

# An Instructed Eucharist at New Song, August 26, 2018

On August 26, 2018, we had an Instructed Eucharist at New Song. Members of New Song's Liturgy Team all helped in creating the text to be used for the day. We started with an Instructed Eucharist that The Reverend David Bateman had written for his Episcopal congregation, and then adapted it to fit our worship practices at New Song. What follows is the "script" that we used along with a note as to when that portion of the script was to be read in the course of the service.

## **First instruction, prior to the pouring of the water:**

Good morning! Today, our service will take the form of "An Instructed Eucharist." Periodically, it makes sense to pause and reflect on the meaning of the liturgy we engage in each Sunday. It is best known today as The Holy Eucharist but is sometimes called The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or the Mass. Christians have worshipped in this way since the earliest days of the Church. When Jesus shared his final meal with his friends on the night before he died, he instructed them to continue the practice. It is one of the clearest, strongest ways we know to tell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection and to maintain our bond with him and with one another.

Episcopal worship is structured, and it uses *The Book of Common Prayer* as its source. Today there also officially authorized alternative liturgies to be used alongside the Prayer Book, such as *Enriching Our Worship* and similar rites we use at New Song. These texts are derived from the earliest surviving texts of ancient Christian worship, updated and expanded as times and circumstances have changed. The common words of the liturgy express our most deeply held beliefs, keep us connected to the timeless elements of Christian tradition, and allow us to participate as more than just listeners.

The Eucharist has two main parts. The first part is known as the "Service (or Liturgy) of the Word." The word *liturgy* means *the work of the people*. In the Liturgy of the Word we gather in God's name, proclaim and respond to the Word of God, and pray for the world and the church. We do this, not as spectators watching a performance, but as the people of God acting together, each with their own part to play.

We begin with the gathering rite. When we are assembled in one place, those who have certain designated roles in the service enter in procession. At New Song, just before the opening hymn, someone from the assembly pours water from a pitcher into a basin in full view of the congregation, reminding us of the Church's primary sacrament, Baptism. After a hymn, the minister in charge of the celebration, today often called the "presider" (since all of us are "celebrants!"), begins a dialogue of praise with the congregation. This is known as the Opening Acclamation after which

we typically sing a second hymn of praise that has been used for centuries in the gathering rite. It is known by its opening words “Glory to God.” The gathering rite concludes with a prayer, or collect, that “collects” the themes of this particular Sunday.

### **Second instruction, after the water is poured and before the first hymn:**

Scripture teaches us that music has been present since the very dawn of creation, and will continue forever in the songs of heaven.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, we are told that the morning stars sang together as God summoned all of Creation into being. The earliest descriptions of worship by the Hebrew people include music. In the Psalms, God’s people are urged over and over to “Sing a new song” to God. In the Gospels, we learn that after Jesus and the disciples in the upper room finished what we now call the Last Supper, they sang a Psalm together. In Paul’s letters, both to the Ephesians and the Colossians, believers are admonished to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” when they are together. The book of Revelation is filled with rapturous descriptions of the glorious music sung by the choirs of angels and saints in heaven. And, of course, the very name of this congregation is “New Song” so it is no wonder that music plays an important role in our worship. Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, choir anthems, cantors’ voices, and music played by instrumentalists all play their part here.

In our spirit of mutual ministry, and our embrace of liturgy as the work of all of us together, the most important music in our services is the music we all make together – the “musical work” of the people, if you will.

Here at New Song, we make a regular practice of singing from the hymnal that Jesus used and sang from – the Psalms. We sing them in different musical styles and formats, including responsively, led by a cantor or our choir, and metrically, using poets’ paraphrased versions of the texts that can be sung to hymn-tunes, as we do this morning. We sing a wide variety of hymns and spiritual songs, drawn from sources including the chant tradition of the early church, music from churches and traditions around the world over the centuries, from the indigenous people of this land, immigrants who have come to these shores, and African peoples brought here on slave ships, and their descendants whose spirituals, gospel, jazz, and blues musical forms enrich our worship. Unlike many Episcopal churches, we do not sing hymns and spiritual songs drawn only from a single hymnal; rather, we sing music from dozens and dozens of sources, including texts and tunes written by living poets and musicians.

The hymn that begins our service helps us to transition from the thoughts, cares, and work of our everyday lives, and focus our minds, hearts, and spirits for worship. The Sequence hymn, sung right before the Gospel is read, is usually closely related to one or more of the scripture texts for the day. When hymns are sung as our offerings are gathered to be brought to the altar, the texts often focus on the actions of offering

ourselves to God. Hymns and spiritual songs sung during Communion refer to the actions of receiving and giving thanks for the gift of the Sacrament. And, finally, our closing hymn serves as a transition as it sums up our worship and sends us out into the world as God's people, to share and spread God's word and God's will for all to know Christ's love, and to live in justice and peace. So to speak, it gives us our "marching orders."

**Third instruction, between the Collect (Prayer) of the Day and the reading of the first lesson:**

In this part of the Liturgy of the Word, we are seated as we listen to Bible readings – stories that form the foundation of our faith.

