

# 4

---

## THE ACTION AND SPIRIT OF CELEBRATION

Liturgical worship is often thought to be something said, words to be read and sung and prayed. But liturgical worship is most of all that which is *done*. Ritualists and charismatics alike know that to move people spiritually one must move them physically.<sup>1</sup> “Liturgy” means “work of the people” we remind ourselves again and again. It therefore implies action—dramatic ritual in which the participants do certain things. Even when they listen to the readings and the sermon, their listening should be an active participation in the actions of proclaiming God’s word. The Liturgy of the Word culminates in the reading of the Gospel and the sermon by which Christ again comes among his people and speaks to them directly in their own time, bridging the barriers of space and time. Aware of this, the people welcome the Gospel with the Alleluia—the Easter song—and stand to listen to the good news of their Lord. Again—still—he is Emmanuel, God with us, in our midst. A Gospel procession to the middle of the congregation in order to read the Gospel from there can help to make this presence clear. The Eastern churches have dramatized it still further with the “little entrance” as the priest comes out from behind the screen of the iconostasis bearing aloft the Book of the Gospels to proclaim the good news to the people. Christ comes to his people, and they stand to greet him and to listen to him. Then the sermon is preached, making contemporary application of the readings. Through the sermon, the Word of God becomes present with his people.

The other focus of action in liturgical worship is the Eucharist, sharing the meal of Christ with his disciples, breaking the bread and eating the Lord's Supper. In every Lutheran church, no matter how non-liturgical it may be, at the communion the people move to the altar and there eat and drink the Supper of the Lord and taste again the presence of Christ.

Movement is characteristic of liturgical worship. There are processions (Palm Sunday is a familiar example); there are sacramental actions (washing in the waters of Baptism, eating the Lord's Supper); there is the stripping of the altar on Maundy Thursday, the showing of the rough-hewn cross on Good Friday, the procession with light at the Easter Vigil and the procession to and from the font. Since the liturgy is action and involves movement, attention must be given not only to the words and music, but to the place of action, the space in which the liturgy is done. Effective use of space promotes and encourages an understanding of what people do in the service. And conversely, poor use of space undermines and weakens liturgy and thereby contributes to the shriveling of faith.

The ideal church space is flexible. This need not imply the usual multi-purpose room that is used for worship and a host of other activities. Worship is not just one among the many things that the church does; it is the central action that shows what the church is and in which the church becomes more aware of itself as the people of God. It is the only thing that the church does now that will continue forever in the praise of the hosts of heaven. While it is possible to worship anywhere, worship usually demands a space of its own for practical purposes as well as theological ones. But that worship space ought to be as flexible as one can make it. Pews are often a hindrance to the movement of people, and they lock a congregation into a fixed pattern of seating and action. Newer churches often use wooden chairs instead, which can be moved into various arrangements as the several services of a congregation may direct. (The chairs ought to be of wood and never the metal folding chairs which are noisy, cold, and uncomfortable.) Churches with pews will have to find ways of working around them. It can be done.

## BAPTISMAL SPACE

The location and style of the baptismal font must be given careful attention. It should be in keeping with the fundamental importance of Baptism in Lutheran theology and liturgy. The font therefore must be of noticable, impressive size. Ideally it should be large enough to permit Baptism by immersion—even the immersion of

adults. Even without regard to Baptism by immersion, most fonts in Lutheran churches are too small and appear to be little more than a modest bowl on a stand. The font must be large enough to permit the generous use of water to show as fully as possible the washing by which we become children of God and members of the church. Even a small font can be given prominence by creative placement and appropriate decoration—polychrome, candles (especially the Paschal candle), banners, flowers, and perhaps a canopy.

The font may be of any shape, but traditionally it was eight-sided to connect Baptism symbolically with Sunday, the day of resurrection, the eighth day, the beginning of the new creation. Thus the Easter focus of Baptism is suggested. If the font is of another shape, the number eight might appropriately be used in the decorations around it—eight votive-type candles in clear glasses, for example.

The font should, ideally, contain a mechanism by which the water is made to flow continually and be recycled. The ancient Christian practice was for Baptism to be done in “living water” by which was meant running water. The second-century *Didache* puts it succinctly:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then “baptize” in running water, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The font should at least be provided with a drain in the bottom connected to the earth. When this is not possible, a removable metal vessel conforming to the shape of the font bowl makes the disposal of the water easier. A small bowl put inside the font is undesirable, for it does not allow for the generous use of water and is a redundancy akin to putting a small table on top of the altar.

The font, unless it contains running water or is very large, should be provided with a cover, which is placed on the font when it is not in use. When the cover is made with some height to its decoration, visual attention is called to the place of Baptism. (The cover also keeps the misguided from putting flowers or plants in the font as a decoration.)

