

# *Serving as Liturgist at Alpharetta Presbyterian Church*

2023

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a liturgist for a worship service. This document offers guidance and suggestions as you prepare to lead worship. We urge you to read and make use of them.

## THE LITURGIST'S ROLE DURING SERVICES

You will know well ahead of time if you are to serve. Begin by looking at previous bulletins and watching during services to learn "what comes where" and how much you specifically are likely to be doing (scripture, prayers, etc.).

Below is a list of worship activities that the liturgist will generally do. **Items bolded indicate an item you as the liturgist will need to prepare** in the week before you serve (more guidance on that later).

### Call to Worship

- Say to the congregation something like, "Please stand as you're able and join me in the call to worship." Pause a moment while the congregation gets to their feet with their bulletins.
- Read the "leader" lines of the call to worship printed in the bulletin.
- Following the call to worship, the organist will immediately begin playing the opening hymn. (In other words don't announce the name of the hymn and hymn number.)

**Prayer of Adoration** – A Prayer of Adoration is not always included in the bulletin. If it is, then do the following.

- Following the opening hymn, invite the congregation to pray by saying something like, "Let us pray," or by lifting your hands and bowing your head.
- Say the **Prayer of Adoration**.
- After you close the prayer, invite the congregation to be seated by saying something like, "You may be seated."

### Call to Confession

- Pause for a few seconds while the congregation takes their seats and settles in.
- Say the **Call to Confession**
- Instruct the congregation of the order of the Call to Confession<sup>1</sup> saying something like, "All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Therefore, let us confess our sins first in song, then in silence and finally in unison."

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<sup>1</sup> The order and parts of the Call to Confession may vary. Review the bulletin and modify your instructions to reflect what's in the bulletin. For instance, if there's no song, then say something like, "Let us be called to confession by first praying silently, then praying together in unison."

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- During the silent prayer, please give enough time for silent confession - at least 15 to 30 seconds. Waiting in silence seems like it takes forever. Don't allow your anxiety to rush the congregation along too quickly. There is a clock on the pulpit with a second hand. Use the clock to force yourself to wait.
- After the silent prayer, give a verbal indication to the congregation that it's time to read the printed Pray of Confession by saying something like, "And praying together," then begin reading the prayer.

## **Assurance of Pardon**

- Deliver the **Assurance of Pardon**
- Following the singing of the Gloria Patri, guide the congregation into the Passing of the Peace. Transition by saying something like, "As a forgiven people, we can now greet each other with Christian love as we Pass the Peace. The peace of Christ be with you." Pause for the congregational response, then say something like, "Please pass the peace of Christ to one another."

Children Sermon - If there's a Children's Sermon and you're comfortable doing so, you may join the pastor on the chancel steps.

**Prayer for Illumination** - Before reading the scripture, invite the congregation to join you in prayer saying something like, "As we prepare to read the scriptures, let us go to God for guidance. Let us pray." Then pray the **Prayer For Illumination**.

## **First Scripture Lesson**

- Announce the first reading saying something like, "The first scripture comes from Philippians, chapter 4, verses 4 through 9." Pause a few seconds to allow people to locate the reading in their pew Bibles.
- Read the scripture passage. End by saying something like, "Here ends the first reading," or "Holy wisdom. Holy words."

This will typically end your portion of the service. You may either return to one of the chairs behind the pulpit or quietly move to a front row seat by using the side steps.

On rare occasions, the pastor may ask you to do more than is described above. In those cases, work with the pastor for additional guidance and resources.

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### PREPARING THE PRAYER OF ADORATION, CALL TO CONFESSION, ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

The minister preaching the sermon the week you serve or the APC office assistant will send you the bulletin for the service, usually by Wednesday. You will need the bulletin before preparing the **Prayer of Adoration, Call to Confession, Assurance of Pardon and Prayer for Illumination**.

Once you have the bulletin, go to God in prayer, asking for guidance as you prepare to serve God by leading worship. Then it's time to do your homework.

Review the bulletin. Read all the prayers and responsive readings printed in the bulletin. Read all scripture passages listed in the bulletin. Look at the hymns that are being sung and if possible, look up the words of the hymns. Gain a sense of what the themes and messages are that will be shared. Use this knowledge and inspiration to guide your choices for the prayers you select or write.

Also be mindful of the time of year from both a church calendar perspective (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, ordinary time, etc.) and from a world perspective (holidays such as Father's Day, Thanksgiving, Veterans Day; current weather and seasons of the year; world events; etc.). These too should be taken into consideration as you choose the words you'll deliver.

