

## **Instructed Eucharist**

Used at Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal (October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011)

### **1. AFTER THE OPENING HYMN**

#### **Speaker A (at lectern):**

We're going to briefly interrupt the proceedings now to let you know that today we are doing an instructed Eucharist.

#### **Speaker B (in pulpit):**

So how is this going to work?

#### **Speaker A:**

At various points in the service we'll be stopping to talk about the different parts of the Eucharist, and the meaning of what we do in this service, week by week.

#### **Speaker B:**

A sort of close-captioning for the liturgically impaired...

#### **Speaker A:**

Ha, ha, very funny. But actually we hope that everyone will appreciate the opportunity to think about why we do what we do. And maybe even consider what we might want to do differently.

Since you mention liturgy, I'll point out that the root meaning of "liturgy" is "work of the people". So we are reminded right there that worship is an activity that belongs to us all – liturgy is the common act of worship.

#### **Speaker B:**

And the Eucharist is our central act of worship, which unites us with all other Christians.

Jesus said "Do this" and we do.

Our tradition of celebrating the Eucharist goes right back to the early church – the structure of the Eucharist and some of the prayers are very old.

But liturgy is not static – it is always evolving. We are in a constant tension between preserving our connection with our rich tradition and finding creative ways to worship in a way that fits who we are, in this place and in this time – just as Christians have done in the centuries before us.

**Speaker A:**

Here we use the Book of Alternative Services (the BAS, as we often call it – the green book). This book of course belongs in the Anglican tradition. Back in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Reformation, the Anglican Church separated from the Roman Catholic Church. After the separation it gradually adopted a combination of Catholic and Reformed practices. But in liturgy it remains closer to the Catholic Church than most Protestant Churches.

**Speaker B:**

And just in case any of you are worried that this instructed Eucharist is going to make the service ridiculously long, fear not! We won't be having the usual sermon, in order to make time for the commentary at various points in service.

**Speaker A:**

We begin with the gathering of the community – this introductory part of the service reminds us of our baptism. It also allows us to unite and prepare ourselves collectively for worship.

**2. BEFORE READINGS**

**Speaker B:**

We've just heard the collect of the day prayed by the celebrant. The collect 'collects' the ideas of the Eucharist – it is the declaration of the intention of the Eucharist – the one, simple thing that we are asking for today.

**Speaker A:**

You used the term "celebrant", which is the word used in the BAS. But that might seem in a way a misleading word, since we are all celebrating the Eucharist!

**Speaker B:**

OK, then - an alternative word is "presider". This fits the role of someone who presides – in other words, the person that leads the whole people of God in worship. The presider holds us together and watches over all the parts.

Traditionally the presider does the beginning, middle and end – in other words the Greeting and collect at the beginning, the Eucharistic Prayer in the middle and then the final blessing.

The Collect is an appropriate prayer for the presider – since this is the person who holds us together in worship. He or she prays this significant prayer on our behalf, speaking to God for all of us.

**Speaker A:**

With the Collect we come to the end of the introduction – the Gathering of the Community - and we move into the first of the two major parts that make up the Eucharist, which are the

proclamation of the word and the celebration of the Eucharist. Sometimes they are called the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table.

**Speaker B:**

So we're just about to begin the **Proclamation of the Word**, which focuses on the Bible and our response.

This part of the service has very obvious roots in the Jewish tradition of worship in Synagogues at the time of early Church. Jewish worship included public readings of the Bible, singing of psalms and a sermon.

The central place given to Bible readings in our worship reflects the high value we – as Christians and as Anglicans – give to the Bible and to Bible reading. Anglicans subscribe to the Protestant principle that each Christian has the right to read and understand the Bible.

**Speaker A:**

The specific Bible readings are determined by a calendar called the Revised Common Lectionary, which gives a 3 year cycle of readings. Right now we're in Year A. This Lectionary is used by many churches in North America – and in fact throughout the world. This means that we can go to another church and find them doing the same readings.

**Speaker B:**

I'd like to put in a word for the importance of silence too. We stop between readings to reflect and pray in silence. Sometimes I think we can get caught up in thinking that liturgy is about what is said or done, but the silence is part of it too – it helps us become a praying community.

**Speaker A:**

The Quakers practise what they call a “liturgy of silence”, which is worth thinking about.

[Short pause]

But let's talk a bit about the “doing” part of the liturgy. Worship involves all of us – our mind, our bodies, our emotions. That means using our bodies to worship – so ideally we don't stand, sit or kneel just to get exercise.