One needs to think not simply in terms of the font but in terms of the whole baptismal space. Too often the font is located in a corner or set in the chancel so that it can be seen (as if the chancel were a stage on which all the

action takes place). In a Christian church there is not one place of action (the chancel) and seats for the audience (congregation). There is a room in which the people of God do their service, and in this room the focus of attention shifts as the service progresses.

A traditional location of the baptismal space was near the entrance of the church to show that it is by Baptism that one enters the church. Each time the people enter the church building they pass by the font and are reminded of their Baptism. The arrangement is still worth considering. Space might be made, if none is available in the narthex or center aisle, by removing a couple of pews on one side in the back of the church and creating a baptismal space there with carpet or tile and appropriate decorations. The congregation of course needs to be instructed to stand and turn around to see the font when baptisms take place. In any case, the baptismal space should be at some distance from the altar so that there can be some movement from altar to font and back to the altar again in the baptismal service and in the Easter Vigil. If there is not room in the back of the church, baptismal space might perhaps be created near a side door, in a transept, or midway down the center aisle.

Attention can be given to the baptismal space by decorating it appropriately, especially during Easter and on the festival of Jesus' Baptism. In addition, each service that begins with the Brief order for Confession and Forgiveness might begin with the ministers standing at the font to suggest by their location the relationship between Baptism and repentance. As Luther says in the *Large Catechism*:

To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."<sup>3</sup>

Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued. For we must keep at it incessantly, always purging out whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new man may come forth.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore Baptism remains forever. Even though we fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access to it so that we may again subdue the old man. . . . Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, to resume and practice what had earlier been begun but abandoned.<sup>5</sup>

### THE PLACE OF READING AND PREACHING

As the Holy Communion begins, during the entrance hymn, the procession, with a minister bearing the Bible, moves to the next focus of attention: the pulpit or lectern. Not all churches need have both a pulpit and a lectern. Small churches where there is limited space need have but one reading desk. Churches with a central pulpit should use that for both the readings and the sermon. It is important to show the relationship between the readings and the sermon, and this is enhanced when both are done from one place.

The space for the readings can be defined by placing the processional cross and candles near the place where the lessons are read and the sermon is preached. (Candles should not be placed too close to the place of preaching. Percy Dearmer warns that preachers with candles within reach of the pulpit court martyrdom.<sup>6</sup>)

For practical purposes, enclosed pulpits are to be preferred to open ones to conceal any nervous and distracting movements of the preacher's feet and hands.

The pulpit and lectern hangings need not necessarily change with the church seasons. One neutral hanging of good quality would serve well and would be removed for Lent. Only the altar frontal and the ministers' vestments need follow the colors of the church year.

### THE ALTAR SPACE

The altar becomes the focus of attention at the offertory as the gifts are brought forward and preparations are made for the Eucharistic meal. The altar should be the principal focal point in the church; its size and dimensions should suggest its importance as the place where in the intimacy of a meal God and his people meet.

The most important dimension of the altar is the height. It should be about 39 inches high. A mnemonic device has put it:

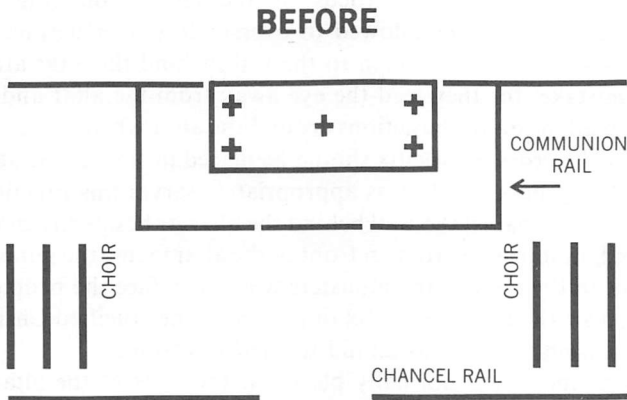
Three-foot three, three-foot four,  
Nothing less and nothing more.

The absolute minimum is 36 inches. The importance of having all altars approximately the same height is for the convenience of the presiding minister. Altars in the early church were rather small. From medieval times to the present they were generally larger and even monumental. As altars are brought out from the wall and made more obviously tables rather than elaborate shelves, the desirability of large dimensions lessens.

Altars, even those at the very back of the chancel, should never be quite against the wall. Properly, they should stand free of the wall, even if only by a few inches. The most desirable arrangement is for the altar to be well away from the wall so that the ministers can go behind it to face the people for the celebration of the Holy Communion. Thus, many associations and meanings can be suggested: a table around which the people of God gather to share the Holy Meal with Christ and with one another; an altar on which the sacrificial death of Christ is remembered; Christ's sacrifice and our sharing his sacramental gift; the minister as priest and as president of the assembly, the leader, yet one of the people.

