

FOUNDATIONS OF WORSHIP AT CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1. Core principles

God's relationships

The one true God is a personal God. God's very nature is a Trinity of three persons (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*) who have lived in loving relation with one another from all eternity. *God the Son has become human* in the person of Jesus Christ in order to draw near to us and to create a way for us to participate in the very relationships that constitute the life of God himself. In history, God draws us near for communion with him by means of a *covenant*, a personal, structured relationship of life and love constituted by God's gifts of grace that establish and sustain the relationship and also by the human response of Spirit-empowered, faith-filled, loving obedience to obligations of the covenant in union with Christ.

Worship is the expression and renewal of this covenantal relationship in and with the Triune God. In the various practices of worship, God draws us near to sustain and strengthen his relationship with us. As we receive the life and power of God, we are enabled to respond to him with expressions of honor, love, and renewed commitment. Thus, worship is not merely an act of education, evangelism, or emotional comfort and release (although it includes all of those things and more); rather, worship embodies and enacts the covenantal relationship. It is an act of communion with God for the life and blessing of the world.

Biblical elements

In the past, God has spoken through the Bible to reveal himself and to teach his people how to worship him, and God continues to speak directly to us through the Bible so that we also can know him today. Therefore, our worship at Central consists of the activities that God commands and promises through the Bible to use as his means to meet us and change us: readings and sermons that proclaim, teach, and apply God's word; prayers spoken and sung to confess our sin, to give praise/thanks to God, to lament, and to intercede for the church and the world; offerings of our gifts; creeds that confess our faith/trust in God; the Lord's Supper; and God's blessing.

Biblical language

Our worship employs the ideas, themes, and even the very words of the Bible to accomplish all of these actions. In worship, God speaks to us as pastors read, preach, and proclaim the Bible, and we respond to God as we listen to the Bible, pray the Bible in speech and song, bless one another with the words of the Bible, confess our loyalty and trust with the words and teachings of the Bible, and enact the Bible in the Lord's Supper. Worship thus guided by the word of God teaches us how to worship, shapes our hearts where they have gone astray, and gives us words where otherwise we might not know what to say.

Biblical story

The backbone of the Bible is a grand narrative of God's creating and saving human beings and all the rest of the world to be a beautiful place of eternal, flourishing life with God. Christian worship focuses primarily on proclaiming and enacting God's story so that we discover the true meaning and purpose of our lives and stories by becoming participants in his. The central actor in this great biblical

drama is Jesus Christ, who is God become man in order to restore and bring to full maturity and glory the broken relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of creation. Therefore, Christian worship concentrates on the story of Jesus' becoming man, living a perfect human life, forming the church, dying and rising from the dead, and ascending to the right hand of God the Father in heaven to lead the church by his Holy Spirit in the mission of his kingdom toward the goal of making all things new. In worship, we experience union and communion with Jesus Christ so that our lives (individually and corporately) are formed increasingly into his image by dying to the evil in us and receiving new life by the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel shape

The elements of worship combine in orders of service that aim to enact a covenantal, gospel-shaped pattern. In other words, the elements of worship combine logically and relationally in a shape that provides a structure through which God graciously serves and we receive forgiveness and healing for what is wrong in our lives and wisdom and strength to love and serve him faithfully.

Historic wisdom

While the primary authority is the Bible's teaching about worship, nevertheless historic Christian patterns of worship provide valuable models that embody the teachings of the Bible in a way that continues to provide wise guidance for the church today. We are united to hundreds of generations of faithful men and women who passed on the faith to us and on whose shoulders we now stand. Since we are all members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that shares one Lord and one faith throughout the history of the church, it is fitting that we honor the Lord's work through our fathers and mothers in the faith by receiving their wisdom and expressing our unity with them in worship in tangible ways as much as possible. As a church in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, we especially value many ideals drawn from its teachings on worship.

Contemporary embodiment

The historic and global Christian church is always local in culture and expression. Every individual Christian congregation is called by Christ and gifted with his presence and power to fulfill his redemptive mission in a particular place and cultural moment. Therefore, our expressions of Christian worship at Central seek to reflect continuity with the universal church in the idiom of the specific time, place, and cultures in which we live.

Missional implications

Faithful worship always overflows in faithful living. Worship is not an escape from the "real" world of everyday life. Rather, it is a time in which God reorients our whole lives and equips us to join him in his mission in the world during life between Sundays. In worship, God clears away confusion and illusion, puts daily life back into the clear and true perspective of Jesus Christ's victory and reign over evil and death, and leads us in practices that shape us to live the good life, the way of true wisdom under his gracious reign. Sunday worship at Central always keeps life in the world Monday through Saturday firmly in view.

2. From Principles to Practice

How are these broad principles fleshed out in our actual practices of worship?