**POSTURES and ACTIONS**

Episcopalians stand, sit, and kneel during different parts of the service. At New Song, we don't have kneelers because of the nature of our space, although kneeling is still an important part of our tradition that can help ground us in worship.

Although these postures are optional, engaging our bodies as we engage our minds enriches worship in ways that help us absorb, reflect, and learn. In keeping with biblical Jewish and Christian traditions, we stand to praise God and to pray; we sit to listen, and we kneel to pray and meditate.

If you have a physical condition that makes any of these postures difficult, you are always welcome to adopt a more comfortable position. You may also notice that some people engage in various acts of personal devotion, such as bowing or making the sign of the cross. These also are optional, used by some to enhance their individual experience of worship. Again, using our bodies during worship helps to anchor ourselves in the experience. What better way to find connection to God, our Divine Creator, than to use the bodies God so exquisitely designed?

Bowing shows reverence when God's name is uttered. The sign of the cross shows reverence for Jesus' sacrifice for us and our pledge to live our baptismal vows in response. It is a simple yet profoundly meaningful expression of faith, a sign of our openness to Christ and our dedication to practicing our faith every day in thought, word, and deed.

In our classes for children here at New Song, I have shown them a way to remember how to make the sign of the cross, and we suggest what it might mean:

Forehead = God in my mind,  
Heart = God in my heart; God in  
Left shoulder = every  
Right shoulder = thing I  
Heart = do.

## **THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

We use a fixed selection of scripture readings, called a lectionary, that allows us to hear a significant portion of the Bible within a three-year period. The Liturgy of the Word is a significant portion of our service during which we are offered food for thought through stories of ancient scripture.

There are four readings: a reading from the Hebrew scriptures (acknowledging our Jewish roots), a reading from the Psalms (the ancient hymnal of the Jews), a reading from the acts of the apostles or from the letters from the apostles, and a reading from one of the four gospels.

During the gospel reading, we hear directly about the words and actions of Jesus. Our liturgy shows the importance of the gospel by introducing it with a hymn. While the hymn is sung, the reader of the gospel processes with the book into the midst of the congregation, bringing the words of Christ as close to the people as possible.

After the sermon, which is always based on at least one of the scripture readings, we conclude our response to God's Word by standing and saying together a summary of our faith, such as the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed was adopted in the fourth century and is one of the oldest texts of Christian worship.

### **Fourth instruction, prior to the reading of the Gospel (from the center of the worship space):**

The Gospel is read from the center of the congregation as a visual reminder that the Gospel is central in our lives. The deacon first makes the sign of the cross on the Gospel book, and then on her forehead, lips, and heart, to enact and emphasize the sacredness of the act of reading the words. It is a sign that we hold God and God's word in our minds, in the words that we speak, and in our hearts. It is another way in which we Episcopalians worship with our whole bodies. If you wish, you are invited to join me in the making of the sign of the cross on your own forehead, lips, and heart as we prepare to read the Gospel.

### **Fifth instruction, prior to the homily:**

In the sermon, the preacher "breaks open the Word" for those gathered. At New Song, as in most Episcopal churches, the sermon is based on the lectionary texts for the day. Often, the text that the preacher chooses to take a deeper dive into is the Gospel. Sometimes they draw other texts for the day into their message, or perhaps they choose to preach exclusively or primarily on the Hebrew scripture or the Epistle.

Preaching is, in large part, about context – when preparing a sermon, the preacher looks for connections to where the chosen text is placed in the scripture immediately surrounding it as well as to the broader body of scripture. The preacher looks both at in the culture and time in which it was written as well as to current events and how scripture continues to be meaningful and to speak to us today. They look for

connections to where we are in the church year, in the broader Christian church, as well as to the particular lives of the people who make up the New Song congregation.

At New Song, Dannye offers a children's sermon downstairs for those children, youth, or adults who wish to participate in that alternative. Those messages are also based on the lectionary readings assigned for the day.

Quite unique to New Song is that we have a group of 13 individuals, both clergy and lay, who offer their gifts of preaching. I don't know of any other church in which this is true. What it means for New Song is that we hear a lot of different voices from the pulpit. What we may lack in continuity of preaching is, in my mind made up many times over by the richness gained by the variety of perspectives and insights that those 13 voices bring.

### **Sixth instruction, after the Nicene Creed:**

In the last portion of the Liturgy of the Word, we pray, and make our final preparation for the Communion part of the service. Our prayers always include the entire universal Church, the nation, the welfare of the world, the concerns of the local community, those who suffer or are in trouble, and those who have died. We usually use a pattern of prayer that allows everyone in the congregation to make responses. It is important for the person offering the Prayers of the People to allow space for those responses and to maintain a sense of prayerful calm, so people do not feel rushed or left out. When the prayers are concluded, we say together a general confession of our sins (except during the Easter season) and listen as the presider pronounces God's forgiveness. Then we are prepared to exchange God's Peace, in which we briefly greet those nearby in the name of the Lord. The ancient custom of passing the Peace expresses our unity in Christ and our readiness to receive Communion. It is important to allow the passing of the peace to be a gesture of acceptance and forgiveness. We have just confessed to God, now we acknowledge in each other in the need to create a community of forgiveness as we prepare to share in the act of communion. It is not a break in the liturgy, but an important part of our worship. It is not intended to be a time to greet every person in the congregation, but rather those who are nearest to us, as the concluding act of corporate prayer in this part of the service.