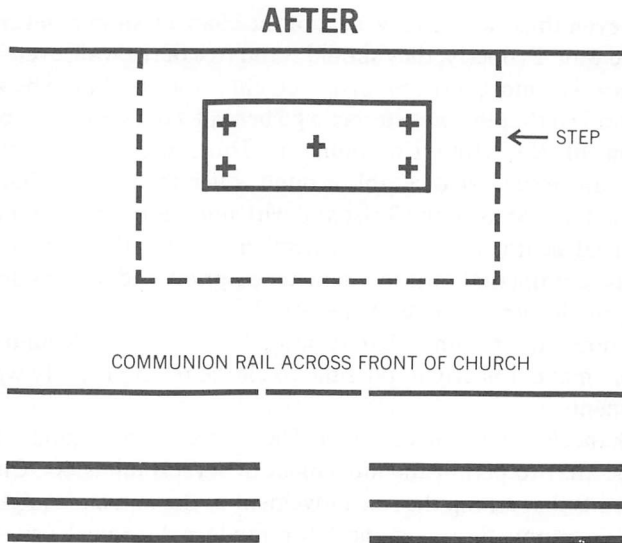
Altars should not be other than rectangular (or square). Round or multi-sided altars make it nearly impossible to clothe them properly with linens and paraments.

Most chancels are far too crowded. There needs to be a good bit of space around the altar to permit the movement of several ministers. Choir stalls and altar rails that cramp the free movement of the ministers might well be removed. In renovating a chancel for modern liturgical use, the altar should be set away from the wall and all clutter that impede access to the altar should be removed.



The ministers and servers should be free to move around the altar, and communicants must be able to approach and leave the altar in a continuous flow without impediments.

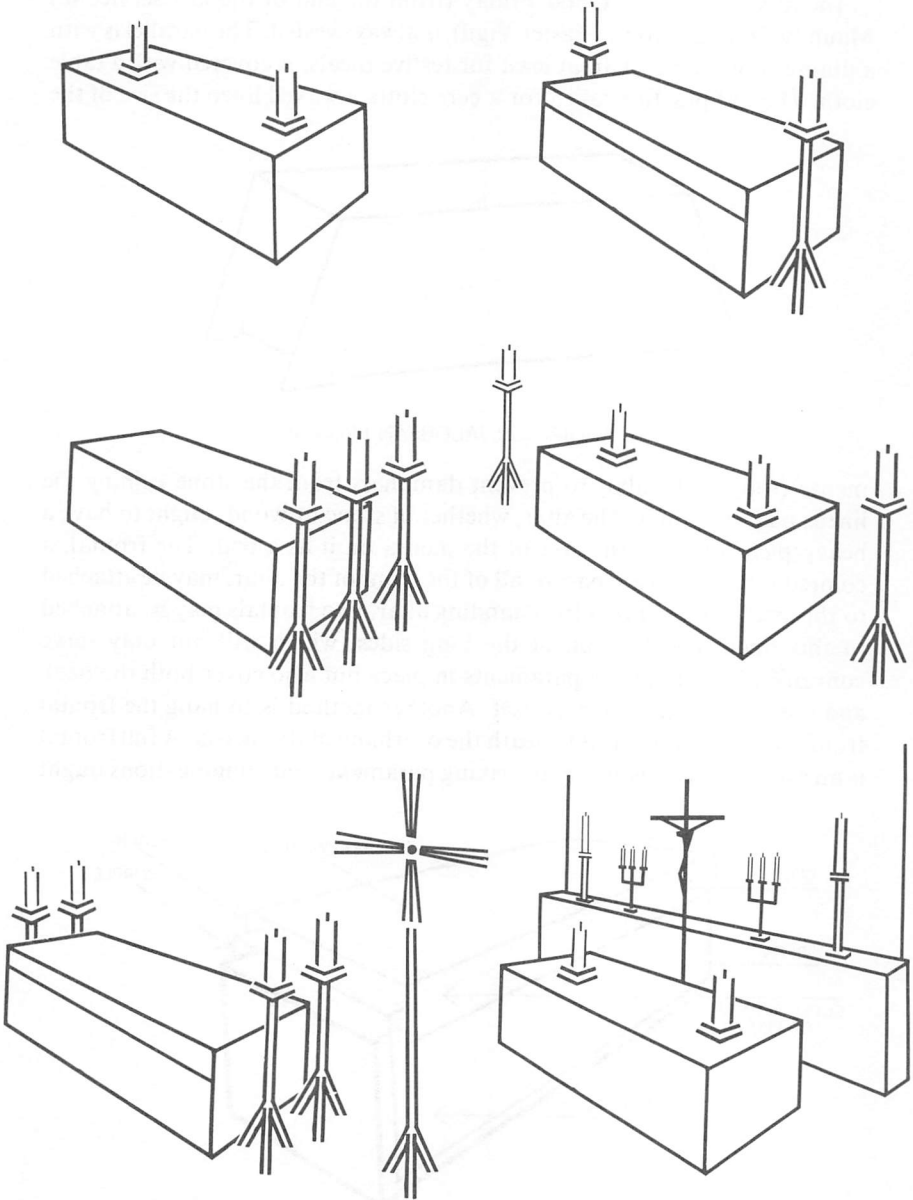
The altar should not be colored or gilded. Attractiveness is achieved by the use of paraments, and plainness is desirable when the altar is stripped on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.