Order that embodies the whole gospel in a holistic way

The order or framework for our worship services draws upon many elements of biblical and historic Christian patterns of worship. This ensures that we receive the fullness of God's gifts to us and that we respond appropriately with the fullness of our lives.

Entrance	God calls us to worship, and we sing to respond to his call with praise and thanks.
Confession and Forgiveness	Having entered a special audience with God together, God invites us to confess our sins, and when we respond in confession, he forgives us.
Instruction from God's word and Response to God's word	Having been forgiven by God, God instructs in his wisdom from his word. and we respond with offerings & prayer for the church & the world in order to embrace his wisdom and offer ourselves to him with joy.
Communion at God's table	Having renewed our commitment to God, God serves us his own life in the Lord's Supper to celebrate renewed friendship and to strengthen us for service, and we serve one another with gratitude.
Blessing and sending	Having been restored and strengthened by God, God blesses us and sends us out to love and serve him in the world.

Preaching and applying the whole Bible

Following the best ideals of the early church and later Presbyterian tradition, sermons at Central focus on both biblical content and life application. Our pastors teach the meaning of biblical texts in depth and use concrete illustrations and examples to draw out the implications of these texts for life in the modern world. Usually, our pastors preach sequentially through whole books of the Bible, or at least large portions thereof.

Experiencing the wholeness of God's means of grace in the Lord's Supper

God not only gives us grace by means of words but also by means of the tangible symbols of bread and cup. The Lord's Supper confirms and strengthens the ministry of God's word and the renewal of our faith by completing the liturgy of the Lord's Day with a holistic experience of God's grace. The Lord Jesus serves us this edible form of the gospel so that we receive his resurrected life by the power of the Holy Spirit in a manner that involves our whole bodies. It immerses us in the whole biblical story of God as we celebrate the victory of Christ's death in the past, receive with joyful thanks the presence and power of the resurrected Christ in the present, and look forward with confirmed hope to the wedding feast of the Lamb of which the sacrament is a tangible foretaste and promise. Following the practice of Jesus and the majority of the Reformed tradition, we sit and serve the bread and cup to one another because the sacrament has the form of a meal that embodies the reconciliation, friendship, and unity that we have with one another in the Lord as the family of God and the body of Christ.

Active participation with the whole church

Worship is not a spectator sport or a performance by religious professionals for an audience of passive religious consumers. Worship enacts the covenant relationship between God and his people as a whole. The whole church is therefore a priesthood with both the high privilege and calling to know and serve God in worship in a variety of very active ways. Consequently, we provide ways for the whole congregation to participate actively as one unified body in every part of the service. Services at Central regularly include these biblical actions:

- Speaking responses together to respond to God's word to us.
- Singing songs together to offer praise, thanks, lament, and requests to God.
- Professing our common faith together with a creed.
- Praying together using psalms, the Lord's Prayer, or other biblical texts.
- Standing and raising hands together.
- Sitting and serving one another as we partake in the Lord's Supper.

Most often we follow the biblical and historically Christian practice of speaking with one voice and moving as one body in our responses. This unified action enables us to experience and enact our common faith and spiritual unity as God's family.

Music old and new from the whole church

Music is one of the most glorious ways that we worship in one voice. Worship songs are our prayers of response to God; therefore, the content and style of the music vary to evoke and express a wide range of emotions and messages appropriate to all the different ways God serves us. In order to balance historic traditions with contemporary applications, worship services at Central feature increasingly diverse kinds of music: old hymns and new hymns, old hymns with new tunes and new hymns with old tunes, and more contemporary worship songs from more recent generations. As God continues to provide our church with talented musicians, we try to follow biblical examples by using all categories of musical instruments to accompany congregational singing (e.g., Psalm 150).

Church calendar to celebrate the whole biblical story

The early church adapted the biblical calendar from ancient Israel and established an annual Christian calendar of special festivals focused on the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus Christ as well as his sending the Holy Spirit to empower us with his presence. At Central, we celebrate the major festivals of this historic Christian year with songs and other prayers, Bible readings, sermons, and visual art that address the unique themes of the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Practically, this calendar maintains a proper breadth and depth to our worship as we progress each year through a celebration of the whole person and work of Jesus Christ as the center of all of creation, all of history, and all of our own personal lives.

Visual art that speaks to the whole person

Worship embodies the good news of Jesus Christ not only in words and music but also in visual symbols. The central means by which God meets us and serves us in worship are found at the center of our worship space. Standing side-by-side in that central position are the communion table bearing bread and wine for the Lord's Supper and a pulpit symbolizing the importance of God's word. Colorful banners change with each new season of the church's calendar and tell the story of Jesus with ancient Christian symbols.