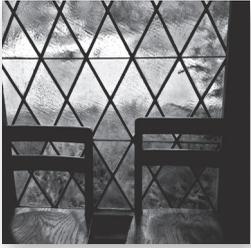


# contents

To the Leader	4
Leader Helps	5
About Our Writers	8
<b>1: Why Do We Worship?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2: Encountering God in Word</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>3: Encountering God in the Sacraments</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4: Responding to God in Prayer and Praise</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>5: Worship and the World</b>	<b>59</b>
Holy Communion: Pattern for Worship	71
Scripture and Worship	74
Thanksgiving at the Table: Anatomy of a Prayer	79
Words for Worship	80
Worship Matters: Your Assembly's Worship	87

# to the leader

---



## ❖ WELCOME ❖

Welcome to *Worship Matters*! This five-session course has been designed for adult worshipers in Lutheran congregations. They may be newcomers to the Christian faith or to a Lutheran church. They may already worship regularly. Most likely they all have some questions and would like to think more about *why we do what we do* in worship. Our prayer is that worshipers might more deeply encounter and be transformed by the living God, the one we know in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you are leading this course, you already know that worship *matters*. While Lutherans don't all worship in exactly the same way, we do hold central things in common. This course invites exploration of those central things by considering the purpose and pattern of worship as practiced by Lutherans—the why and the how.

## ❖ COURSE FOUNDATIONS ❖

This course focuses on worship as *the principal weekly gathering of God's people around word and sacrament*. You might call this Sunday worship, worship on the Lord's day, the day of the resurrection.

This course also focuses on the particular *pattern* of worship that Lutherans have used over time when they gather around word and sacrament. That pattern can be described as *gathering, word, meal, and sending*.

Finally, this course is guided by some foundational principles. These principles are named and explained in a beautiful statement about word-and-sacrament worship called *The Use of the Means of Grace*. *The Use of the Means of Grace* was adopted for guidance and practice by the Fifth Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on August 19, 1997—by people just like you. Since then, Lutherans have been living into what this statement invites us toward. This course provides one way for Lutheran assemblies to continue to grow into these commitments, as people formed and transformed by the word and by the sacraments, as people who gather weekly and are sent into the world for the sake of the world.

We know that not everyone in your congregation will participate in this course, so we've provided some ideas for extending the fruits of your exploration and discovery into your congregation's worship. Those ideas are described in a section called "Worship Matters: Your Assembly's Worship" at the end of this Leader Guide.

This is holy work. We are glad you are embarking on this journey in your congregation. Welcome to what matters—for you, the course participants, and for the life of the world.



You can download a free copy of *The Use of the Means of Grace* at [www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/The-Use-of-the-Means-of-Grace.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/The-Use-of-the-Means-of-Grace.aspx). People who have read and studied *The Use of the Means of Grace* have frequently been amazed by how it has enriched their understanding of worship, of why the word and the sacraments are central to Lutheran worship, and what worship is for.

# leader helps

---

## ✧ GETTING STARTED ✧

- Sessions are designed to run between 60 and 90 minutes. It is certainly possible to extend or shorten the time, for example, by adding or omitting activities or using a session over two meeting times. You know your group best; adjust and adapt the sessions as needed.
- The portions of each session highlighted in **blue** are unique to this Leader Guide. In some cases they provide additional background or suggestions for using an activity. Other times they provide options and alternatives to what is presented in the Participant Book.
- Think through the space available for hosting the session in relation to the session activities. Read through the session in advance and make decisions regarding what activities you plan to do. What will you need to facilitate a good experience for your group? For example: Do you want a circular seating arrangement so that everyone can see a central display or to facilitate singing or discussion? Do you need a projector, speakers, and screen to show a video? Does the room have Internet access? Do you have space to move around if you choose to invite participants to try out prayer postures?
- Supply lists are noted throughout the sessions.
- Familiarize yourself with the corresponding course Participant Book.

