

7. Preaching

The official proclamation of the Word by God's ordained servants is the central part of the worship service. Biblical preaching is God's primary means of speaking to us and saving us by grace (Rom. 10:14-17).

The purpose of preaching is to glorify God through our knowledge of His holiness and trust in His salvation in Christ. It aims both at the conversion of the unsaved and the building up of believers.

The content of preaching must be:

- *Biblical:*
Explaining and applying God's Word both from His law and gospel.
- *Doctrinal:*
Teaching scriptural truths in a simple way.
- *Universal:*
For all ages and spiritual conditions and levels of maturity.
- *Experiential:*
Not simply head-informing but heart-changing and fruit-revealing.
- *Practical:*
Showing people how to live in our world but not like the world.

The pastor is called to prayerfully prepare his sermon throughout the week and bring it seeking the Spirit's power on Sunday.

The congregation is called to prepare themselves prayerfully during the week, to pray for the pastor's preparation, to come with a heart ready to receive and submit to the Word, to listen attentively, and to put the Word into action after hearing it.

8. Tithes and Offerings

Tithes and offerings are our gifts to the Lord to show thankfulness to God for His abundant gifts to us. Tithes should be given joyfully and abundantly from the heart. As tithes are given, each member should confess faithful stewardship of God's gifts, thankfulness, and trust in God's provision.

9. Congregational Singing

Songs provide another way to praise God, witness, and worship the Lamb. Songs touch the emotions, blend Word and music, edify, encourage, convict, unify the congregation, and glorify God. Since special music reduces the active involvement of the congregation, our worship services maintain the corporate act of worship as modeled in the Word. The worship services also focus on the Word of God, and thus use the singing of Psalms. Hymns and choirs are included at special music programs rather than on the Lord's Day.

10. Doxology

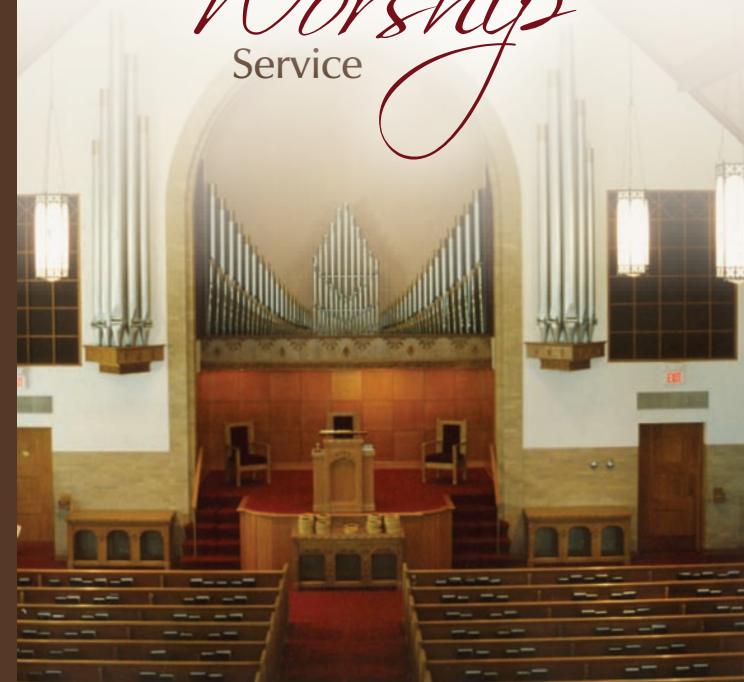
The doxology gives a final response of faith to the Word, giving glory to God for all we have heard about Him, seen in Him, and received from Him.

11. Benediction

The benediction pronounces God's blessing on the congregation prior to leaving. The triune God promises to be with His people throughout the week, to comfort and bless them (2 Cor. 13:14).

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Understanding Our Worship Service



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Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation

Why do we do that? What does this mean? Why did the minister say that? These are natural questions when you come to a church's worship service. This pamphlet is designed to help you understand the biblical principles governing our worship service and the specific elements of what we do.

Be sure to also read our booklet, *The Heritage Reformed Congregations: Who We Are and What We Believe*, which explains our teachings, emphases, and ministries.

Biblical Principles of Worship

All that we do must be governed by the Scriptures, for they are God's Word. Here are several key principles from the Bible.

We believe that worship services must be:

1. *God-focused.* "Worship God" (Rev. 19:10).
2. *Christ-centered.* "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).
3. *Spirit-moved.* "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).
4. *Word-based.* "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).
5. *Heart-felt.* "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth...but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8).
6. *Orderly.* "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).
7. *With instruction.* "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..." (Col. 3:16).
8. *Shared as a church.* "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).
9. *Under oversight.* "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves..." (Heb. 13:17).
10. *On the Lord's Day.* "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them..." (Acts 20:7).

Elements of Our Worship Service

Our worship service is structured to intentionally direct our hearts to God.

Before the service begins, the consistory meets for prayer. Upon entering the sanctuary, one elder shakes the hand of the minister and both say "blessing," wishing God's blessing on the preaching and hearing of the Word. The consistory members enter and stand in prayer—a sign of their authority and ministry. The entire congregation joins in silent, personal prayer for a blessing upon the Word.

The service includes the following elements: votum, salutation, reading of God's Law (morning), or the reading from a doctrinal standard (evening), Scripture reading, congregational prayer, preaching, tithes and offerings, congregational singing, doxology, and benediction. An explanation of each of these is given below.

1. Votum

"Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). This opens the service by remembering our helplessness and the all-sufficiency of God our Creator and covenant Lord.

2. Salutation

The minister, speaking as God's mouthpiece, pronounces a blessing on the people of God. Generally, Numbers 6:24–26 is used in the morning. Revelation 1:4–5a is often used in the evening.

3. Reading of God's Law

God's Law is read each Sunday morning to signify God's sovereign rule, testify of sin and the need for heartfelt confession, prepare the church for the hearing of the gospel, and teach believers how they ought to walk before God. Sometimes the Law is followed by singing a Psalm.

4. Reading of a Doctrinal Standard

The reading from one of our doctrinal standards defines who we are, shows our unity with the church through the ages and across the world, reminds us of core doctrines, and calls us to examine ourselves.

5. Scriptural Reading

Scripture is read in each service because it is the principal means of grace and the infallible foundation on which the preaching is based. God speaks personally, infallibly, and authoritatively.

6. Congregational Prayer

The minister prays to God on behalf of the congregation. He confesses sin. He pleads for conversion of sinners, growth in grace of believers, and the local, denominational, and world-wide Christian efforts and education. He seeks God's help for special needs or burdens of members, prays for a blessing on the offerings, and offers thanksgiving for all that God is and does. He seeks for God to apply the sermon to all who hear the Word.

