

“Our Order of Service”

Independent Presbyterian Church

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Welcome to the Independent Presbyterian Church. We are pleased that you have chosen to worship with us today. Our service is a classic worship service in the tradition of Reformed (or Presbyterian) Protestantism. Given the diversity of styles of worship today, what we do is unfamiliar to many of our visitors. We offer the following booklet as an aid in understanding the meaning of each part of the service.

Before we explain each item let us make some general comments.

The Setting of Our Worship

The architecture and furnishings of a church building may either reinforce the congregation's message or detract from it. Our church building is a gift to us from past generations, and is a classic example of the architecture of Reformed Protestantism. The exterior “looks like a church,” which we see as a positive virtue. It tells the onlooker that this is a house of worship, not a bank, or theater, or a retail outlet. The interior displays beautiful craftsmanship employing the finest materials. Yet notice the absence of religious art: no pictures, statues, or religious symbols. The architectural focal point, the pulpit, underscores our theological conviction: the word of God takes the central place in our worship without competition from extraneous visual stimuli. More broadly, decorative simplicity aids worshipers in giving their undistracted attention to the three primary means of grace (i.e. growth): the word, sacraments, and prayer. The pews are placed as they are in order to gather the congregation around the pulpit, baptismal font, and the Lord's Table.

The Elements of Our Worship

Our worship is simple, consisting of the few biblical elements that God has commanded. Our approach to worship means that:

We read and preach the Word – Approximately a chapter is read in each service in addition to the portion upon which the sermon is to be based. Normally our sermons are sequential, verse-by-verse expositions of whole books of the Bible.

We pray the Word – Our prayers are filled with the praises, the confessions, and the promises of Scripture. We offer a full-diet of prayer in each service.

We sing the Word – We incorporate at least one metrical Psalm (the biblical Psalms translated and rhymed for singing) in each service. We also sing biblically rich hymns.

We receive the Visible Word – The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are the word of God made visible and perceivable by our senses.

Our services join together that which is so often separated: reverent worship and biblical preaching. We see this as the distinctive benefit of our ministry: God-centered worship and Bible teaching at the same place and at the same time.

The Order of Worship

The design of our worship, both morning and evening, is driven by what one might call “gospel logic.”

1. A cycle of *praise* (call to worship / prayer of praise / hymn / *Gloria Patri* / Creed); is followed by . . .
2. A cycle of *confession* (recitation of the Law of God / confession of sin / assurance of pardon / collection); which is followed by . . .
3. A cycle *employing the means of grace* (intercessory prayers / sacraments / Scripture reading / sermon); which is followed by . . .
4. A cycle of *thanksgiving and blessing* (concluding hymn / benediction).

This is essentially the pattern of Isaiah 6, the Lord's Prayer, and the gospel itself. In knowing the true God (in praise), we know ourselves (as sinners), our need (for grace), and give thanks for His gifts in Christ. Sometimes each element is distinct. Sometimes they are combined (as in the morning "pastoral prayer," where confession, pardon, and supplication are together in a "great prayer").

The Day of Worship

We worship on Sunday because the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath, a day devoted to worship and rest. We worship twice on Sunday, following the pattern of the morning and evening sacrifice of the Old Testament and the devotions that flow from them. Morning and evening Lord's Day prayer have been standard for the Christian church from the beginning. Sunday morning is somewhat more formal in tone, with more "fixed forms." Robes are worn by the ministers not as priestly attire (pastors are not priests), but as a simple covering while performing sacred duties. Similarly, we encourage our members to wear their "Sunday best," that is, that they dress nicely and neatly, as they do for other important occasions. Visitors are warmly welcomed to come as they are.

We trust that you will find at the Independent Presbyterian Church two well-ordered services that are offered in "spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23), conducted with "reverence and awe" (Heb 12:28), and characterized by both emotional discipline and holy joy (Ps 2:11; 1 Cor 14:32,40).

THE LORD'S DAY MORNING WORSHIP

"Let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service, with reverence and awe."
Hebrews 12:28

The Silent Prayer Upon Entering the Sanctuary

(We provide a different prayer for each week of the year for meditation as you prepare for worship. They are slightly expanded versions of the collects [short succinct prayers] from the Book of Common Prayer.)

The Prelude

(The prelude is part of the meditative environment we seek to establish prior to the call to worship.)

The Welcome and Announcements

(Announcements are handled before the call to worship so as not to interfere with the flow of the service.)

The Call to Worship

(The call marks the beginning of our worship as the congregation is called to the happy task of worshipping the Triune God. Sometimes this is sung by the choir, sometimes spoken by the ministers.)

The Hymnal

(This is a vigorous, energetic hymn of praise that focuses on the attributes and works of God.)

The Invocation and Lord's Prayer

(The invocation is a prayer of praise that calls upon God to be present among us by His Spirit and bless us. It concludes with the Lord's Prayer.)

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed *(The Creed is the oldest Christian confession of faith, with roots in the second century, and provides the means by which we affirm our Christian identity and faith. Because the churches of Christ have all affirmed this Creed for centuries, its use also demonstrates our unity with the whole church, past and present).*

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell*; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church;** the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

* this refers to the realm of the dead, not the place of punishment.

** "catholic" means "universal" church, the true church in all times and places.

The Gloria Patri

(This Trinitarian ascription of praise dates to the fourth century. It has played an important role in combating unitarianism. We sing it to several different tunes.)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.

The Pastoral Prayer

(This is a comprehensive prayer of confession of sin and intercession, and follows the five-fold pattern of intercession found in Scripture [e.g. 1 Tim 2:1ff]: (1) for civil authority; (2) for Christian ministry; (3) for all peoples; (4) for the sanctification of God's people; (5) for the afflicted.)