## ✧ AN INVITATION ✧

The world we live in often expects us to make our choices on the basis of taste (“I like this better than I like that”). The content and style of worship can evoke strong feelings among worshipers. This course does not have as one of its goals debating questions of taste or style. These are questions best addressed in your local ministry context. What this course does do is invite participants to think about why we worship, and the relationship between its purpose and its pattern.

It is very easy to move immediately to critique and evaluation when encountering a new or unfamiliar idea or practice related to worship. Instead, invite your group to approach your time together in a spirit of observation and exploration. Invite them to try out comments that begin with “I notice” or “I wonder” and see what they might discover about worship. Ask them to consider tucking away (for now) comments that begin with “I like” or “I prefer.” For example, what happens when we think about worship as a communal practice and witness more than as an individual activity whose worth we evaluate by whether or not we “liked” it?

## ✧ SESSION PATTERN ✧

Worship has a pattern and so do the course sessions. The time durations for each portion of the session are suggestions; adjust as needed in your context.

**Gather.** A way for your group to get together and get ready. Modify the gathering suggestions to suit the group you have. Some alternatives are suggested for you. If your group likes to sing, sing together! If your group is quiet, you may wish to provide some visual focus through a display of artwork, artifacts, or other items.

**Encounter.** The “main dish” of each session where we present some material to chew on. Encourage participants to read the Encounter and make some notes or jot questions prior to your meeting; they’ll get the most out of your time together that way. For the session itself, you will need to make some decisions about whether and how much to read aloud.

**What Matters.** Each session presents three What Matters activities. They’re meant to help your group do some digesting of the chewing material in the Encounter section. You don’t have to do them all—and you won’t be able to in a typical hour-long session. Choose one activity that you think will both engage and stretch your group. Or, prepare for all three and then ask participants to decide which activity they’re most interested in.

**Send.** Presents a quick recap of the session’s main points and some things for participants to try next time they’re in worship. During these concluding minutes, invite participants to step back from the session and reflect on new insights, ah-ha moments, resistances, or other things they may have experienced during the session.

## ❁ TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS ❁

Here are a few tips and suggestions for getting the most out of a group study of *Worship Matters*.

- Hospitality in all things. Invite. Follow up. Be welcoming. Anticipate needs. Make arrangements for food and drink to be provided. Listen and observe what engages them.
- This course is not about giving participants the answers, but about accompanying them in their questions and discoveries.
- Acknowledge and defuse any embarrassment participants may have about “not knowing anything.” This is an introductory course! Be a model of support and encouragement. A handy glossary of “Words for Worship” in the back of their Participant Book should help with any shaky vocabulary (look for words printed in blue throughout the course).
- Encourage participants to make their Participant Books a living document by making notes or sketching in it, highlighting, underlining, circling, color-coding, or folding down page corners. The more actively they invest in their learning, the more likely it is to stick with them.
- Keep copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and Bibles handy. Both are referenced often in this course. Encourage participants to bring their own copies of these resources if they have them. Encourage a household purchase of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*: it is a wonderful resource for personal and household prayer.

## ✦ FACILITATING GROUP CONVERSATION ✦

“Mutual invitation” is one method for facilitating conversation in small groups that guides participants into shared responsibility for the conversation and helps to address in group settings the twin dilemmas of those who speak too often and those who avoid speaking at all. When using mutual invitation, each participant is invited to speak and empowered to select whom they would like to hear from next. Typically the leader either begins the round of conversation or selects the first speaker. When that person is finished speaking, she or he gets to select and invite the next speaker: “I invite you, *Name*, to share with us now.” That person has the option of accepting the invitation, passing until later, or declining (though, even if the person declines, he or she still gets to select the next speaker). The conversation proceeds in this way until everyone has been offered the opportunity to speak, whether or not they accept, pass, or decline the invitation.

## ✦ THANK YOU ✦

Worship matters. Thank you for the gifts and enthusiasm you bring to this work. Whether you are a pastor, church musician, member of a worship planning team, or an interested volunteer, your own engagement with your congregation’s worship will serve you well as you explore why worship matters with others in your faith community. Blessings on this endeavor!