The altar is the principal focus of the church building, and its appointments must not be allowed to overshadow it or detract from it. Large crosses, for example, fixed to the wall behind the altar are almost always a mistake, for they lead the eye away from the altar and distract from giving attention to the actions around the altar when the Eucharist is celebrated. The cross or crucifix should be placed in close association with the altar. The processional cross appropriately serves this function when placed in a stand against the wall behind the altar or beside the altar or, if it is a thin and unobtrusive cross, in front of the altar facing the ministers. If a cross is not in the view of the ministers when they face the people for the Eucharist, a small cross or crucifix or picture of the crucified Christ might be placed flat on the altar as an aid to their devotion.

Two low candles are normally placed at the ends of the altar during celebrations of the Holy Communion. Or the candles may stand on the floor at the ends of the altar or at one end of the altar. Other candles may be placed around the altar and used for non-eucharistic services such as daily prayer or as additional festival lights for special celebrations. The number of candles might well vary with the festiveness of the occasion.

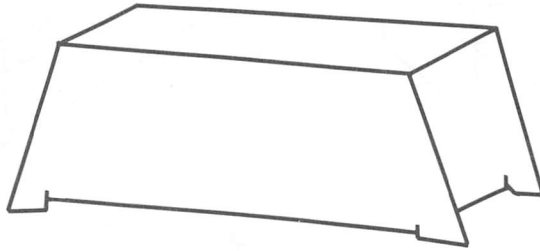
Candles should be burned down to within two inches of the socket. Removing candles after only a few weeks' use is sheer waste.



THE ALTAR AND ITS APPOINTMENTS IN SEVERAL ARRANGEMENTS

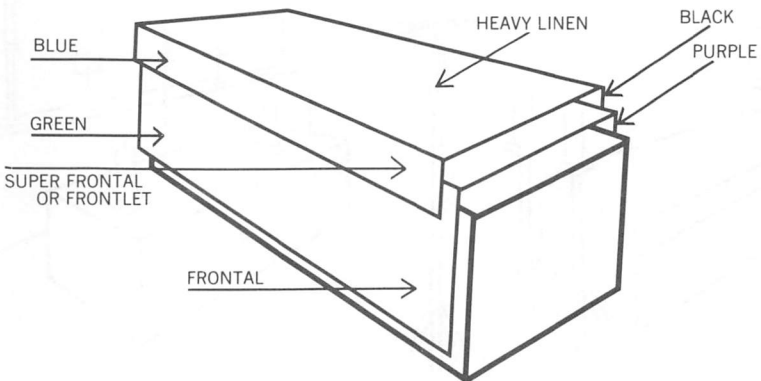


The altar, except on Good Friday (from the end of the last service on Maundy Thursday to the Easter Vigil), is always vested. The parallel is with a dining room table, that, at least for festive meals, is covered with a table cloth. The old practice called for a cere cloth, a waxed linen the size of the



A LAUDIAN OR JACOBAN FRONTAL

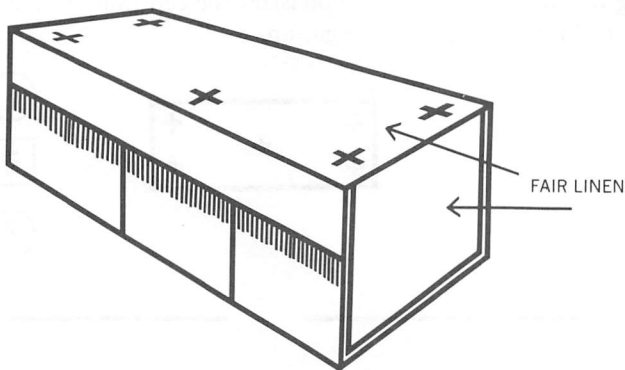
mensa (top) of the altar to prevent dampness from the stone ruining the linens placed upon it. The altar, whether of stone or wood, ought to have a heavy piece of linen the size of the mensa on it as a pad. The frontal, a colored fabric covering part or all of the front of the altar, may be attached to this heavy linen. For a free-standing altar, two frontals may be attached to this linen, one to each of the long sides, which will not only serve conveniently to hold the paraments in place but also cover both the back and the front of the altar as well. Another method is to hang the frontal from hooks or from a rod beneath the overhang of the mensa. A full frontal is an especially handsome and striking parament, and congregations ought



