

A quick guide to

“Worship Aerobics”

at

St. Joseph's Episcopal Church

Welcome to St. Joseph's!

This pamphlet is a guide to participating in worship services at our church, otherwise known as the *liturgy*.

Liturgy means “the work of the people,” and we invite you to actively participate during our time together, bringing your gifts and accepting those of others.

Babies, children, and people of all ages, gifts, and abilities are welcome to participate and share their gifts in this space.



Making the sign of the cross

Making the sign of the cross, or “crossing yourself”, is an ancient Christian tradition that reminds us of the power of the cross of Jesus. We often make the sign of the cross when we ask or acknowledge a blessing. We also cross ourselves when mentioning the dead, as a reminder that Christ’s resurrection, not death, has the final word.

How to cross yourself

To cross yourself, begin by touching your forehead, moving to touch the middle of your chest, then to your left shoulder, followed by your right shoulder, and finally back to touch the middle of your chest.

When to cross yourself

We often cross ourselves at these points in the liturgy:

- During the opening *acclamation*, beginning with the words “Blessed be God”
- When we profess belief in the “resurrection of the dead” during the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed
- When praying for the dead in the Prayers of the People
- After we confess our sins, during the *absolution*, when the priest makes the sign of the cross over the congregation
- During the *Sanctus* (“Holy Holy Holy”) when we say or sing “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”
- During the *Eucharistic prayer* that precedes the Eucharist, when the parish or the priest asks God for sanctification
- After receiving the Eucharist
- At the blessing from the priest at the close of the liturgy

Gospel readings

Episcopalians also often cross themselves before the Gospel is read in the liturgy. At this time, you may make three small crosses using your thumb: one on your forehead, one over your lips, and one over your heart. As you do this, you may pray silently, “Christ be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.”

Standing and kneeling

At various times during the liturgy, we may stand or kneel so that our physical posture reinforces the meaning of the words we say and hear. At some times one or the other posture is preferred, and at other times participants may choose. You may always modify the positions due to physical limitation or discomfort.

We stand...

Standing together signifies celebration and shows our unity as a church before God. Participants in the liturgy are invited to stand during the processional, recessional, the singing of hymns, the reading of the Gospel, and the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer, also known as “The Great Thanksgiving.” All are again invited to rise to for the final blessing, recessional, and dismissal.

We kneel...

We kneel to represent our humility, contrition, and obedience before God. It is because of this symbolic meaning that the Book of Common Prayer suggests kneeling during the confession of sin and when receiving the Eucharist.

We may choose...

Following the singing or saying of the Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy”) the prayer book suggests either standing or kneeling for the remainder of the Eucharistic prayer. Participants in the liturgy may also choose to stand or to kneel during the post-communion prayer.

The *liturgical season* of the church calendar may determine whether we stand or kneel at these times. For example, during the penitential season of Lent, we commonly kneel throughout the Eucharistic prayer and post-communion prayer, while during the Easter and Christmas seasons, we stand at these times.

At other times of the year, the choice is left to individual participants. If you are in doubt as to which posture feels right for you, simply do what the people around you are doing.

Bowing

There are many different kinds of bowing (sometimes called ceremonial acts) that people choose to participate in during church services. Bowing throughout the church service is optional, but for many it is an important reminder of our reverence, humility, and obedience before God.

A solemn bow

A *solemn bow* is made from the waist, moving your head and shoulders forward and down. A solemn bow is commonly taken when you enter or exit your pew, to reverence the altar and/or the Sacrament (the consecrated elements of Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ). You may see the Old and New Testament readers make a solemn bow before the altar and reserved sacrament before and after they read.

Solemn bows may also be taken at other times during the liturgy:

- When the cross is processed into the church at the beginning of a service or out of the church at the end

- During the first portion of the Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy;”). We rise with the phrase “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”
- During the mention of the Incarnation during the Nicene Creed
- When we profess belief in the “resurrection of the dead” during the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed

Genuflecting

Some people choose to *genuflect* when entering or exiting the pew, if reserved sacrament is present in the Church. To genuflect, begin standing up, and bend your right knee until it touches the floor, and then return to standing. During this motion, it is common to bow one's head and cross oneself.

