and power and might
be to our God forever and ever!
Amen.

Rev. 7:12

Soli Deo gloria,

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THE LORD'S DAY



After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

MATT. 28:1

PRECEDING PAGE ILLUSTRATION:
As the sun rose on the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus' disciples discovered that his tomb was empty.



On the Lord's Day we break bread with the risen Christ, just as his disciples did on the day of his resurrection, and as Christians have done ever since on the first day of the week.

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Worship on the Lord's Day

The Day of Resurrection

We gather to worship God on the Lord's Day (Sunday) because the Gospels testify that Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the week. The Lord's Day is also called the "eighth day" of creation, a sign of the new creation that has begun with Christ's resurrection. While we may worship God on any day and at any time, the Sunday service in particular is a celebration of Christ's resurrection and an anticipation of the fullness of God's coming reign.

The Pattern of Lord's Day Worship

The Service for the Lord's Day is a service of Word and Sacrament. We meet in the presence of the living Lord, who appeared to his disciples on the first day of the week—the day he rose from the dead—to interpret the scriptures and break bread. Following Jesus' example, the Church proclaims the fullness of the gospel in Word and Sacrament on the Lord's Day.

The Service for the Lord's Day includes other actions as well: gathering and singing, confession and pardon, prayer and offering, blessing and sending. Through all these actions, we are drawn into Christ's presence and sent out in the power of the Spirit.

The pattern of Lord's Day worship may be applied to days and times other than Sunday morning. Saturday evening services such as the Easter Vigil appropriately follow the order of Lord's Day worship since, in the ancient Jewish and Christian reckoning of time, the new day begins at sunset. Services of daily prayer provide a pattern for worship at other times and on other days of the week.

The Order of Worship

An order of worship offers a meaningful and reliable structure for the church's encounter with the living God. Over time, an order of worship helps to shape our faith and faithfulness as the people of God, becoming a pattern for how we live as Christians in the world.

The order of worship offered here for the Service for the Lord's Day is rooted in scripture, the traditions of the universal Church, and our Reformed heritage. In particular, it seeks to uphold the centrality of Word and Sacraments in the Church's faith, life, and worship. This description of the Service for the Lord's Day is presented as one commendable model, but is not intended to exclude other ways of ordering worship. Other patterns may be appropriate in the context of a particular congregation or culture, provided that they are faithful to the Word, open to the Spirit, and dedicated to the glory of God.

Gathering

Preparing for Worship

Worship begins as the people gather—greeting one another, praying in silence, sharing announcements, or offering music to the glory of God. The act of assembling in Jesus' name bears witness to the Church's identity and mission as Christ's body in the world.

Opening Sentences

A call to worship, typically drawn from sentences of scripture, expresses God's invitation to gather as Christ's body in this place. A greeting in the name of Jesus Christ or the triune God establishes the context for worship as an encounter with the Holy One who calls all things into being.

Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs

For millennia the people of God have sung psalms as praise and prayer to God. Early Christians continued to sing, pray, and study the psalms, interpreting them in the light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Singing psalms remains an important part of the Reformed heritage. To the psalms the Church has added other hymns, canticles, and spiritual songs. Through the ages and from varied cultures, the Church has developed many other forms of congregational song, accompanied by a great array of instruments. We draw from this rich repertoire in the Service for the Lord's Day, singing glory to God.

Gathering Prayer

A prayer may be offered, giving thanks and praise to God, expressing joy in the presence of Christ, and calling for the gifts of the Spirit to be poured out upon the gathered community. This prayer may employ themes and images that are drawn from the biblical readings for the day or from the setting in the Christian year.

Confession and Pardon

Having praised the holiness of God, we must also face the sinful state of the world and of our lives, confessing our unworthiness to enter into God's presence. Nevertheless, we approach God with confidence, trusting in the mercy of Jesus Christ. This turn from communal praise to corporate confession, established on the promise of God's grace, is one of the hallmarks of the Reformed tradition.