to be encouraged to provide such vestments for the altar, especially for the festival seasons. The frontal gives a bold accent of color to the altar space and focuses attention on the table of the Lord. A frontlet or superfrontal is sometimes hung over the frontal with a depth (or "drop") of about seven inches. Its practical purpose is to conceal the means by which the frontal is hung. It need not be the same color as the frontal and can be used to vary the character and spirit of the vestments of the altar, especially during the long season after Pentecost.

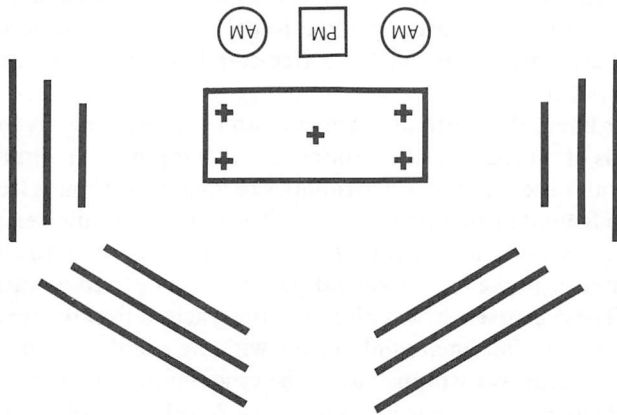
The frontal is sometimes stretched on a wooden frame which is hung from beneath the mensa. Another style is a large, rectangular cloth which is placed over the altar forming large folds at the four corners. It is an especially attractive vestment for a free-standing altar with considerable space around it.

The fair linen, the width of the mensa<sup>7</sup> and extending nearly to the floor on the ends of the altar,<sup>8</sup> is the basic covering. It is put on the altar whatever style frontal is used, or if a superfrontal is used alone without a frontal, or if there is no frontal or superfrontal at all. The fair linen is often embroidered with five crosses (at the four corners of the mensa or of the entire length and in the center or in the front to avoid making an awkward hump under the chalice). These crosses, which also are often incised into the mensa of the altar, connect the fair linen symbolically with the winding sheet with which the body of Jesus was wrapped after the crucifixion in preparation for his burial and suggest the five wounds of Jesus. Another possibility for the fair linen is an ample cloth with embroidery.

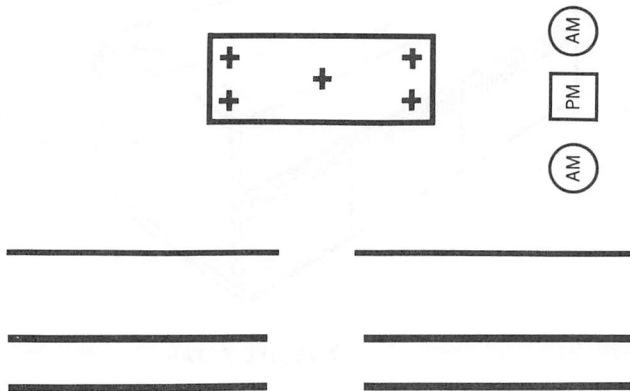


A VESTED ALTAR

There are two basic seating arrangements for the clergy. The ancient arrangement was for the bishop's chair, his *cathedra*, to be set behind the altar facing the congregation, and this arrangement has been widely restored in the Roman Catholic Church following the reforms of Vatican II. The presiding minister sits in the center and the assisting ministers to either side. This arrangement emphasizes the presidential function of the minister. It is most suitable when the congregation is placed on three sides of the altar.

