession, repentance, assurance of pardon, and praise, we are ready to listen to the righteous requirements of the Law and obey God. By His word, we are being cut up as living sacrifices. Though I like to hear the pages of the Bible whipping back and forth as much as the next Christian, the Bible was originally penned to be read aloud in the congregation. In our media-driven society, some may struggle a bit with attentive listening, but this is a practice with eternal benefits. The Word of God is life to us, so we must listen and receive the Word of God with faith and a hearty “thanks be to God,” thanking Him for cutting us up and making us holy.

We begin with a Psalm, reciting it in a call-and-response fashion. In this way, we are acting out the Bridegroom/Bride relationship. The bridegroom speaks to us, and we respond. The bridegroom gives us the word, and we glorify that word with another word. After this, the Old Testament and New Testament readings follow. We sit, listen and submit to God's double-edged sword, and respond to the reading with "thanks be to God."

These Bible readings are followed with standing and singing the *Gloria Patri*. In doing this we attribute all glory to our Triune God, acknowledging all good things come from Him and deservedly return to Him. This is a signal in the service that we are reaching the peak of the ascension. Once sung, the minister reads from one of the Gospels. There is a differentiation between the Gospels and the rest of the Bible readings because of the revelation of Jesus Christ. These are the books that uncover the rest of Scripture. Though we call them the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they are in a more real sense the gospels—the good news—of Jesus Christ. Thus we respond to this reading with "praise be to You, O Christ."

Following the Bible readings, the sermon is delivered to the people. This is God's word communicated to each believer and to the body as a whole. Though the entire service is sermoniac to a great degree (we've been reading, singing, and praying the word throughout), the sermon is different in that the Husband speaks to His Bride. God speaks to His church in Martinsburg. It is intimate, planned, and purposeful.

...The primary audience addressed on the Lord's Day is the people of God who have just now been reconstituted as God's covenant

community. On this particular day at this special time God's people are in the process of being offered as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1). One of the essential means of sacrificial consecration is the "renewing of the mind" so that it will not be "conformed to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). The word of God is the priestly knife that chops us up and prepares us as sacrificial "food for God" (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, after we have praised God, confessed our sins, accepted Christ's forgiveness, thanked God for His love in Christ, recited His law, and entered His presence boldly to pray after we have done all of this then we are ready to listen to the pointed and sharp voice of God from the Scriptures.⁵

Like the Levitical ascension offering that is divided into 3 segments (ascension, tribute, incense), our consecration is divided into 3 segments as well: word, tithe, and prayers. God's people respond to the Word of God by giving tithes and offerings. This is analogous to the tribute offering in the Old Testament. God's word has done its proper work in our lives when we, by the Spirit and from the heart, offer ourselves as well as our possessions and works to God. This is an act of worship. As a sign of her thankful dedication to the Lord, the Church offers to the Father a tenth of what God has given her along with any freewill offerings over and above the tenth required by God. This is a corporate offering of ourselves as well as the work of our hands back to God in devotion and gratitude as a whole. TRC offers her tithes while singing Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, *Cast Thy Bread Upon the Waters*.

In closing out the consecration portion of the service, the prayers of the people are offered to God, voiced this time by the liturgical minister for us. We can now approach the throne of grace with full confidence and bold expectation that God will hear and answer our petitions. Our goal is brevity,

⁵ Ibid.

but our responsibilities are real. Biblical extemporaneous prayers are difficult, so our ministers prepare written prayers in advance. This enables us to be certain that we are praying for all the areas that God has charged His Church to pray for: the world, the Church, and our congregation. This does take some training and practice. The congregation should be able to give an enthusiastic AMEN to the corporate prayer. We follow this in song with the Lord's Prayer, which is only fitting. Our prayers are the incense offering placed on top of the tribute and ascension offerings.

Finally, the Church remains standing and recites (or reads) one of the historical Church creeds (generally the Apostle's Creed or Nicene Creed) in unison. This is not solely a declaration of doctrine. It is much more than that. It is an opportunity to stand with the martyrs and the saints that came before us to confess in Whom our trust lies and why. It is our privilege to stand boldly and proclaim the hope of our salvation, announcing that this Jesus Christ is our God and we worship Him. This is the last act of the congregation before we sit and eat with our King.