# about our writers

---



**Jennifer Baker-Trinity** lives in Beaver Springs, Pennsylvania, a rural town in the heart of the Susquehanna Valley. A church musician, she enjoys creating, thinking, and writing at the intersections of music, worship, and theology. She is a member of Beaver Lutheran Church where she directs the children's choirs. She is married to Nathan Baker-Trinity and they have three young children. As the "Baker" in Baker-Trinity, she is passionate about real food and the stewardship of God's good earth.



**Erik Christensen** lives in Chicago, where he has been pastor to St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Logan Square since 2006. St. Luke's is a congregation under redevelopment serving a diverse community in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Prior to his ordination, Erik worked with and for runaway, homeless, and street-dependent youth in Minneapolis, Atlanta, and Washington, DC. Raised on Suzuki violin and church choirs, and later Billy Joel and the Indigo Girls, Erik's love of things both old and new shapes his vision of worship. Recently, Erik enjoyed being a complete beginner in both group guitar and Latin dance classes.



**Callista Isabelle** lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where she serves as chaplain of Muhlenberg College. She previously served as associate university chaplain at Yale University. When she's not serving college students food, she is often learning global songs for worship or talking with students about major life transitions. Callista is a native of West Branch, Iowa, is married, and loves hiking, cooking, and being pulled around the neighborhood by her dog.



**Christian Scharen** teaches worship and practical theology at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, having previously taught at Yale Divinity School. Originally trained in theological ethics, ethnography, and social theory, Scharen's work brings a lively Christian imagination to critical engagement with culture. He is a regular columnist on faith and pop music in *The Cresset*. He is married to Sonja, a nurse-midwife, and has two children, Isaiah and Grace. He loves the silence of old churches, hiking in the Rocky Mountains, and a pint of local beer. On that last one, he'd recommend the fantastic Minneapolis/Saint Paul local, Surly Furious.



**Miriam A. E. Schmidt** moved from Plains, Montana, to Slovakia in 2012. She serves as pastor of the Bratislava International Church and as coordinator of the Young Adults in Global Mission Program for Central Europe through ELCA Global Mission. Miriam, spouse Jeremy Blyth, and daughter Ursula live smack in the middle of a European capital city. But wherever "home" is, Miriam loves to gather friends and family around their table, and occasionally run away to the mountains for renewal. She finds continued sustenance in the weekly celebration of holy communion.



**Paul E. Walters** lives in Troy, Michigan, where he serves as pastor of Lutheran Church of the Master. An ordained ELCA pastor for more than 15 years, Paul has served churches large, small, and newly restarting. Paul has a passion for inspiring worship and for leading people toward a deeper experience of the presence of the triune God through worship. When not helping his wife, Brandy, wrangle their three boys, Paul is likely to be found out peddling around on his candy-apple red racing bike named Candy.

# 1 Why Do We Worship?



*This session explores the diverse reasons why Lutheran Christians gather together weekly to worship God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name.*

# gather (10–15 minutes)

---

## ❖ WELCOME AND CHECK-IN ❖

Welcome the group. Small group study may be a new experience for some, and it is important for people to feel welcome and secure. Provide name tags and include time for introductions. Snacks, or even a meal together to celebrate this new venture, can help the group feel more comfortable. You might consider asking participants to introduce themselves briefly and share either why they have decided to join this study or one thing they hope to take away from it. Record the responses and use them to guide you as you prepare for subsequent sessions.

## ❖ OPENING PRAYER ❖

Welcome! When your group has assembled and is ready to begin, pray aloud (or sing on a tone) these words that have been passed down to us from ancient Israel, from the prayer book we share with our Jewish sisters and brothers—the book of Psalms.



The psalms are intended for singing; this ancient poetry is inherently musical. Each psalm verse is divided into two parts; the second half of the verse is indented. Each part has a point (|) within it. This point indicates when the singer moves from the reciting note and continues with the rest of the melody.