**Speaker B:**

Or just because That is How We Always Do It.

**Speaker A:**

When it comes to posture, there are lots of different opinions and practices. And here at the Cathedral we've been making some changes – and maybe we will think about more in the future.

One thing we do consistently is stand for the Gospel reading – and turn to face the Gospel, which is brought into the centre of the congregation. This reflects the special role of the Gospels for us as Christians. All the Bible readings teach us, inspire us, challenge us, feed us. But the Gospel brings us the words of Jesus: The Good News!

**Speaker B:**

You might see some people signing a cross on their foreheads, lips and chest when the Gospel is announced – this is to show that the words of Jesus should guide our thoughts, our words and our deeds.

**Speaker A:**

We highlight our distinct response to the Gospel by sitting for the other readings. And since the Psalm is a reading, it makes sense to sit for that too – as we have started to do.

**Speaker B:**

Speaking of posture, I used to think that if I wanted to pray, I should get on my knees. But now I think that different types of prayer are suited to different postures – kneeling for confession and supplication, but standing for praise and thanksgiving.

**Speaker A:**

When we stand to pray I see us as the resurrected people – risen up. So it makes sense particularly for the prayers after the Eucharist. And in the weeks after Easter.

**Speaker B:**

We have to bear in mind our physical capacities – at some stage in our life most, if not, all of us will be unable to stand or kneel. But we can offer the bodies we have to the act of worship.

But let's return now to the service and listen to today's readings.

### **3. AFTER GOSPEL READING**

**Speaker B:**

[If people still standing] Please sit down.

As we mentioned earlier, we are not having the usual sermon, so I'm not here to preach to you.

But on a normal Sunday you would hear a sermon that comments on the readings and proclaims the good news for our times, carrying on Jesus' example of preaching. The preacher asks us to see what the gospel means for us and for our society today – and summons from us a response, as Jesus did when he preached "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand".

**Speaker A:**

Hopefully we respond in various positive ways to the preacher's words, but our liturgical response comes in the Creed, where we sign on to our faith's statement of identity.

**Speaker B:**

About the Creed, I'm not sure whether I am allowed to say this, but I find the language a bit obscure.

Take "became incarnate from the Virgin Mary" – it's not exactly the kind of phrase you could slip into normal conversation.

**Speaker A:**

I'm not myself a hundred per cent sure I know what we mean by "one holy catholic and apostolic Church."

**Speaker B:**

Wouldn't you think it should say something like "we believe God loves us"?

**Speaker A:**

I think that the whole creed is basically saying that.

Well, the wording seems to us a bit archaic, but that's not so surprising because it is more than 15 hundred years old. In singing this creed, we are touching hands with Christians down through the centuries and around the world.

[pause]

And we don't have to say the Creed every Sunday.

There are lots of other professions of faith we can also use, some from the Bible, some from around the world.

**Speaker B:**

After the Creed, we have the Prayers of the people, which - appropriately enough – are led by a lay person representing the congregation. These prayers reflect our concern not just for ourselves and our church community here, but for the broader world – from which we come, and to which we will return after the service.

The Prayers conclude with the Confession and absolution – here we think about how we have separated ourselves from God – and then we are welcomed back into God's loving embrace.

**Speaker A:**

After the prayers and confession, we have the exchanging of the peace – this carries forward some of the same intentions. When we exchange the peace with each other, we recognize that we meet Christ in other people – including our neighbours in the pew, whether they are friends, family, acquaintances, or visitors.

In the peace we encounter the other, we seek reconciliation and we look forward in anticipation to the coming of God’s Kingdom when there will be peace among all people.

**Speaker B:**

Jesus told us to make our peace with our brother and sister before we offer our gifts at the altar.

**Speaker C: [with a microphone in congregation]**

I notice you haven’t said much about the music. I’d say this is an essential part of our worship, especially here at the Cathedral.

**Speaker A:**

Well, you’re absolutely right about that. Both the organ music and the singing play an important role, in many different ways. Listening to the music can help us move from the busyness of our regular lives to a spirit of worship. It helps us meditate prayerfully. It can communicate dimensions of the Christian story that words cannot. The beauty of the music reminds us of the gloriousness of God’s creation. Singing is a natural way to offer praise and, by singing together, we express our unity.

**Speaker B:**

As a Cathedral church we have a special role to play – and one of the things we offer is a high standard of music in our worship. Some parts of the service are sung by the choir. They use a wide range of settings of the Eucharist, ancient and modern, from the Anglican or the Catholic traditions.