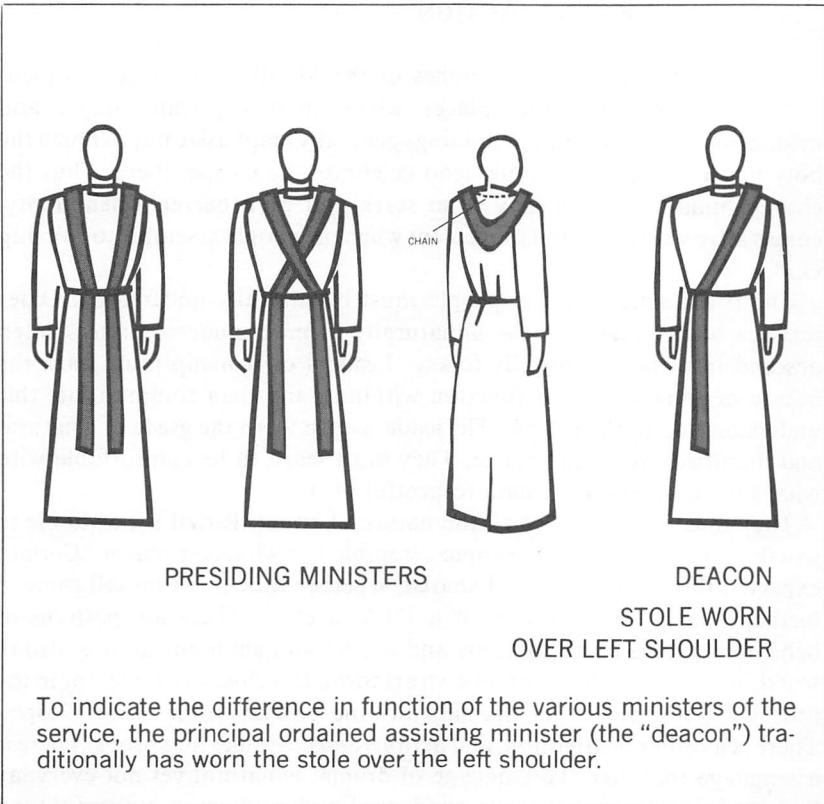


Another arrangement is to have the ministers sit on one side of the altar, facing it. This arrangement emphasizes the centrality of the altar and the ministers' role with the congregation.



## VESTMENTS FOR THE MINISTERS

The ministers of the service usually vest in albs. This vestment is made of white (or off-white) fabric and is never made in a color. (*Alba* in Latin means white.) It is the basic vestment and is becoming a kind of ecumenical vestment, worn by Lutherans, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others. It may be worn by all the ministers of the service, whether ordained or not—presiding minister, assisting ministers, servers—and suggests the baptismal garments. The cincture need not be worn with the alb. For Daily Prayer the ordained ministers need not wear their stoles over the alb; leading these services is not the exclusive prerogative of the clergy. For preaching at Morning or Evening Prayer, the Service of the Word,



weddings, and burials, the clergy wear stoles over the alb as an indication of their pastoral office. The stole is worn crossed over the breast or hanging straight from the shoulders.<sup>9</sup> It may be held in place by the cincture. For the celebration of the Eucharist the chasuble may be worn over the alb and stole by the presiding minister. Thus the basic vestment is modified for the various services by what is worn over it.

Another option is to wear the alb and stole (and chasuble) for the Eucharist and to wear the cassock and surplice (and stole) for other services: the surplice without the stole for daily prayer, surplice and stole for weddings, burials, confession and forgiveness, the Service of the Word, preaching. Readers, especially those who come from their places in the congregation and return when the reading is finished, need not wear special vestments.

### RITUAL ACTION

The Gothic churches of the Middle Ages were conspicuously holy places which invited private prayer and meditation. Modern church buildings generally emphasize not so much the holy place as the holy people who celebrate the Gospel there. Thus the church building, which may seem stark and even barren when empty, comes alive with color and movement when the people assemble to worship God.

The ritual actions of the people must be carefully understood. Older services often verged on the unnaturally formal; modern services often descend into the unnaturally folksy. Leaders of worship must learn the nature of ritual and their function within it, and then communicate this understanding to the people. The leaders must learn the grace of a natural and dignified presidential style. They must learn to be comfortable with what they do and still remain respectful of it.

They must learn first of all the nature of ritual. Ritual is inevitable in worship, as it is whenever people assemble for whatever reason. Certain expected things are done and shared, whether it be at a football game, a birthday party, a classroom, or a PTA meeting. There are patterns of behavior that we come to know and expect and share in. So it is also in worship. Liturgy is the church's own art form. It is close to drama, for in the liturgy Christians act out dramatically the proclamation of the Gospel. There is a center of attention, and actions and costumes and props. There is a language that, like the language of drama, is natural yet not everyday language. It is heightened and condensed and made more powerful than

our usual way of speaking. It uses everyday language but elevates it so that more can be said in a brief space. A play would not hold one's interest if it reproduced everyday speech exactly with all of its repetition and vocalized pauses and clumsiness. Nor can a liturgy. The closest the liturgy comes to ordinary speech is the sermon, and even there the language must be careful and precise and condensed so that much can be said in a few minutes. If those who lead the worship of God's people insist on bringing the language and the spirit down to the level of the ordinary, they have made the liturgy a personalized, privatized, and exclusive thing; not everyone will be able to participate in it.