### Psalm 100

- <sup>1</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD,  
| all you lands!
- <sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness;  
come into God's presence  
| with a song.
- <sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD is God,  
our maker to whom | we belong;  
we are God's people  
and the sheep | of God's pasture.
- <sup>4</sup> Enter the gates of the LORD  
with thanksgiving  
and the | courts with praise;  
give thanks  
and bless God's | holy name.
- <sup>5</sup> Good indeed is the LORD,  
whose steadfast love is | everlasting,  
whose faithfulness endures  
from | age to age.

### OR Prayers of the Saints

In its Prayers for Worship section, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* presents some prayers attributed to ancestors in the faith: Augustine of Hippo, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Martin Luther, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta (*ELW*, p. 87). Select one or two of these to pray as an opening prayer.

## ❖ THE LUTHERAN AND ❖

Ask one or more participants to read the following paragraphs.

Lutherans live in the beautiful tension of *and*. We are simultaneously sinner *and* saint. We need the **law** that tells us the truth about our sinfulness *and* the **gospel** that tells us we are a new creation in Jesus Christ, freed and forgiven by God's grace. We believe that Jesus became truly and fully human *and* is truly and fully God. We believe that God's reign is already here among us *and* is still to come in its completeness. We worship in word *and* sacrament. We are gathered *and* sent. Not one or the other, but both, all—the *and* in its complexity and richness.

The reasons we worship are likewise complex and rich. We may find ourselves living in the beautiful tension of a Lutheran *and* when we . . .

- gather with fellow Christians to confess our sin *and* hear God's word of forgiveness.
- hear the word proclaimed—law *and* gospel—in scripture reading, preaching, and song.
- eat the bread and drink the wine of communion *and* become the very **body of Christ** that we receive.
- pray for the great needs of the whole creation *and* are empowered by the **triune God** to be a living presence of faith, hope, and love in the midst of the needs of the community and the world.

In this first session we'll spend some time exploring the diverse reasons why you and other Lutheran Christians gather together weekly to worship God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name.

## ❖ WORSHIP AND YOU ❖

Don't spend too much time on this activity. For now, simply have participants share their answers without comments from the group. Record or collect their answers for future reference if desired.

Take turns answering the following question in quick, around-the-room fashion, or write your answers (anonymously) on a slip of paper to be collected and read out loud by the leader. Don't overthink your answer.

- **If someone asked you, "Why do you come to worship?" what is the first reason you would give?**



Throughout these pages you will see various words highlighted in blue. If any of these words are unfamiliar to you, flip to the "Words for Worship" glossary on page 80 for a quick explanation.



### Supplies

- Slips of paper
- Pens or pencils

# encounter (30–40 minutes)

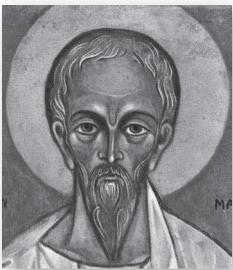
Depending on your own familiarity with the topics being discussed, you may decide to:

- Invite the group to read aloud from the Participant Book.
- Summarize and expand on the content provided.

## ✧ PATTERN FOR WORSHIP ✧

Christians around the world have been worshiping now for just about two thousand years. And, for as long as Christians have been worshiping, they've been discussing, writing, and teaching—and, yes, sometimes even arguing—about why and how we worship.

Christian worship traditions are incredibly diverse. Given how many languages, cultures, instruments, and architectures have been applied to our worship life, this is not surprising. What is perhaps more remarkable than the diversity of our worship is its consistency across time and space. The pattern of worship familiar to Christians of many denominations and traditions was familiar to Christians as long ago as the second century (just a couple hundred years after Jesus' life). We see a record of this Sunday pattern—gathering, word, meal, sending—already in the writings of Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr was a second-century convert to and teacher of Christianity from what is now called Nablus, a Palestinian city in the West Bank. He writes:



Justin Martyr

And on the day named after the sun all, whether they live in the city or the countryside, are gathered together in unity. Then the records of the [apostles](#) or the writings of the [prophets](#) are read for as long as there is time. When the reader has concluded, the [presider](#) in a discourse admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things. Then we all stand together and offer prayer. And, as we said before, when we have concluded the prayer, bread is set out to eat, together with wine and water. The presider likewise offers up prayer and thanksgiving, as much as he can, and the people sing out their assent saying the *amen*. There is a distribution of the things over which thanks have been said and each person participates, and these things are sent by the [deacons](#) to those who are not present. Those who are prosperous and who desire to do so, give what they wish, according to each one's own choice, and the collection is deposited with the presider. He aids orphans and widows, those who are in want through disease or through another cause, those who are in prison, and foreigners who are sojourning here. In short, the presider is a guardian to all those who are in need. We all hold this meeting together on the day of the sun since it is the first day, on which day God, having transformed darkness and matter, made the world. On the same day Jesus Christ our savior rose from the dead. (Translation from Gordon W. Lathrop, *Central Things: Worship in Word and Sacrament*, Augsburg Fortress, 2005, pp. 79–80.)

### Discuss:

In the second century, Christians gathered on Sunday to hear the word, pray for others, collect an offering, share a meal, and be sent into the world.

1. Why do you think Christians have worshiped with this pattern for two thousand years?
2. How does this pattern shape us as individuals and as a community of faith?

In this course, we'll be focusing more on the "whys" of Christian worship than the "hows." We won't suggest debating questions of taste or style—what this or that person particularly prefers to experience in worship. This course won't ask you, for example, to take sides over whether a worshipping [assembly](#) should sing unaccompanied or accompanied by guitars or organs.

Nor will we come to one end-all, be-all answer for "why we worship"—as if there could be only one correct reason! Instead, we will begin exploring the broad and diverse reasons why contemporary Christians—specifically Lutheran Christians—continue to use a pattern of worship developed by early Christians. When we all have a better understanding of the foundations of worship and what holds us together, the debates of taste and style can be more productive, more loving of our neighbors at worship.

Of course, "how" we worship does matter: Lutheran Christians take worship seriously and recognize there are pitfalls both in careless practice ("it doesn't really matter how we worship") and rigid uniformity ("this is the only way to worship or else!").

**Discuss (optional):**

1. What, if any, aspect of worship do you care a lot about doing the same way every week? Why?
2. What, if any, aspect of worship do you wish our congregation changed up from time to time and tried doing in new ways? Why?

## ✿ TOP TEN REASONS WHY WE WORSHIP ✿

Before launching into this Top Ten list, let's be clear about who we are worshipping. That may seem obvious: God, of course! Who do we mean by *God*? There are a lot of things we make into gods—relationships, wealth, possessions, fame, activities, personal success, to name a few—that are not, in fact, God. For Lutheran Christians, *God* is the one we know in *Jesus Christ* by the power of the *Holy Spirit*. Lutheran Christians trust that this [triune God](#) saves us in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17) and breathes new life (Holy Spirit life) into us.

Let's also be clear that these reasons aren't listed in order of importance—nor are they an exhaustive list. They do, however, all begin and end with God.

As you move through this list, you may wish to underline, circle, or highlight things that are interesting or puzzling to you, or make notes or doodles in the margins. Notice your reactions to each reason. Is this a reason you worship? Is this a reason you hadn't thought of before, or one that seems either completely obvious or impossibly far-fetched? Are there any reasons you expected to be on the list that aren't?

**10** *Because God created us to love and serve and worship God.* In other words, worship is one of the ways—perhaps the primary way—that we both receive and return the deep love of God for the world. In worship, we get the opportunity—together, as a body—to pray, sing, listen, eat, lament, rejoice, and experience the good news of Jesus Christ.