FOUR

Communion

CALL TO WORSHIP, *CONFESSION* OF SIN, *CONSECRATION*... NOW WE are ready for *communion* – the culmination of the Lord’s service. God has called us together to have a meal. Yes, He cleanses us and consecrates us – but before He sends us out into the world to serve Him, He sits us down and strengthens and nourishes us with bread and wine. This is the only ritual in the New Covenant that we are obligated by Jesus to do on a routine basis. This implies that we should be careful and thoughtful as to how we do it. God has given us very specific types in the Old Testament through Israel. Just as Israel approached God in the way He instructed them, so must we.

How does Trinity Reformed Church celebrate communion? And why? First, we do this as a memorial in obedience to Jesus’ admonition:

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:19-20)

We see this again in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

"This do in remembrance of Me." This has come to mean, "Do this as a way of helping others to remember Me." But a better translation is: "Do this as My memorial." What then was the Old Testament example of a memorial?

All of the memorials in the Old Testament were to remind the Lord Himself of the covenant He inaugurated with His people. In fact, the name of Yahweh was given to the people of God to use during prayer to remind God of the covenant He had made with them. This does not mean that we serve an absent-minded God who forgets His promises. God is the ultimate promise maker and keeper. We don't forget we're married, but our rings are a reminder of the covenant we made with one another. In the New Covenant, we use the name of Jesus when we pray to remind God of the covenant He made with us. We often say, "in Jesus' name" or "for the sake of Jesus we pray."

Passover is the most obvious example of a memorial. God instituted it as a covenant meal. "So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance" (Exodus 12:14). When God saw the blood on the doorpost, He "remembered" His covenant promise and passed over the house during judgment. All the sacrifices were instituted to remind God of His covenantal faithfulness to His children.

Not only does communion follow this pattern, but Jesus used this same language at the Passover meal (Luke 22). In every animal sacrifice in the Old Testament, the blood of the animal was separated from the body and poured out. Jesus used this sacrificial language, separating the body rite and the blood rite, “This is My body...” and “this is My blood...” Also, in the breaking of the bread, Jesus calls to the worshiper’s mind the sacrifices that were always divided on the altar. Even grain offerings were divided and separated.

The Lord’s Supper is the New Covenant memorial rite. It is the fulfillment of all these older ways that the Lord instituted as the means whereby His people would call upon His Name and dramatically ask Him to remember His covenant. All the memorials of the Old Order are now fulfilled and completed (compacted) into one simple covenantal memorial meal.⁶

In communion, we remind God of His covenant promises (think rainbow after the flood, the Passover feast, or the twelve stones placed as a memorial after the Jordan crossing into the Promised Land). In this rite, we are praying to God to remember the sacrificial death of Jesus and His covenant with us. And God, in response, is nourishing and strengthening us, making us one body united to Christ.

TRC celebrates communion weekly. It is the primary reason God has gathered us together to eat and drink of the Lord Jesus, having our bodies and souls nourished and strengthened for the good works that God has ordained for us to walk in, individually and as His body. One common reason is raised against weekly communion by many local churches: rituals become rote and lose their meaning and impact. But we don’t hug our children once a month or have family dinners only once a month because we’re worried hugs

⁶ Ibid.

and dinners won't be special anymore. It's the meaningful things that should be practiced most often. The Bible has given us a clear statement that we should have the Lord's Supper as often as we gather together. If asked if we believe in having the Lord's Supper weekly, a proper response might simply be, "Of course. I believe that worship is covenant renewal and the communion meal is always the climax of renewing the covenant."

TRC also uses wine and bread, not grape juice and crackers. God gave us a list of supplies with only two items. Imagine your spouse sending you to the grocery store for bread and wine. What would the reaction be if you came back with substitutes? Wine in the Bible is alcoholic – it has fire in it. If not, the warnings against drunkenness are a bit superfluous. It was not possible to preserve fruit juice in the ancient world. With the exception of harvest time, there was never any such thing as non-alcoholic grape juice.