The music is chosen to reflect the theme or the liturgical season. And the hymns are chosen because they express what we want to say – not just because we like the tunes!

**Speaker A:**

The organ pieces are part of the service. There’s the “prelude” at the beginning and the “postlude” at the end. If you ask Patrick, he will tell you...

**Speaker B: [interrupting at Patrick]:**

Say who Patrick is – not everyone here will necessarily know.

**Speaker A:**

Thank you – we do try to be welcoming to newcomers, but sometimes we slip up. Patrick Wedd, our Director of Music – he will tell you that when he plays the organ he is offering it as part of the worship, not as a personal performance, so there’s no need to clap.

**Speaker C:**

And the postlude is much appreciated by many here as a conclusion to the worship – so those who are keen to get chatting might want to move into the baptistery to socialize, so as not to disturb those listening to the organ.

**Speaker A:**

Well said. And now we return you to normal service.

**4. AFTER OFFERTORY HYMN**

[NB the people bringing the offertory are being asked to wait to come up to the altar until after the commentary is finished.]

**Speaker B:**

We come now to the second main part of our service – the **Celebration of the Eucharist**.

The word *Eucharist* in its Greek root means “thanksgiving”. We’ll be reminded in many different ways throughout this part of the service that we are giving thanks, just as Jesus gave thanks at the Last Supper.

We begin with the offertory, where we offer up a portion of God’s gifts – not just the money, but also the music we sing, and our hearts. Representatives of the congregation offer the bread and the wine – so that we as congregation are participating in the Eucharist from the beginning, not just at the end when we receive communion.

**Speaker A:**

The Eucharist is made up of four essential acts: the offertory – when we give the bread and wine; the giving of thanks, which is the prayer over the bread; the breaking of the bread, and finally the communion when we share the bread and the wine.

**Speaker B:**

Looking at the four acts from the point of view of the presider, we can say that he or she takes, blesses, breaks and shares.

**Speaker A:**

The congregation is not a passive participant, of course. As we have already said, we present the bread and wine, and of course we receive communion. And in the middle, we say “Amen” to the Eucharistic Prayer, as well as the Lord’s Prayer.

**Speaker B:**

The Eucharistic prayer comes in various versions – we have six to choose from in the Book of Alternative Services. Like the Eucharist as a whole, this prayer has a very ancient history, going back to the early Church – and even before, since it borrows elements from the prayers of blessing said by Jews at the table.

The Eucharistic prayer we’ll be using today dates back to a 4th century text called the Apostolic Tradition.

**Speaker A:**

There are different versions of the Eucharistic prayer but they always include certain basic elements: giving God thanks and praise, remembering God’s actions in creating and redeeming the world, telling the story of Jesus’ last meal, and asking God to send the Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify both us and the bread and wine.

The prayer is a single prayer, so we shouldn’t change posture in the middle. Some may prefer to kneel, others might think it more appropriate to stand, but it doesn’t make a lot of sense to move from one to the other in the middle of the prayer.

**Speaker B:**

The Celebration of the Eucharist is not just in the words, but also in the actions. The bread is broken, the bread and wine are shared. We try to reflect in actions what we believe the Eucharist is about. So, for example, the priest faces the congregation because we are a community celebrating the Eucharist together. And the altar is a table to remind us that this is a shared meal to which we are all invited.

After the Eucharistic Prayer we speak of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and of being in Communion with Jesus. Queen Elizabeth I of England put it well over 400 years ago:

Christ was the word that spake it.  
He took the bread and break it;  
And what his words did make it  
That I believe and take it.

**Speaker A:**

There is so much more that could be said about the Eucharist – of course as the central sacrament of the Church there is a rich history of reflection on the subject. But let’s now stop the talking and return to worshipping.

## **5. AFTER THE NOTICES**

### **Speaker A:**

So here we are nearly at the end of the service. Maybe we are already thinking of what we're going to do next. The last part of the service – the Dismissal – is designed for this. This is not “dismissal” as in “you must go now”, but in the sense of sending us out into the world to be the Church.

### **Speaker B:**

In the Eucharist we have experienced the whole Christian life in one hour: we have studied, prayed, repented, given thanks, been filled with grace, and committed ourselves to mission.

### **Speaker A:**

In that same hour, we have also heard the whole Christian story of Jesus: his incarnation (celebrated in the Gloria), his life (heard in the readings), his death and resurrection (retold in the Eucharistic Prayer) and finally in the dismissal we relive Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and they were sent out into the world to spread the good news.