Most people serving as liturgist use material that has been written by someone else.<sup>2</sup> Traditional resources are *The Book of Common Worship* and *Feasting on the Word*. Our head pastor has a copy of each.<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Common Worship* is available online at <http://www.secondpresabq.org/uploads/5/3/8/3/53833777/book-of-common-worship.pdf>. You can also use material written by other Christians, Presbyterian as well as other denominations with similar theology. Many Christians and churches share these resources online for the worship of God. In looking online, in *The Book of Common Worship* or in *Feasting on the Word*, start by looking for the items of service such as **Prayer of Adoration, Call to Confession, Assurance of Pardon, or Prayer for Illumination** and add any key terms that are significant such as 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Spring or Mother's Day. Read what comes up and choose one that fits the service adjusting as needed to fit your style and manner of speaking.

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<sup>2</sup> If God has gifted you with as a writer, you are welcome to create your own original **Prayers of Adoration, Calls to Confession, Assurances of Pardon, or Prayers for Illumination**. Your creations don't have to be "high church" but should respect the style and traditions of Alpharetta Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church USA. God gave you the talent – feel free to use it in worshipping God!

<sup>3</sup> Most of the pastors also have *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion* and the PC(USA) publication *Call to Worship Lectionary Aids*. Both are very helpful too.

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Type or write up the parts of the service you're responsible for so you'll have it available to read on Sunday when you serve as liturgist.

## PREPARING FOR THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

The pulpit and pew bibles are the NRSV<sup>4</sup> translation. If you don't have an NRSV Bible at home, you can access an online copy at <http://bible.oremus.org>.

As far as "introducing" the scripture you will read is concerned, our pastors prefer that you simply say nothing beyond perhaps, "from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 41, verses 1 through 10," or "reading from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth," or whatever, lest what you say beyond that detracts from or conflicts with what the pastor intends in the sermon. But if you do feel a need to say something to highlight or put the text in perspective in some way, be sure to let the preacher know in advance just what it is.

## PREPARING TO SERVE

At this point, you should have the bulletin with what you need to read, you'll have the NRSV translation of the scripture passage you'll be reading, and you will have your **Prayer of Adoration, Call to Confession, Assurance of Pardon, and Prayer for Illumination** written out and ready to go. Now it's time to prepare to serve.

In music - playing the piano for example - it is said that there is a world of difference between "playing the notes" and "playing the music." So it is with reading any text to an audience. There is a sea of difference between just reading the words and conveying the message or meaning. And to get to the difference, you need to practice ahead of time.

Say the instructions you'll give to the congregation out loud. Read from the bulletin out loud. Read the parts of the service you are responsible for out loud and practice transitioning from one part of the service to the next. Master the pronunciation of difficult words, names or places.<sup>5</sup> Say the words in the same manner you plan to say them during the service. Employ vocal variety to add inflection and meaning to the words. Stress important words. Pause where it helps the listener to understand and absorb what is being said. Most of all - - slow down! A certain amount of anxiety is perfectly normal, and this commonly causes one to speed up. Don't do it! Take your time!

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<sup>4</sup> NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

<sup>5</sup> Try [dictionary.reference.com](http://dictionary.reference.com) for pronunciation of unfamiliar words. For difficult names or places, look in your Bible or online for phonetic spellings or ask the pastor for help.

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Repeat your rehearsal several times. By doing so, you will develop your muscle memory which will make the reading easier and make you more comfortable on Sunday.

## ON THE SUNDAY IN WHICH YOU SERVE

Attire - The fact that you will be in front of the congregation is obvious and appearance matters. A coat and tie are nice for gentlemen, but not required. For the ladies the usual Sunday clothes are fine. Use your own best judgment.

Using the Pulpit Bible - Normally a staff member will place one of the red ribbons attached to the pulpit Bible to mark each of the scripture readings. And normally, the pulpit Bible will be opened to the first reading. If you plan to read from the pulpit Bible, then 15 or more minutes before the service starts (assuming another service is not in progress), go to the pulpit and double check to see that the passage is marked and open.

Meet the Pastor in the Church Office - Approximately 15 minutes before the service starts, meet the pastor in the church office. This lets the pastor know that you're there and ready to go. The pastor will probably say a word of prayer with you and anyone else that may be serving at that service.

Meet the Pastor in the Narthex – After meeting in the church office, you and the pastor may have a couple quick things to do before the service. If you don't go directly together toward the Sanctuary, meet the pastor by center doors in the Narthex in the minutes before the service is scheduled to start. Walk in with the pastor if it's just the two of you, or beside the other pastor who is serving as liturgist if there are two pastors participating at the service, with the preaching pastor following behind.

Using the Pulpit Microphone – The pulpit microphone will pick up your normal speaking voice and the sound system operator will adjust if it's necessary. You do not need to pull the microphone closer to you.

## THE WORSHIP COMMITTEE IS AVAILABLE TOO

If the worship committee can assist in any way do not hesitate to ask. Many people find that actually standing in the pulpit and reading scripture well ahead of time, perhaps when no one other than a "coach" is present for feedback, can help immensely. You can rehearse using the sound system if you wish; just contact us to schedule a time and an operator. Your participation is vitally important, and we sincerely thank you for agreeing to serve.