A call to confession expresses God's initiative in calling for repentance and promising forgiveness in Christ. As members of Christ's body, we confess the reality of sin, captivity, and brokenness in personal and common life and ask for God's saving grace. The prayer of confession may include the singing of a prayer for grace, such as "Lord, Have Mercy." A declaration of forgiveness proclaims the good news of God's mercy and offers the assurance of pardon in Jesus' name. Leading this element of worship from the font connects our confession with the grace and cleansing of Baptism, and the baptismal call to new life in Christ. Because of these associations with the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it is fitting for a pastor to lead the call to confession and proclaim the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Other actions may follow—a song of praise, such as "Glory Be to the Father" or "Glory to God"; a summary of the law or call to faithfulness; and the sharing of peace as a sign of reconciliation in Christ.

Word

Theology of Proclamation

The scriptures bear witness to the word of God, revealed most fully in Jesus Christ, the Word who "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Where the word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the living Word is present by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, reading, hearing, preaching, and affirming the word are central to Christian worship and essential to the Service for the Lord's Day.

A pastor is responsible for the selection of scriptures to be read in public worship. Selected readings are to be drawn from both Old and New Testaments, and over a period of time should reflect the broad content and full message of scripture. Selections for readings should be guided by the rhythms of the Christian year, events in the world, and pastoral concerns in the local congregation. Lectionaries ensure a broad range of biblical texts as well as consistency and connection with the universal

Church. The pastor is also responsible for the version of the Bible to be used in public worship. The scriptures are to be read in the common language(s) of the worshiping community. The congregation is to be informed of significant adaptations, paraphrases, or new translations.

The word proclaimed shall be based on the word written in scripture. Preaching requires diligence and discernment in the study of scripture, listening for the voice of God through the discipline of daily prayer, theological reflection on the message of the gospel, sensitivity to the context of the congregation, attentiveness to what the Spirit is saying to the church, awareness of events in the world, and consistent and personal obedience to Jesus Christ. The sermon will present the gospel with clarity and simplicity, in language that all can understand. The gifts of song, drama, dance, and visual art may be employed in the proclamation of the Word.

We respond to the proclamation of the Word in a variety of ways: confessing the faith of the Church, celebrating or reaffirming the Sacrament of Baptism, praying for the Church and world, and offering our lives in gratitude for God's grace. The proclamation of the Word is incomplete if it fails to evoke the response of the people of God. When the word is proclaimed, we are called, above all, to discern Jesus Christ, receive his grace, and respond to his call with obedience. All these things depend on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, whom we seek in prayer.

Prayer for Illumination

A prayer for illumination calls on the Holy Spirit to empower the reading, understanding, proclaiming, and living of God's word. This sense of utter reliance on the illumination of the Spirit is an important and distinctive mark of the Reformed tradition. The prayer for illumination precedes the reading of scripture and preaching of the sermon and applies to all the readings, as well as the proclamation of the Word.

Scripture

The public reading of scripture is to be clear, audible, and attentive to the meaning of the text. Reading from the church's Bible conveys a sense of the permanence and weight of the word of God, and demonstrates the communal nature of the biblical story. Anyone may be invited to read scripture, including children and youth. Because deacons are charged with the ministry of witness to the gospel and elders are responsible for the proclamation of the Word, it is fitting for a deacon or elder to read scripture. The session will ensure that all readers are prepared for this important ministry.

The role of the congregation is to listen prayerfully, actively, and attentively to the word that is read and proclaimed. Such listening requires expectation, concentration, and imagination. The congregation may participate in the presentation of scripture through unison, responsive, or antiphonal readings, or by following along with printed or projected materials. Spoken responses may conclude the reading of scripture. Scripture may also be presented through music.

Musical Responses

Psalms, canticles, anthems, alleluias, songs of praise, or other musical responses may accompany the reading of the word. A psalm may be sung in response to the first reading, giving the congregation an opportunity to reflect on and pray from that text.