It's also important to note here that during communion, Jesus does not change the elements from their common use. We do not believe in transubstantiation. The bread and wine are just bread and wine. It is in the act of eating and drinking by faith that we receive life and union in Christ. This is why we have no problem with the children devouring the leftovers after church: it is just bread.

We also sit and sing during the meal. Many denominations that practice regular communion have instituted a more individualistic posture. The worshiper approaches the minister and receives juice and a cracker before returning to the pew. There are almost as many variations of this as there are denominations. But we believe we are to eat and drink as a family would eat together: seated with joy and anticipation. We encourage you to look around at one another and make eye contact when you eat and drink. It is communion, after all – so commune with one another! We are having a meal with Jesus and

with His family. Receive Jesus from the person next to you with a smile and eat with joy. Then pass Jesus to the person next to you with the same joy, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

Baptized children are invited to the table with the rest of God’s people. God calls us all to worship Him and to eat with Him. Baptism is the sign of the covenant and evidence of belonging to Christ and His church. This was the practice of the saints in the Old Testament. Every person circumcised was invited to God’s table at the Passover unless they happened to be unclean at the time. The Bible promises that God will be our God as well as God to our children and our children’s children.

“As for Me,” says the Lord, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the Lord, “from this time and forevermore.” (Isaiah 59:21)

Baptized children of believers are mysteriously yet truly members of the body of Christ and thus declared to be Christians – members of the covenant. Does this mean that our children will automatically end up in heaven whether or not they have faith in Christ? An emphatic “no” is in order. Apart from faith no one will be justified. But nowhere in the New Testament does it say that our children should be excluded from the Table. In fact, Jesus rebuked the disciples for excluding children from Him. We should expect our children to grow up in the faith. Participation in the Supper is an affirmation of God’s favor on our children as they come into their inheritance.

The ancient Church admitted the children of believers to the Lord's Supper (see Cyprian, *On the Lapsed*, Ch. 9, 25-26). This practice was essentially abandoned around the twelfth century in the Western (Roman Catholic) Church, largely due to superstitious views concerning the Mass. This discontinuance of ancient practice was an error, and ought to be reversed in biblically reformed churches."⁷

(For more info on *paedocommunion*, see our "Recommended Reading".) Are your children baptized? Let them eat.

Communion is designed to leave us wanting more until Christ returns. It is a picture of our future hope when we will sit at the giant, all-encompassing feast with the Lord in His fully realized kingdom. It's a foretaste of all that we long for, the coming hope of seeing Jesus face-to-face and knowing as we are known.

Following communion, we receive the Eucharistic Benediction: "Now may the body and blood of our Lord strengthen and preserve you steadfast in the true faith unto life everlasting; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." And then we "pass the peace" a time during which our congregation is encouraged to greet one another with the precious words: "the peace of Christ be with you." This is a tangible act of gratitude, love, and unity.

⁷ Gallant, Tim. *Feed My Lambs: Why the Lord's Table Should Be Restored to Covenant Children*. Grand Prairie, AB, Canada: Pa, 2002.

FIVE

Commission

THE FINAL “C” IN OUR COVENANT RENEWAL SERVICE IS *COMMISSION*.

To be commissioned is simply to be set apart and sent out for a particular purpose. Our service ends with a charge from God to the congregation (through His appointed representative) to go into the world and carry forth the kingdom. We should come into worship with the expectation of being “cut up and offered up” and leave with the expectation that we have been received as an acceptable offering to the Lord. The Lord has reoriented us and sent us out as kingdom ambassadors by His Spirit. He sends us out during the benediction with a blessing.

We find commissioning in the Old Testament as well. Aaron and Moses concluded their service by blessing the people of God with God’s benediction in Numbers 6:22-27. This is the same blessing that we often receive on the Lord’s Day:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

“The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you,

And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.”

“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

The blessing comes in speaking to the people. God is putting His name upon them. Can you think of a better blessing?