Ritual by its formal and elevated language allows many diverse people in many moods to bring to it their own emotions, intuitions, needs, and hopes. The people are there not to be entertained but to extend themselves so that the liturgy might extend them and teach them. Formal language enables everyone in the assembly to find an expression of needs, desires, and feelings that they can identify with and expand personally. It takes work, constant work. No mere language change can effect it, nor can it be done once and for all. In his *German Mass* (1526), Luther complained that people had become as lackadaisical about services in the vernacular as they used to be about Latin services. It is a useful warning to us in the twentieth century also.

## PLANNING THE SERVICE

The key to avoiding a careless attitude is planning: there needs to be long-range planning, six months or a year in advance, to set broad outlines and goals. There must also be careful and detailed planning before each service, especially those that require changes in the familiar patterns. The leaders of worship must learn to anticipate the entire service. Each one must think through what they should be doing at every point in the service, what movements are required in the course of the service, who is to do and say each part of the service. They must also walk through new services at least once to familiarize themselves with it and its patterns before the actual service is done. If a service is well done, congregational resentment at change will be lessened.

To illustrate, here is a sample check-list of planning for the central celebration of the church year from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost. No later than immediately following the Epiphany (January 6) these kinds of questions need to be given careful and thorough attention.

ASH WEDNESDAY

1. What time will service be held? morning? evening? both?
2. Will black paraments be used?
3. What decorations can be removed from the church to suggest the austerity of the season?
4. Music: Will the organ be used at all? Can congregational singing be supported in some other way? What hymns will be sung? Will the choir sing anthems or other music? How will Psalm 51 be sung?
5. Will ashes be used?
6. Are palms available to make the ashes? If not, how will they be obtained?
7. What instruction and preparation will the congregation require to prepare for innovations?

SUNDAYS IN LENT

1. The theme of Lent is not the passion but spiritual renewal: do the organist and choir director understand this? do the ministers understand?
2. Will the paraments and vestments be purple or unbleached linen?
3. Who will preach? What will the approach be? The Lessons? Thematic? A series?
4. Will the Kyrie be used instead of the Hymn of Praise or will neither be used?
5. Will the choir sing the Psalm and the Verse? Could they also sing the proper Offertory?
6. On Lent I and II which Prayer of the Day will be used?
7. Which hymns will be sung? How will new ones be introduced? Will the hymns receive special treatment by organ and choir?

WEEKDAYS IN LENT

1. What will be the day(s) and time of service?
2. If Evening Prayer is used: Will the Light Service be used? Is a large candle available with a stand? Will incense be used? How will the Psalm(s) be sung? Will the New Testament Canticle be sung also? What office hymns will be used? Which lessons from the Daily Table will be read—one or two? (cf. *LBW* Min. Ed. pp. 92ff.)
3. If the Service of the Word is used: Which Old Testament Canticle will be used? How will it be sung? Which lesson(s) will be read? Which prayers will be used? Could the Litany be used? Which New Testament Canticle will be used? How will it be sung? Which form of the Lord's Prayer will be used? (Could the new translation be introduced during Lent?)

4. How will the congregation be encouraged to use a simplified form of Daily Prayer in their home devotions?

HOLY WEEK

1. How can the scarlet (deep red) paraments be provided?
2. On Passion Sunday: How will the church be decorated? Should palms be attached to the processional cross? to the altar cross?  
For the Procession with Palms: Have the palms been ordered? Where will the congregation gather for the palm ceremonies? Is there room in the Parish Hall? Is cooperation possible with neighboring parishes for this part of the service? What will the route of the procession be? Outside the church? Through the churchyard? Around the block? In addition to "All glory, laud, and honor," what other hymns (and psalms) will be sung in the procession?  
For the Service of the Passion: How will the long Gospel be read? Will several readers be used? Will the congregation have a part to read? Will copies of the text be provided? How many practice sessions need to be scheduled for the readers?
3. For Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday in Holy Week: What kind of services should be held? Morning or Evening Prayer? Holy Communion? How can people be encouraged to attend? Who besides the pastors could lead Daily Prayer?
4. Maundy Thursday: What instruction and preparation need be given to the congregation for this service? What form of confession will be used? Which lessons will be read—those from the lectionary or those from the Maundy Thursday rite? Will washing of the feet be done? Whose feet? Is a pitcher for the water and a basin available? Towels? How will Psalm 22 be rendered during the stripping of the altar? Choir? Single voice? Who will take part in the stripping of the altar? How will the items be handled? Where will they be put?
5. Good Friday: Which lesson will be read—Hosea or Isaiah? How will St. John's Passion be read? Who will the readers be? Will the congregation have a part to read? Will copies of the text be provided? Is the rough-hewn cross available? Who will make it? Will it be carried in procession to the altar?