Sermon

A sermon, based on the scripture read in worship, proclaims the good news of the risen Lord and presents the gift and calling of the gospel. Through the sermon, we encounter Jesus Christ in God's word, are equipped to follow him more faithfully, and are inspired to proclaim the gospel to others through our words and deeds. The sermon may conclude with prayer, an ascription of praise, or a call to discipleship. In keeping with the ministry of Word and Sacrament, a pastor ordinarily preaches the sermon.

Other forms of proclamation include song, drama, dance, visual art, and testimony. Like the sermon, these are to illuminate the scripture read in worship and communicate the good news of the gospel. When these forms of proclamation are employed, worship leaders should connect them with the witness of scripture to the triune God.

Affirmation of Faith

Responding to the word proclaimed, we affirm our faith in the holy, triune God. This affirmation of faith is drawn from sentences of scripture or the creeds, confessions, and catechisms. A congregational song, anthem, or other musical response may serve as an affirmation of faith. Opportunities for personal testimony may also be provided at this time. When Baptism or the reaffirmation of Baptism takes place, the Apostles' Creed is spoken in the context of the baptismal liturgy. The Nicene Creed, our earliest ecumenical confession of faith, is traditionally associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Baptism and Baptismal Discipleship

The Sacrament of Baptism and other services associated with the baptismal covenant ordinarily take place as a response to the word. Such services include the reaffirmation of Baptism on profession of faith, the reception of new members, commissioning for service, ordination and installation to ordered ministry, transitions in life or ministry, commemorations of communal events, Christian marriage, and witness to the res-

calling worshipers to be baptized or to live into the promises of their baptism.

Prayers of Intercession

In response to the word, we pray for the world God so loves—joining Christ's own ministry of intercession and the sighs of the Spirit, too deep for words. These prayers are not the work of a single leader, but an act of the whole congregation as Christ's royal priesthood. We affirm our participation in the prayer through our "amen" and other responses.

Prayers of intercession and supplication are offered for the mission and ministry of the universal Church and the local congregation; care of creation and the right use of resources; peace and justice in the world; the leaders and peoples of all nations; the poor, hungry, and oppressed; compassion and reconciliation in the local community; healing and wholeness for all who suffer; and other special needs. These prayers may be led from the communion table or from the midst of the congregation. They may include musical responses or symbolic action. The peace of Christ may follow, if not previously shared.

Because pastors are called to serve as good shepherds for God's people, it is fitting for a pastor to lead the prayers of intercession and supplication. Because deacons are responsible for ministries of compassion and elders are charged with the nurture of the congregation, it is also fitting for a deacon or elder to lead these prayers. Other persons with a gift for prayer may be invited to lead the intercessions.

Eucharist

Theology of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper (or Eucharist) is the sign and seal of our communion with the crucified and risen Lord. Jesus shared meals with his followers throughout his earthly life and ministry—common suppers, miraculous feasts, and the covenant commemorations of the people of God. Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of life, and as the true vine, in whom we are branches. On the night before his death, Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples. He spoke of the bread and wine as his body and blood, signs of the new covenant, and told the disciples to remember him by keeping this feast. On the day of his resurrection, Jesus made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. The disciples continued to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayers, and the common meal. As Paul wrote, when we share the bread and cup in Jesus' name, "we who are many are one body" (1 Cor. 10:17).

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper offers an abundant feast of theological meaning, including thanksgiving to God the Father, remembrance of Jesus Christ, invocation of the Holy Spirit, communion in the body of Christ, and a meal of the realm of God. The Reformed tradition understands the Lord's Supper to be a sign of God's covenant. The bread of the Lord's Supper is linked with the bread of Passover and the gift of manna in the wilderness. The Lord's Supper thus connects us with God's saving power and providential care from generation to generation. Like the offering of sacrifices, a sign of Israel's thanksgiving for God's faithfulness, the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice of praise and a sign of our gratitude for God's steadfast love. The Lord's Supper represents God's gracious invitation to an everlasting covenant. The Lord's Supper also reflects our calling to feed others as we have been fed, and offers a foretaste of that heavenly banquet when God will wipe away every tear and swallow up death forever.