**9** *Because worship is one of the places in which we reliably encounter God.* This may sound familiar—or outright crazy. Many of us long to experience the mystery of God, the power of the holy in our lives, and we look in many places to find it: relationships, mountaintop experiences, pilgrimages, retreats. We can forget that God promises to show up in ordinary places too—like our neighborhood churches! There we have an opportunity to experience the holy in worship with real, fallible people, sacred stories, water, bread, and wine. It's as simple as this: Lutheran Christians believe that God really is with us doing good things for us when we gather together in Jesus' name.

**8** *Because worship is where the church comes into being.* The church is not a building; it is a community of believers gathered around the word and the sacraments. No assembled community? No church. In fact, Lutherans even have a super-official, foundational, historical document called the [Augsburg Confession](#) (written in 1530) that says this: "It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel" (Article VII). We worship together because in doing so we become a visible sign of God's activity in the world.

**7** *Because God calls and leads us there.* We can (and do) decide not to go to worship. Sometimes we don't worship for weeks or years. But when we do come to worship, week after week, or even sporadically, is it entirely our own willpower that gets us there? Lutheran Christians believe that God acts in our lives—even getting us out of bed and through the church doors. Coming to worship is a sign that God is acting in your life! Lutheran Christians believe it is God who calls the [assembly](#) together through the Holy Spirit (see [Martin Luther's](#) explanation of the third article of the [Apostles' Creed](#) in the [Small Catechism](#), *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 1162).

**6** *Because we are forgetful people.* Sometimes we forget we sin at all; sometimes we forget that God can and does forgive our sins. But on Sunday, we get a chance to remember both the painful reality of our human brokenness and the remarkable forgiveness God pours into us and into our world. God forgives our sins in the healing waters of baptism and in the meal of holy communion, and by the power of the Spirit, God continues to forgive us day after day.



God, who is rich in mercy,  
loved us even when we were  
dead in sin,  
and made us alive  
together with Christ.  
By grace you have been saved.  
In the name of  
✚ Jesus Christ,  
your sins are forgiven.  
(*Evangelical Lutheran  
Worship*, p. 96)

**5** *Because God speaks to us.* Sometimes God speaks to us in the ways we might expect: through the Bible, in the stories of God reaching out to ancient Israel, the **prophets'** words, the gospel accounts of Jesus Christ, or the letters of Paul. Sometimes God speaks through the words of the preacher or the words of a song. Sometimes God speaks in other ways in worship: through music; when we hear “peace be with you” and shake the hand of a person with whom we have recently disagreed; or when we hear the words “the **body of Christ**, given for you” when receiving communion. God speaks to us as individuals, yes, but also as a gathered community (the “you” is both singular and plural: peace be with *you all*, the body of Christ given for *you all*). Worship offers us a time to listen intentionally as individuals and as a community.

**4** *Because God feeds us at Jesus' table with the very body and blood of Christ.* We are people who hunger and thirst for something that simple calories cannot satisfy. In **holy communion**, all are welcome to come, eat and drink, and be nourished in a meal that we share with the saints of every time and place. In the **eucharist**, we hold out our hands for food and receive it, not because of who we are, but because of who God is. God feeds us with bread and wine, and through this meal God forgives us, renews us, strengthens us, binds us together with others, and reminds us of God's vision—that all the world would be fed. In the **Lord's supper**, we also become what we receive: the **body of Christ** for the world. God fashions us in this meal (like a potter at work with her clay) into the body of Christ, so that God might use our hands and feet to do God's work of justice, mercy, and reconciliation in the world.

**3** *Because the weekly pattern helps us come to know, over time, who God is and who we are.* Week after week, we learn from our ancestors, Jewish and Christian. Week after week, we participate in patterns that are meaty and rich—patterns that have been meaningful and helpful to Christians over time. We learn through weekly practice because we don't learn anything well—or receive any benefits—by doing it just once. (Twenty sit-ups just one morning or vegetables for just one meal will have little effect on our health. Regular exercise and a healthy daily diet, on the other hand, can radically change our lives.) When we commit to a weekly practice of worship, we enter into a deep tradition that aids us in our struggle with life's deepest and hardest questions: Who are we? Who is God? How do we live after (or in the midst of) great suffering? By committing to this practice with a group of people (like a congregation!), we get to live and breathe these questions in the company and shared wisdom of others.

