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WORSHIP RULES: PART TWO NINE RULES FOR WORSHIP LEADERS

- 1 This posting concludes a two part series of advice for Christian worship. Essay 237 (see above) presented Part One: Seven Rules for Worshipers. This Essay 238 addresses Nine Rules for Worship Leaders.
- 2 .RULE ONE: If you have a role as Presiding Minister (PM) in Holy Communion, or as Assisting Minister (AM); plan to arrive at the place for worship a full hour early. You will need the time. See 4 - 11 below.
- 3 If you are leading Morning Prayer, or any other of the church's non-eucharistic services, plan to arrive at least a half-hour early. These services are generally less complex and therefore less demanding of worship leaders. But you must still arrive early enough to prepare yourself.
- 4 RULE TWO: Check to see if all the tools of your trade are in readiness. Has the Altar Guild done its work, with sufficient quantities of Bread and Wine prepared and in their proper places? Are the ribbons in the Altar Book (Missal) and Lectionary at the correct locations in the book? Are the ribbons in your personal hymn book in their proper places, marking each hymn? (This is a splendid chore for an Acolyte. Every Sunday, it's the Acolyte's job to be certain, before worship begins, that the hymnals to be used, by PM, AM, and Acolyte, have their ribbons properly placed, marking hymns and rites .)
- 5 It's amazing how useful those well-placed ribbons can be, in the stressful moments of actual worship leadership!
- 6 Check with AM, Lectors, and Acolytes to confirm that they know their jobs. (This is all part of Rule Two.) Are there any unusual rites in this Service? A Gospel procession, for example? A Baptism? A rite of Farewell and Godspeed? Will Ministers be sent out to bring Bread and Cup to shut-ins or the hospitalized? Is everybody involved in these rites aware of what's required of them?
- 7 RULE THREE: Now it's time to vest. For Holy Communion, the PM will want to wear alb, stole, and chasuble. Never alb and stole alone. That's an unfortunate and widespread sectarianism. Churches that use the historic order of Mass should also use the historic Mass vestments. There is no compelling reason not to. Without apology or embarrassment. See Essay 226 above.
- 8 AMs who are also ordained should wear alb alone. The role of AM is a layperson's role. The alb is a layperson's vestment, the garment of Baptism. Clergy who serve in an AM capacity – and that's quite legitimate, on occasion – are not exercising their Ordination. They are exercising their Baptism. On occasion, the AM may want to serve in civics.

9 Acolytes wear alb alone as well.

10 One of the important roles of Acolyte or AM is to check the vestments of the PM and AM, and make certain they're hanging straight. Stoles evenly matched at right and left. Cowls neatly framing the face and properly positioned. And, conversely, for the PM to check the appearance of the vestments of AM and Acolyte. You "preen" each other. Nothing is more off putting for worshipers than to see their Leaders' vestments hastily thrown on and hanging cockeyed or crumpled. For some sensibilities, Leaders' carelessness with their own vestments can ruin the entire experience of worship.

11 You might want to share a prayer with other worship leaders before you leave the vestry.

12 **RULE FOUR** If you have arrived early enough, you should have 4 to 11 above accomplished by about twenty minutes before the worship hour. Now, fully vested, you walk to your church's main door, and, along with Ushers and Greeters, you greet people at the door as they enter.

13 It's important to plan your morning so as to be able to welcome members and visitors before worship begins. You are host of the party, after all. Hosts normally greet their guests at the door as they enter. It's more important to greet worshipers before worship begins, than to greet them after worship ends. Although you will want to do that as well.

14 **RULE FIVE:** Try to arrange that any parish announcements be made by competent lay leaders. There's almost no good time during worship for announcements. But they are usually necessary. Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) provides for parish announcements at the conclusion of worship. (Rubric, page 114.)

15 Sometimes, however, announcements are necessary before worship begins, particularly announcements pertaining to the Day's worship. I'd try to enlist competent lay persons to make all announcements.

16 As PM, I would try to reserve my first public words in worship to be the splendid Apostolic Greeting: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God..." That's a magnificent encapsulation of the entire Gospel. Any public words from any PM at the beginning of any worship, like "Good morning!" or even "The Lord be with you..." are greetings, after all. But they cheapen the liturgy's own subsequent Apostolic Greeting, "The grace of our Lord..." The liturgy's own Apostolic Greeting is better by far. And it belongs to the PM. Preferably at the very beginning of the liturgy, after lay-led announcements and prelude. But before any announcements, if absolutely necessary.

17 **RULE SIX:** Once worship has begun, I'd try to preserve what I have called Ritual Clarity. Reserve the Ambo or Lectern exclusively for reading and preaching. Reserve the Table exclusively for The Meal. Lead prayers and Intercessions elsewhere, taking into account what your worship space suggests or demands! See Essay 231 above. By such punctiliousness are worshipers helped to understand what is happening at a given moment in worship.