The Lord's Supper enacts and seals what the word proclaims: God's sustaining grace offered to all people. The Lord's Supper is God's gift of grace and also God's call to respond to that grace. Through the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ nourishes us in righteousness, faithfulness, and discipleship. Through the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit renews the Church in its identity and sends the Church to mission in the world.

When we gather at the Lord's Supper, the Spirit draws us into Christ's presence and unites with the Church in every time and place. We join with all the baptized faithful in heaven and on earth in offering thanksgiving to the triune God. We reaffirm the promises of our baptism and recommit ourselves to love and serve God, one another, and our neighbors in the world.

The opportunity to eat and drink with Christ is not a right bestowed upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. All who come to the table are offered the bread and cup, regardless of their age or understanding. If some of those who come have not yet been baptized, an invitation to baptismal preparation and Baptism should be graciously extended.

Worshipers prepare themselves to celebrate the Lord's Supper by putting their trust in Christ, confessing their sin, and seeking reconciliation with God and one another. Even those who doubt may come to the table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated as a regular part of the Service for the Lord's Day, preceded by the proclamation of the Word, in the gathering of the people of God. When local circumstances call for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated less frequently, the session may approve other schedules for celebration, in no case less than quarterly. If the Lord's Supper is celebrated less frequently than on each Lord's Day, public notice is to be given at least one week in advance so that all may prepare to receive the sacrament.

Offering

Christian life is an offering of one's self to God. In the Lord's Supper we are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ for the life of the world. As those who have been claimed and set free by his grace, we respond with gratitude, offering him our lives, our spiritual gifts, and our material goods. Every service of worship shall include an opportunity to respond to Christ's call to discipleship through self-offering. The gifts we offer express our stewardship of creation, demonstrate our care for one another, support the ministries of the church, and provide for the needs of the poor.

Tithes and offerings are gathered as an act of thanksgiving to God. Gifts of food for people who are hungry may also be collected at this time, and the table may be prepared for the Lord's Supper. All these gifts are received with a prayer of dedication to God, spoken or sung. Because elders and deacons are charged with the stewardship of the church's resources and leadership in ministry to people who are poor, it is fitting for an elder or deacon to lead this prayer. Signs of Christ's peace and reconciliation may be exchanged, if this did not take place earlier in the service.

Great Thanksgiving

Following the offering and the preparation of the table, a pastor invites worshipers to the Lord's Supper using sentences of scripture. At the table, facing the people, the pastor shall lead the people in a prayer to the triune God: giving thanks for God's creative power, providential care, and covenant faithfulness, along with particular blessings of the day; remembering God's acts of salvation through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return, as well as Jesus' institution of the sacrament (if not otherwise spoken at the invitation to the table or the breaking of the bread); and calling on the Holy Spirit to draw worshipers into the presence of the risen Lord, nourish them in the body and blood of Christ, unite them with Christ in the communion of saints and the Church in every place, and send them in mission to the world. The prayer ends with praise to the triune God. Musical acclamations, such as "Holy, Holy, Holy," "Christ Has Died," and "Amen," may be included. The Lord's Prayer follows.

Breaking of the Bread

At the table, in full view of the people, the pastor breaks the bread and pours the cup, or lifts a cup that has already been filled. These actions may be accompanied by sentences of scripture or performed in silence. The use of one loaf and one cup expresses the unity of the body of Christ and the communal nature of the sacrament. The bread used for the Lord's Supper should be common to the culture of the congregation; those who prepare the bread shall make provision for persons with food allergies. The session will determine whether wine is used; a nonalcoholic option shall be provided and clearly identified.

Communion

The bread and cup are shared in the manner most appropriate to the occasion. Worshipers may gather at the table, come forward to meet the servers, or receive the bread and cup where they are. The bread may be broken and placed in people's hands or they may receive pieces of bread prepared for distribution. They may drink from a common cup, receive individual cups, or dip the broken bread into the cup. Ordinarily elders, deacons, and pastors serve the bread and cup; the session may authorize other church members to do so. While the bread and cup are shared, worshipers may sing, other music may be offered, appropriate passages of scripture may be read, or the people may pray in silence.