**2** *Because community helps.* Much of our Western culture tells us that spiritual life is an individual, personal concern. The Christian tradition counters this claim. Christians worship *together* in an assembly. The assembly might be tiny or huge. It is often intergenerational—including little children, teens, young adults, persons in the middle of life, and seniors. The assembly often includes people we would not normally choose to spend time with, people we don't know, and sometimes even people we dislike. But that's exactly the point: God calls us in Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves, even when we have a difficult time loving certain neighbors. On a more positive note, an intergenerational, diverse worshiping community can become deeply important



*Holy communion, eucharist, Lord's supper, mass, sacrament of the altar, divine liturgy, and divine service* are all names for the meal of bread and wine we share at Jesus' table as baptized Christians.



to our spiritual lives. Paul, one of the New Testament writers, often uses the familial language of “sisters and brothers” in his letters to early Christian worshiping communities. Baptized Christians are blood relatives—through Jesus’ blood. In Christian assemblies, we also can find mentors, friends, and companions for our lives.

**1** *Because when we open ourselves to experience God’s presence in worship, we also open ourselves to experience God’s presence in our day-to-day lives.* That is to say, worship is not the only time that God is active and at work. Worship awakens us to the God who is at work in our daily lives—through us, with us, for us, and sometimes in spite of us. God is at work in the world of day-to-day work and play: as we wake and dress ourselves; as we speak and sing and keep silence; as we give to and receive from our neighbors; as we eat and drink; as we lie down to sleep. And God is at work in our communities—uncovering what has been hidden; restoring what is broken; healing what is sick; pouring out mercy where there is agony and need; raining down justice where there has been cruelty, prejudice, and bloodshed.

## what matters (15–25 minutes)

---

*The following activities are intended to flesh out some of the material presented in the Encounter section. You don’t have to do them all. Choose what works best for you and adapt as needed.*



### Supplies

- A set of at least 4 different colored highlighters, markers, crayons, or colored pencils for each participant; more colors if you have them
- Sticky notes; 2 per participant

## 1 COMPARING PATTERNS

*In this activity we will compare Justin Martyr’s second-century description of Christian worship (see p. 12) with “Holy Communion: Pattern for Worship” as presented in Evangelical Lutheran Worship.*

Mark Justin Martyr’s second-century description of Christian worship with a sticky note (p. 12). Then mark “Holy Communion: Pattern for Worship” with another sticky note (p. 71). Now compare the two patterns. Use different colors of highlighters, markers, crayons, or colored pencils to highlight, underline, or circle elements that are the same or similar in both patterns. You might choose to use one color for “Gathering” elements, one for “Word” elements, and so on.

What do you notice? What about the pattern is the same? What is different?

## 2 ENCOUNTERING GOD IN OUR BODIES

*In this activity we will explore the multisensory ways we encounter God in worship.*

If you are working with a smaller group, work together as a group; with a larger group, divide into smaller groups of two to five people. You might jumpstart the activity with a small display in the room set up beforehand. Include things like pieces of cloth in the colors of the church year, a handbell or worship book, a loaf of bread, a pitcher of water, a candle or stick of incense, a flower, a bowl of ashes, pictures of your congregation at worship.

Lutheran Christians believe that worship is one of the places in which we reliably encounter God (see reason 9, page 14). What are some ways we experience such an encounter? Is it all in our heads, or does our whole body with all its senses participate in an awareness of God's presence with us in worship? Working alone or in small groups, list as many ways as you can think of that the five human senses are engaged and enlivened in worship. Share your list with the larger group.

### Sight

### Touch

### Hearing

### Taste

### Smell

Individuals or groups could work on all five senses or, if you are short on time, you could assign each individual or group one of the five senses and ask them to brainstorm and record how we encounter God in worship through that sense. For example:

1. What are ways or times we *hear* God in worship?
2. What are ways or times we *smell* God in worship?

Assure participants that there are not right or wrong answers to these questions.