### **Seventh instruction, after the exchange of the Peace and before the Offertory:**

After the peace we begin the basic action of the Holy Eucharistic. We accept the people's offerings as two members of the congregation bring to the altar table bread, wine, money and other gifts. The congregation stands as the offerings are brought forward, an indication that these are symbols of the self-offerings of the people. The offerings are given directly to the deacon or priest standing at the altar.

Leavened or unleavened bread and actual wine are presented. We use actual wine just as Jesus did and as he commanded us to do. The bread and wine are prepared

on the altar table, and the Deacon, if present at the service, traditionally has this responsibility. A little water is generally poured into the wine to symbolize the water that poured from Jesus' side after his crucifixion. Vessels for the water and wine have been especially crafted for New Song and honor the importance of communion.

The altar linen clothes remind us of the similar ways in which we might use linen or other napkins and tablecloths at a special dinner celebration. Both Scripture and Christian tradition often compare Eucharist to a great heavenly banquet or feast of all the saints that have gone before us.

There are no words spoken during receiving the gifts from the community or during setting of the table. A music offering may be presented in the form of an anthem by the choir or a congregational hymn.

Now as the altar is completely set and ready.

**Eighth instruction, after the altar is completely ready and just before the presider begins:**

The word *Eucharist* means *to give thanks*. In every Eucharist Christians tell the story of God's creation and God's incredible gift in the sending of Jesus. We focus on his death and resurrection, which is the heart of the Christian faith. We listen to his oldest recorded words at the Last Supper with his disciples, in which he commanded us to continue the tradition he was beginning. You will find the clearest expression of the meaning of communion by listening carefully to the words of the service.

The one who presides at the Eucharist is always an ordained person, either a bishop or a priest. In the earliest centuries of the church, the bishop, or chief pastor, would always preside but soon the church grew too large for one person to do this. So bishops ordained and delegated priests to celebrate the Eucharist in each local congregation. They joined the bishops and the deacons whose ministry of word and service began in the *Acts of the Apostles*. This three-fold order of the ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons goes back to the beginnings of the church; that is why Episcopalians and others retain these orders to this day.

As the words and action at the altar unfold, they do so according to a four-fold pattern first used by Jesus when he fed the multitudes with bread and fish, and also used again at the Last Supper. First he *took* the bread. Then he *gave thanks* over the bread. He *broke* the bread, finally he *gave* it to the people. As we involve ourselves in the drama of Holy Communion, together we remember what happened in such a vivid way that this memory is brought right into the present moment.

**Ninth instruction, after the presider has broken the bread and the fraction anthem has been sung, but before the words of invitation:**

Through the prayers and actions of the liturgy we believe that Christ is truly made known to us in the Breaking of the Bread. The Bread and Wine are now the Body and

Blood, the Being and the Life, of Christ for us. Christ is truly present in them. Together they are an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace – which is the definition of a sacrament.

Traditionally, only the baptized were invited to receive communion by coming forward to the altar. At New Song, we practice a kind of Eucharistic hospitality known as the “open table” in which we say “all who seek God are welcome at this Table.” All are invited! As we join one of the two lines up to the Altar, the person in front of you will make the sign of the cross on your forehead reminding us all of the centrality of Baptism. You are invited to do the same to the one following you to the Table. The Presider will first place a piece of Bread on your outstretched hands for you to eat. Then you will move to another Eucharistic minister who will offer the cup of Wine. It has been Christian practice to drink communion Wine from this common cup, and you may do so by grasping the chalice at the bottom and tipping it slowly. You are also welcome to receive the Bread only (and not the Wine), or to dip the Bread into the chalice. After you have received communion, you may return to your seat. If you do not wish to receive communion at this time, you may still join in the line for communion, fold your arms across your chest as you approach the Presider who will then pronounce a simple blessing.

During the administration of Communion, you are welcome to go to the prayer desk to the left of the altar for private prayer and anointing. You may request prayer for yourself or on behalf of another. The minister of healing will also be available there after the end of the service and announcements.

**Final instruction, after any communion anthem or music is finished, while the last of the altar is being cleared:**

The deacon (or priest) clears the altar in much the same way as you might clear your own table after dinner, removing the dishes and cloths and eating or storing any leftovers. In church, we generally consume any leftover bread and wine immediately after the service. Occasionally some is reverently put aside to carry to those who have not been able to attend the service.

The presider then leads everyone in saying a post-communion prayer is followed by a blessing and dismissal, which formally closes the worship with a call for us to go as Christ’s servants out into the world. It reminds us that the purpose of worship is not simply to encourage and build ourselves up, but for all of us to be empowered and sent forth as ministers of Christ. Finally, we sing a hymn as our closing act of common worship.

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