When all have received the bread and cup, the remaining elements are placed on the table. The pastor then leads the people in prayer, thanking God for the gift of the sacrament and asking for grace to live and serve faithfully until the coming of Christ's realm in fullness.

As soon as possible after the service (ordinarily on the same day), the bread and cup may be shared with absent, homebound, or hospitalized members by two or more persons in ordered ministry. Those who carry out this extended service of Communion shall be authorized by the session; equipped with the necessary theological, pastoral, and liturgical gifts and resources; and instructed to maintain the unity of word and sacrament through the reading of scripture and offering of prayers.

At the conclusion of the Service for the Lord's Day, the bread and cup are to be removed from the table and used or disposed of in a manner approved by the session, in keeping with the Reformed understanding of the sacrament and principles of good stewardship. This may be accomplished by consuming what remains or returning the elements to the earth.

If the Lord's Supper Is Omitted

The Lord's Supper is integral to the Service for the Lord's Day, a service of Word and Sacrament. If, in local circumstances and by the decision of the session, the Lord's Supper is to be omitted from Sunday worship, the service continues after the prayers of the people with the offering and a prayer of thanksgiving and dedication, followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Sending

Acts of Commitment

Having encountered the risen Lord in word and sacrament, we affirm Christ's call to discipleship through acts of commitment. Such acts of commitment may include closing hymns, psalms, or spiritual songs that send us out to live the gospel by God's grace; creative or symbolic actions expressing our resolve to share in Christ's mission; declarations of intent to prepare for or desire to receive the Sacrament of Baptism, or to reaffirm the baptismal covenant; commissioning to ministries of evangelism, compassion, justice, and reconciliation; farewells to members of the church who are departing; and brief invitations or announcements related to the church's mission.

Blessing and Charge

The Service for the Lord's Day concludes with a blessing in the name of the triune God, such as the priestly blessing or apostolic benediction. Because this blessing is an expression of the gospel of God's grace and an extension of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, a pastor ordinarily speaks the blessing.

We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. The charge calls the church to go forth as agents of God's mission in the world. Because deacons are responsible for the church's ministry of witness and service, and elders have oversight of the church's faithfulness to God's mission, it is fitting for a deacon or elder to speak the charge.

Service in the World

Christian worship and service does not end at the conclusion of the Service for the Lord's Day; we go forth to love and serve the Lord in daily living. In so doing, we seek to fulfill our chief end: to glorify and enjoy God forever.

—This commentary on the Service for the Lord's Day is based on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Directory for Worship as it appears in the 2017–2019 *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2017).

Preparation for Worship

Other prayers appropriate for preparation for worship may be found in Ancient and Classic Prayers (1099–119).

1 O Jesus, our great high priest,
be present with us
as you were present with your disciples,
and make yourself known to us
in the breaking of bread. **Amen.**
—Derived from the Mozarabic liturgy (7th century)

2 God of mercy,
grant that the Word you speak this day
may take root in our hearts,
and bear fruit to your honor and glory,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**
—*Book of Common Prayer* (1549)

3 We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own goodness,
but in your all-embracing love and mercy.
We are not worthy even to gather up the crumbs under your table
but it is your nature always to have mercy.
So feed us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your Son,
that we may forever live in him and he in us. **Amen.**
—*Book of Common Prayer* (1549)

4 Almighty God,
you pour out the spirit of grace and supplication
on all who desire it.
Deliver us from cold hearts and wandering thoughts,
that with steady minds and burning zeal
we may worship you
in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**
—Derived from William Bright, *Ancient Collects and Other Prayers* (1862)

5 Almighty God, we pray for your blessing
on the church in this place.
Here may the faithful find salvation,
and the careless be awakened.
Here may the doubting find faith,
and the anxious be encouraged.
Here may the tempted find help,
and the sorrowful comfort.