18 **RULE SEVEN:** ELW does not provide any votum ("Grace to you and peace...") or greeting or prayer before the sermon, nor any prayer or blessing or benediction after it. Again, the gracious words of the liturgy itself – its Apostolic Greeting at worship's beginning, and its Trinitarian Blessing at worship's end – are cheapened when Leaders scatter their own greetings or blessings throughout the Service. One Greeting at worship's beginning – "The grace of our

Lord...” ELW page 98 – and one concluding Blessing – “Almighty God...” ELW page 114, at worship’s end – are surely sufficient.

19 ELW also does not provide for the Preacher to say an “Amen” at the sermon’s conclusion. (“It’s all over, folks!”) Any “Amen” at sermon’s end belongs to the People, not to the Preacher. Such an “Amen”, spoken by the People themselves, would be appropriate as an affirmation by the People of what the Preacher has just preached. See worship among Black and Hispanic communities, where the Preacher is often actually interrupted during the sermon by the Peoples’ affirmations. That practice should be our model for any post-sermon “Amen”.

20 I would try to train my congregation to claim the “Amen!” after my sermon, and to utter it lustily and whole heartedly.

21 I’d also try to get the assembly accustomed to the after-sermon silence, which ELW does indeed mandate. See ELW page 103. It’s a tricky moment, in my experience. You have ended your sermon, the people have affirmed it with a vigorous “Amen.” Then, presumably, silence.

22 But if the Preacher so much as twitches a muscle – shuffling sermon manuscript pages, for example – the silence is lost, in my experience. The Preacher must stand stock still in the Ambo, barely breathing, for the space of a full minute – it will seem like an eternity, to people who are not accustomed to it. But people can become accustomed to it, and in due course they’ll be asking for more silence, to reflect on the Day’s sermon, scripture readings, and hymns.

23 I’d further like to see the Hymn of the Day (HOD) after the sermon elaborated, every Sunday, as a matter of course. This is the chief hymn of the Day, in Lutheran tradition, extending and elaborating the Day’s themes. And it can and should be thought of as a musical highlight. Treble voices and lower voices on alternating stanzas. Choir and People on alternating stanzas. Parallel Organum on plainsong hymns. Vocal drones on 19th century “gospel” hymns. Canons. The possibilities are numerous. See Essays 179, 194, and 203 above.

24 **RULE EIGHT** The Thanksgiving at the Table (Anglicans call it the Eucharistic Prayer) is a prayer to God that functions at the same time as proclamation, after the manner of a Jewish berakah. See Essay 220 above. Accordingly, the PM’s posture throughout is appropriately the familiar orans: hands, head, and face lifted, eyes open and focused “out there” somewhere.

25 Therefore it is neither necessary nor desirable for the PM to look at the People during the Verba (the so-called Words of Institution). Prayer and proclamation are mixed throughout this prayer, sacrifice and sacrament. The People are presumably listening to what is prayed, as in a Jewish berakah. So these words become proclamation as well.

26 Lifting Bread and Cup during the verba are traditional gestures during this prayer that continue to commend themselves. However, and alternatively, the PM might simply designate with a gesture the Bread and Cup as they remain on the Table. And toward the end of this long and beautiful prayer, at the words “...bless us, your servants...”, the PM might laudably bring hands to breast as a gestural proclamation of Luther’s insight that this Meal is all “for us”.

27 Under no circumstances should the Bread be broken during the Verba. The breaking of the Bread is called the Fraction, and ELW provides no words or liturgical formulas for it. The Fraction is a simple utilitarian gesture. The words of the entire Verba are designative, not imitative.

28 ELW provides a total of eleven versions of this lovely prayer, a summation of the entire Gospel. See ELW pages 65-70. When prayer number XI is used, the so-called Prayer of Hippolytus, the PM moves directly to this prayer after the Preface, omitting Proper Preface and Sanctus. Good to know when you want to shorten the service.

29 Do not use option II – Verba alone – under any circumstances. That is an unfortunate but persistent Lutheran sectarianism. Respectfully consign option II to our noble but checkered history!

30 RULE NINE: At the ministration of Bread and Cup, the PM and other servers look warmly into the eyes of those they are serving.

31 Note that, unlike its predecessor, Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW), ELW does not provide any post-communion blessing, following the principle outlined in paragraph 18 above. See ELW page 113, where a concluding “table blessing” is allowed, in a “may” rubric. I’d never use that option, in order to preserve the principle noted in 18 above.

32 After the Trinitarian Blessing, the assembly is dismissed by the AM, standing at the door. At worship’s end, the PM and AM greet people at the door.

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