After a few minutes, invite individuals or small groups to share their thoughts about how God might be present through a particular sense in worship.

# 3 WHY DO YOU WORSHIP?

*In this activity we will review the “Top Ten” reasons why Christians worship with attention to how individual and communal context shapes our motivations to worship.*

This session’s Encounter section presents a “Top Ten” list of reasons why Lutheran Christians worship. Look back over the reasons and any notes you made, then discuss one or more of the following:

1. Which two or three reasons are most compelling to you? To your congregation?
2. Which two or three might be most compelling to someone you know who does not worship?
3. Which reasons surprise you?
4. What are some reasons not on this list?

**Optional:** Set up ten stations around the room, numbered 1 to 10, and invite participants to move from their seats and stand under the number of the reason for worshipping that resonates most closely with their personal experience. This creates a strong visual representation of the diversity of experiences and perspectives in the group that may strengthen this and later conversations.

## send (5–10 minutes)

---

### ✧ RECAP ✧

- This session explores ten reasons why Christians gather for worship: God created us to worship; we can trust God is there; it’s where the church comes into being; God calls us to worship; we are forgetful of our sin and God’s forgiveness; God speaks to us; God feeds us; weekly practice helps; community helps; and worship helps open us to God’s presence in the rest of our lives.
- While this session proposed one set of reasons why Lutheran Christians gather for worship, it is not an exhaustive list. Each person and community may have other reasons.

**Optional:** Offer a brief summary of what seemed most interesting, new, confusing, controversial, or exciting to the group. What did you observe during the session?

### Looking Back

1. What reason for why we worship presented in this session was most interesting to you or hit closest to home?
2. What reason for why you worship was affirmed for you?
3. How might your experience of worship in this congregation (say next week or later this morning) be affected by your participation in today’s session?

## ✧ TRY THIS ✧

- Next time you are in worship, pay special attention to your congregation's worship folder, bulletin, or projected slides. Does it make the pattern of your worship clear? Does your congregation's worship reflect the basic pattern of gathering, word, meal, and sending presented in this session? If not, can you outline or describe its pattern?
- Next time you are in worship, think consciously about all five of your senses. Which one(s) do you use the most in worship to sense God's presence? Which are underused?
- If you keep a journal or a diary (or even if you don't), consider spending 5–10 minutes each day during this coming week journaling on one of the "Top Ten" reasons provided why Lutheran Christians worship. Write whatever comes to mind, without the pressure of worrying that you'll be asked to share your thoughts publicly. Notice if, through the course of the week, there are recurring questions, ideas, or topics that emerge in your writing. Decide before you come to the next session what, if anything, you'd like to share with the group.

Remind participants of the date, time, place, and topic for the next meeting.

## ✧ SENDING PRAYER ✧

A *canticle* is a hymn, usually drawn from scripture or other texts in use by the early church (though generally not from the psalms). The *Nunc dimittis* (also called the song of Simeon) is a canticle drawn from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:29-32). The name comes from the Latin translation of the first words of these verses, "Now, dismiss." Lutherans have used this canticle as a song after communion since the sixteenth century.

Invite participants to pray aloud (or sing) the *Nunc dimittis*. Musical versions are provided in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 324, and #200–203, 313, and 440.

Let us pray.

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:

your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation

which you have prepared in the sight of every people:

a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Amen.

## For Further Reading

- "The Triune God and the *Means of Grace*" and "The Means of Grace and Mission." *The Use of the Means of Grace*. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997, pp. 6–9; 56–59. Download a free copy at [www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/The-Use-of-the-Means-of-Grace.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/The-Use-of-the-Means-of-Grace.aspx).
- Ramshaw, Gail. *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Rimbo, Robert A. *Why Worship Matters*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.
- Wengert, Timothy J., ed. *Centripetal Worship: The Evangelical Heart of Christian Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007.