As the service is coming to an end, we are sent back to our families, communities, and marketplaces as the Lord’s particular people. We are not unaccompanied. God is sending us out with and by His Spirit. When God sends the Spirit out into the world on mission, the Spirit glorifies the creation. Likewise, we are sent out as zephyrs in the greater wind of the Spirit to glorify God and His works. Mission is not just the spread of a message (although that is significant). Rather it is to bring all of creation to maturity in Christ. This is a work of the Spirit. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

The commission is the final service God corporately renders to His people on the Lord’s Day. We receive peace, promises, and His gracious presence as we leave His special home to return to the world. In Luke 24:50-53 Jesus’ final recorded act was a blessing pronounced upon His disciples:

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

Our minister lifts his hands and communicates the Lord's blessing. Our posture is important at this moment. We are still worshiping so we face him and receive the blessing given. Therefore, at TRC, we stand with our hands outstretched to receive from the Lord. We respond with gratitude and joy, singing the Song of Simeon. This is our enthusiastic "yes" to the Lord's commission and benediction both to the mission and to the blessings.

CONCLUSION

Let's Wrap It Up

WE HAVE SEEN HOW THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM VERY TECHNICALLY informs our worship. Jeffrey M. Myers, in his book *The Lord's Service*, gives us a very succinct summation of all that we have discussed. With gratitude, we quote it below:

Based on this analysis, we can now offer a synopsis of the service as a whole. The congregation is served by God as they move from prostration (confessional obeisance in response to being called into God's presence) to standing (praise for God's renewed forgiveness) to sitting (in order to hear and learn from the Word) and then, finally, to reclining at the Table (to enjoy table fellowship with God). The basic threefold pattern of God's service to us may be outlined as follows:

- **God cleanses and restores us through confession and absolution (Purification Offering).**
- **God consecrates us by the Word (Ascension Offering).**
- **God communes with us at the Table (Fellowship Offering).**

Our response to God's work (our service to Him) corresponds to His service to us and gives us this threefold sequence:

- **We confess our sins, receive absolution, and respond with praise.**
- **We hear the Word of God and offer our works and lives to Him.**

- **We eat and drink at peace with God at His Table.**

If we put this all together and include the call to worship at the beginning and the blessing or commissioning of God at the end, then we have the following fivefold order of sacrificial or covenant renewal worship:

- **God Calls Us We Gather Together and Praise Him**
- **God Cleanses Us We Confess our Sins and are Forgiven in Christ**
- **God Consecrates Us We Respond in Prayer and Offering**
- **God Communes with Us We Eat God's Food at His Table**
- **God Commissions (Blesses) Us We March out to Serve God**

It is our desire that a deeper understanding of the Lord's Service at Trinity Reformed Church will heighten your resolve to attend and participate with a whole heart each Lord's Day; that it will deepen your love and devotion for the Lord Jesus Christ who has covenanted so mercifully and faithfully with us in calling us to Himself; and that it will broaden and enrich your love for the body of Christ and compel you to take the kingdom into the world with joyful military vigor.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
 And to present you faultless
 Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
 To God our Savior,
 Who alone is wise,
 Be glory and majesty,
 Dominion and power,
 Both now and forever.
 Amen.
 (Jude 24-25)

Recommended Reading

Gallant, Tim. *Feed My Lambs: Why the Lord's Table Should Be Restored to Covenant Children*. Grand Prairie, AB, Canada: Pa, 2002.

Jordan, James B. *Theses on Worship: Notes Toward the Reformation of Worship*. Niceville: Transfiguration Press, 1998, 2nd edition.

Meyers, Jeffrey M. *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*. Moscow: CanonPress, 2003.

Wilson, Douglas. *A Primer on Worship and Reformation: Recovering the High Church Puritan*. Moscow: CanonPress, 2008.



All Scripture quoted is from the New King James Version



Trinity Reformed Church at Martinsburg receives no profit from this publication and is grateful for the scholarship, giftedness, and time of those authors within the Reformed community who provided the foundation for our liturgical structure. Though direct quotes have been cited, much of the information and terminology used in this booklet has been gleaned from the resources above (shared with many thanks) for the edification of our members.