THE EASTER VIGIL

1. How is the congregation to be prepared for a service that lasts longer than one hour?
2. Are there candidates for Baptism?
3. How will the new fire be struck? Matches? Flint and steel?
4. Are hand candles available for the congregation?



5. Is the Paschal candle ready?
6. Who will sing the Easter Proclamation? Is the music available?
7. Which of the twelve lessons will be used? Is it entirely out of the question to use all twelve?
8. Which canticles will be sung with the lessons? How will they be sung?
9. What decorations will be placed around the font?
10. Should Psalm 136 be sung as the post-communion canticle? How will it be done?
11. Will a meal of some kind follow the Vigil? Who will be responsible for preparing that?

EASTER

1. How can the festive spirit be kept alive throughout the Fifty Days?
2. Can there be an extended procession every Sunday of Easter?
3. Can a sequence hymn with lots of Alleluias be sung between the Second Lesson and the Gospel on every Sunday of Easter and on Pentecost?
4. What festive decorations can adorn the church, the font, the altar, and the Paschal candle? Flowers and plants? Banners? Can small bells be hung from a banner which is carried in procession?
5. What special treatment will the hymns and psalms receive?
6. What other instruments can be used in addition to the organ?
7. Will there be baptisms during Easter?
8. Is Easter a time to introduce the weekly celebration of Holy Communion—at least for the Fifty Days? Could the practice be extended to include the Sundays in Lent as well as the Sundays of Easter to show the unity of the two seasons?
9. What can be done to encourage people to continue the use of Daily Prayer during Easter?
10. Should some weekday services be scheduled during Easter?

ASCENSION DAY

1. How can attendance be encouraged at the service?
2. Will the service be the Holy Communion?
3. Should the Paschal candle be extinguished at the Gospel on this day or should it burn until Pentecost?

PENTECOST

1. Can there be a procession as festive and as extended as the procession on Easter Day (and for the Sundays of Easter)?
2. How will the sequence hymn (before the Gospel) be sung?

3. Could seven red votive-type candles be put across the altar to suggest the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit?
4. Should red roses be considered as the floral decoration for Pentecost to suggest the flames of fire? (Roses are a traditional decoration for Pentecost.)

These are specific questions to be considered in preparation for the observance of Lent and Easter. Before any service several things need to be done by the presiding minister.

1. Is the service folder prepared, explaining carefully any unusual aspects of the service?
2. Is a statement of the significance of the day and its theme prepared?
3. Have the ministers' parts of the service been practiced, especially the proper Preface?
4. Has the presiding minister rehearsed with the readers to help them read with understanding?

The ministers should arrive at the church at least three-quarters of an hour before service time.

1. Are the paraments of the proper color in place?
2. Is water in the font or a ewer if there are to be baptisms?
3. Is there sufficient bread and wine prepared for the Holy Communion?
4. Do all the ministers of the service understand their roles?
5. Are the lessons marked in the Bible?
6. Are the places marked in the altar book?
7. Are the candle wicks free so that they can be lit without difficulty?
8. Are the proper vestments laid out?
9. Are service books and leaflets available for those who will participate in the service?

In short, careful attention must be given to the variable parts of the service (such as hymns and lessons), to the objects required by the service, and to the roles of the ministers of the service.

### THE SACRISTY: A PLACE OF PREPARATION AND PRAYER

A church ought to have two sacristies: one, a place where the sacramental vessels and paraments and linens are prepared; and the other where the ministers prepare themselves for worship. Still more important than attention to all the details of the service

is the requirement of prayer. Pastors should get to church early enough to see that everything is in order, but they should primarily devote themselves to prayer before the service begins. Every worshiper should do this; pastors most of all. This prayer must not be hurried or rushed. It cannot be done while one is on the way to doing something else. It is helpful for pastors to have a special place of prayer—in the nave of the church, at a chair in the chancel, or in the sacristy. Let them kneel, make the sign of the cross, and immerse themselves in the immensity of God. This meditative prayer must be done without interruption from ushers, acolytes, altar guild members, or other parishioners. A special place and a special posture can insure against intrusions.

Through these times of prayer, the leaders of worship will come to a renewed realization of who they are and who they represent. As leaders in the worship of God's people, they do not function in a personal capacity, like one who runs one's own business. Contemporary ministers are the inheritors of a long tradition and stand in an age-old succession. What they say and what they do is essentially the same as what innumerable predecessors have done before them.

If the ministers, through prayer, have become aware of the presence of God and of their own responsibility as worship leaders, this will put its stamp on all that they say and do during the liturgy. The faith and adoration of the ministers will shine through the words and actions in which they participate, and the people will understand that the pastors themselves are worshiping and that they believe what they say.