The Baptism

Baptisms are administered upon request of Christian parents (we practice infant baptism) and new believers (if never previously baptized). All those who are baptized are initiated into the membership of the church. Baptism is no mere ceremony, but a means of grace, blessing, and growth for believers and their children.

The Scripture Reading

(We read roughly a chapter of Scripture, sequentially, through books of the Bible, in each service, in addition to the portion of Scripture to be preached.)

The Psalter

(We sing a psalm in each service and work our way through much of the Psalter each year.)

The Collection

(A simple collection is taken for the support of the work of the church. It is not an "offering" that is presented to God on the altar, and for this reason is not brought forward with ceremony.)

The Choral Anthem

(The choir and organ are in the back, not up front as though they were entertainers, and are part of the congregation, not clergy. The primary task is to support and enrich the congregation's singing.)

The Doxology and Dismissal

(The doxology was written by Thomas Ken in 1709, and perhaps has done more to popularize the doctrine of the Trinity than all the theological books ever written. It is typically associated with the tune Old Hundredth [Geneva Psalter, 1562] but is used in our services with a number of other tunes.)

Children ages 4 & 5 may leave for a separate service.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

(We encourage children to stay for the entire service from as young an age as possible. The criteria for determining if our children should stay or leave is their ability to sit quietly and not be a distraction to those around them. We provide a "children's church" in which 4 and 5 year olds are encouraged to learn by heart the various fixed-forms in our services [e.g. Creed, Lord's Prayer, Doxology, Gloria Patri, Ten Commandments].)

The Sermon

(Normally our sermons are sequential and expository, verse-by-verse through books of the Bible.)

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a covenantal meal ("this is the new covenant in my blood") which seals or finalizes covenantal commitments. Each time we partake we renew the covenant, recommit ourselves to Christ, even as He reaffirms the efficacy of His atoning death on our behalf. It is normally administered in the morning on the first Sunday of each quarter (January, April, July, October). We believe in the "true presence" of Christ in the supper, that is, His spiritual presence. We enjoy fellowship with the ascended Christ at the Table (1 Cor 10:16) and partake of spiritual food to the nourishment of our souls (1 Cor 10:3).

The Hymnal

(The closing hymn is normally related thematically to the sermon.)

The Benediction and Response (sung by all)

(The benediction is a prayer for the blessing of God upon the congregation as it departs. A brief response by the congregation follows.)

The Postlude

(A final, beautiful selection is played on the organ as the congregation departs.)

THE LORD'S DAY EVENING WORSHIP

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
John 4:24

Preparation

(For a period of about 15 minutes before the beginning of the service we prepare for worship by singing hymns. As is the case in the morning, we place the announcements before the call to worship so as not to interfere with the flow of the service.)

Hymn Sing

Announcements

Praise

(As is the case in the morning service, the opening prayer and hymn focus on the attributes and works of God. The hymn is a vigorous song of praise.)

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Hymn

Confession of Sin, Pardon, and Thanksgiving

(Having praised God we move on to the confession of our sins. We make liturgical use of the Ten Commandments in the evening as a preparation for the confession, a practice rooted in the synagogue and early church, and revived by the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century. A comprehensive prayer of confession is offered followed by scriptural assurance for all of the benefits that we receive in Christ.)

Reading of the Law of God

Minister: God spake all these words saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

All:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
10. Thou shalt not covet. [Exodus 20:1-17]

Hear also the words of our Lord Jesus, how he saith: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. [Matthew 22:37-40]

The Prayer of Confession of Sin

Assurance of Pardon

Affirmation of Faith

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Collection

Provision for Life and Growth

(Also known as the "means of grace," this cycle [following the cycles of praise and confession] employ the ordinary means given by God to the church by which to sanctify the saints and grow the church.)

Scripture Reading

(Normally a chapter is read in addition to the text upon which the sermon is to be based. This means that regularly two full chapters will have been read in our services on a given Sunday.)

Intercessory Prayer

(We see prayer as an important part of our ministry to our own people and to the world. This fourth prayer of the service is a prayer that is primarily petitionary, that is, an intercessory prayer.)

Psalter

(A second metrical psalm of the Sunday is sung.)

Prayer of Illumination

(This is a prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit in understanding the Scripture as it is read and preached. It is based on scriptural example [e.g. Ps 119:12, 17, 18, 27, etc.] and the practice of the early church. It demonstrates our dependence upon the Holy Spirit.)

Scripture & Sermon

(As is the case in the morning, normally our sermon is expository, taking us verse-by-verse through a book of the Bible.)

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper normally is administered in the evening service on the first Sunday of the months in which it is not administered in the morning (that is, February, March, May, June, August, September, November, December, and Maundy Thursday). At the Table we enjoy a spiritual meal ("the Lord's Supper"), fellowship with Christ ("Communion"), and give thanks ("Eucharist") for our salvation in Christ Jesus.

Thanksgiving and Blessing

(The concluding cycle of response includes a hymn that is normally related to the theme of the sermon and the concluding blessing upon the congregation.)

Hymn

Benediction

Conclusion: Worship and Ministry

Worship is both our highest priority and greatest privilege as believers. We give it careful and focused attention at Independent Presbyterian Church. Worship also shapes our ministry. Because we worship twice on Sunday and our services are filled with biblical content, our weekday schedule is relatively uncluttered. Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and discipleship are not activities that must be scheduled for weekdays (and weeknights). They occur richly in our Sunday services. Christian growth is not something that must be pursued through retreats, camps, conferences and frenetic weekday activity, but through the ordinary services of the church.