A simple bow

A *simple bow* may also be used at the mention of Jesus at any time during the service or when the Trinitarian formula (“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”) is sung, chanted, or spoken. To perform a simple bow, bow your head slightly.

Passing the peace

Following the Confession of Sin and our absolution, we receive words of peace from the priest or deacon:

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

To which we respond:

And also with you.

We then share signs of peace with one another, by shaking hands and speaking words of peace. This is called *passing the peace*. You may use phrases such as “Peace of Christ,” “Peace of the Lord,” “Peace be with you,” or simply “Peace.”

Exchanging the peace with one another reminds us of our relationship to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. It is a reminder that as we have entered into peace with God, by confessing our sins and receiving assurance of God's forgiveness, we might also enter into peace with those around us.

The passing of the peace also provides an opportunity to make peace with those around us before going to the Eucharistic table:

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Receiving the Eucharist

At St. Joseph’s, we welcome everyone at the Eucharistic table either to partake of the Sacrament or to receive a blessing.

- Those baptized in any Christian tradition are welcome to receive the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ.
- If you have not been baptized, or you do not wish to receive communion for any other reason, we welcome you to come forward to the altar to receive a blessing.

The usher will indicate when it is time for you to come to the front of the church. We invite you into a posture (standing or kneeling) in which you are able to receive God’s blessing. If for any reason you are unable to come forward to the altar rail, please let one of the ushers know, and the priest will come to you to offer communion or a blessing.

To receive a blessing..

If you have not been baptized or do not wish to receive communion, cross your arms over your chest in the shape of an X. This position will indicate to the priest that you would like to receive a blessing.

To receive the Sacrament...

When receiving communion, place one hand over the other with palms facing up. The priest, deacon, or Eucharistic minister will place a piece of consecrated bread in your hand, saying “the body of Christ.” You may choose to eat the bread and drink the wine separately, or receive the wine by *intinction*:

- If you choose to eat the bread, use your hands to gently guide the bottom of the chalice of wine to your lips when the consecrated wine is presented to you.
- If you choose to *intinct* the bread, dip the bread carefully in the chalice.

It is appropriate to silently or softly say *amen* following your reception of both the body and the blood.

We often make the sign of the cross before and after receiving the Eucharist.

If you require a gluten-free wafer, please ask the priest, a Eucharistic minister, or an usher before receiving the sacrament.

Other physical signs

Holy water

The holy water in the baptismal font in the *nave*, just inside the church doors, has been blessed by either a priest or a bishop. The holy water is a reminder of our baptism with water.

Some people choose to dip their fingers into the holy water as they enter or exit the church and to make the sign of the cross, as a reminder of their baptism and of the many ways in which God works to cleanse us:

Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51:7)

Candles

Lit candles in our church help remind us of the truth that Jesus Christ is “the light of the world.” The candles by the altar are lit only when there is a Eucharist, while others may be lit at other times.

The *presence candle* that burns above the Tabernacle, where consecrated wine and bread are kept as reserve for the Eucharist, is never extinguished but burns perpetually to remind us of Christ’s presence within and around us at all times. The exception is Good Friday, when we remember Jesus’ death and the reserved Sacrament is consumed.

Sources consulted

If you’d like to learn more about these and other aspects of Episcopal worship, try these resources:

- Rev. Rebecca’s Explanation & Guide to All Things Anglican, <http://franciscan-anglican.com/Anglican.htm>
- Dennis G. Michno, *A Priest’s Handbook: The Ceremonies of the Church*, 3d Edition, 1983.
- Vicki K. Black, *Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer* (2005).
- Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, New Edition, 2005.
- Cheslyn Jones et al, eds., *The Study of Liturgy*, 1992.
- Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 1980.
- John Wall, *A Dictionary for Episcopalians*, 2000.

