

**Where Two or Three are Gathered: Worship for Small Assemblies  
Pentecost through to July 24.**

**Leaders Notes:**

Happy Pentecost from Regina Saskatchewan. It's been a long winter and I hope that your community is finding ways to creatively navigate these strange times.

If there was ever a time for the church to explore new ideas and new ways of being... this is it! The hope of this document is to give you a few inspiring thoughts to both get you curious about what our traditions are built on, but also give encouragement to find new ways to express it now. So whether 'small' means literally 2-3 or if small means the ever changing summer crowd of 0-40 I hope you find creative expression and hope that the story that took us this far will find expression beyond us.

12 years ago I wrote for a worship magazine the process we followed in Edson, AB and I've included that text at the bottom of this document. Near the end I wrote, "Perhaps the most important thing to do is to keep talking about why you have done what you have done. Let the whole congregation know why the colours are different, the font is moving around, the banners are in different places. Symbols need interpretation and the space can't speak to people unless they know what they are looking at.

And here is the greatest trick of all... assure people that this is "just for a season... it will all go back to 'normal' again soon." And then keep dreaming and letting the space speak

May your planning be blessed and inspired to tell our story as your space speaks.

Rev. Sean Bell – Chaplain of Luther College – Member of Program Committee for Worship

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**Quoting Gail Ramshaw about Pentecost from "Keeping Time; The Church's Year";**

"The celebration of Easter concludes with the eighth Sunday of Easter, the day of Pentecost. Just as Sunday is the eighth day, the new day for the Christian life, so Pentecost is the eighth Easter, Christ's giving over of his spirit to the church. The celebration is set on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, in observance of the chronology from Luke. The Jewish festival of Pentecost is the observance of the giving of the law on Mount

Sinai. By fixing the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Luke layers the assembly of the believers onto the people of Israel, the tongues of fire on their heads onto the fire of Mount Sinai, the Holy Spirit onto God's giving of the law."

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How will your church space and banners tell this story in a fresh way? Doves descending? Something with fire? Red Balloons falling from the ceiling for the children's message? Perhaps you have confirmation happening and want the space to speak of God doing a new thing in these new confirmands? Perhaps you want to read the text and invite the confirmands to re-arrange the sanctuary to tell this story?

What about the summer? Pentecost is Red for the action of the Spirit but most of the rest of the season is Green. Does your space speak of the season of growth? Does the green colour of the season reflect the summer growth you are seeing outside? Perhaps you are focussing on baptismal life and promise and want to put the font in the centre of the space? Perhaps a long blue cloth will inspire people to think about water flowing out from the font to bring life everywhere?

### **Optional Omissions / Making Choices in the Liturgy**

**READ YOUR HYMNAL: So much is hidden in the resources that we already have!**

It is important to read all those red lettered instructions (Rubrics) in the order of service. These rubrics provide guidance to the "WHY we do this" question. They also offer a beginning understanding of what can be included and removed from the service.

### **Here are some suggestions.**

1. Before anything else happens, the Worship leader could invite the congregation into worship with these words from the "This Far by Faith" supplement – Available at Augsburg Fortress:

<https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/5702/This-Far-By-Faith>

CALL TO WORSHIP (TFF p. 72)

Gracious Spirit, heed our pleading.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

It's your leading that we're needing.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

Guide our thinking and our speaking.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

Motivate all in their seeking.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

Keep us fervent in our witness.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

Ever grant us zealous fitness.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come!**

1. In place of the optional 'Confession and Forgiveness' you might consider the Thanksgiving for Baptism found on Pg. 97 in the ELW. There are also other lesser known OPTIONS FOR THANKSGIVING:
  - a. ELW Pg. 70 "Thanksgiving at the Font" – four optional prayers of thanksgiving are provided. Perhaps this one could be the beginning of each service for the summer months? Perhaps different members can pour the water in the font as the words are spoken?:

## Thanksgiving for Baptism

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

In the waters of baptism,

we have passed over from death to life with Jesus Christ,  
and we are a new creation.

For this saving mystery, and for this water, let us bless God,  
who was, who is, and who is to come.

*Water may be poured into the font as the presiding minister gives thanks.*

We thank you, God, for your river of life,  
flowing freely from your throne:

through the earth,

through the city,

through every living thing.

You rescued Noah and his family from the flood;

You opened wide the sea for the Israelites.

Now in these waters you flood us with mercy,

and our sin is drowned forever.

You open the gate of righteousness

and we pass safely through.

In Jesus Christ, you calm and trouble the waters.

You nourish us and enclose us in safety.

You call us forth and send us out.

In lush and barren places, you are with us.

You have become our salvation.

Now breathe upon this water

and awaken your church once more.

Claim us again as your beloved and holy people.

Quench our thirst; cleanse our hearts; wipe away every tear.

To you, our Beginning and our End,

our Shepherd and Lamb,

be honor, glory, praise, and thanksgiving,  
now and forever.

**Amen.**

If you don't have handouts, Invite people to turn to the page in their hymnal as a way of better learning what is in their ELW book. Have a member of the congregation, perhaps a child, pour the water while the prayer is read. Great participation right up front.

2. OMIT the Kyrie and Hymn of Praise for this season (Bring them back for key festivals).
  - a. EG: On Pg. 98 it says "A Kyrie MAY be sung..." So it is entirely appropriate to remove these for certain seasons (all of summer being one of those times...)
  - b. This leaves a space for another hymn (ELW 164 works well), perhaps one of praise to the Triune God. Or you could simply continue with the Greeting, so your service would look like this. Perhaps there is a song you want to learn by heart?

Perhaps it looks like this:

- i. Call to worship (above) with Thanksgiving for Baptism (ELW pg. 70)
- ii. Greeting (Optional Hymn)
- iii. Prayer of the Day
- iv. WORD – COMMUNION - SENDING

c. If you omit the Kyrie and Hymn of Praise you may want to add something later in the service. Smaller communities don't need to be worried about time; the right length of a service is up to you. This brings me to my next suggestion – a book to guide you.

### **Book Recommendation:**

**"In these or similar words; crafting language for Worship" published by Augsburg Fortress.**

I like this book because it guides the process of using those little red letters (Rubrics). Importantly it tells you "What is going on..." but it also, and perhaps more importantly, tells you "what is NOT going on." On the next page I have included an excerpt from the book for the Thanksgiving for Baptism. The book also offers some exercises to write your own prayer for this optional part of the liturgy.

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**Final thoughts:**

Small congregations can make changes faster than big ones. You can make changes faster than big ones! You know each other well and know how the space and words will be received. Use this advantage! (And remind people that moving things for a season is OK and one day it will go back to 'normal'... do this enough and the new normal will be a living space ripe with meaning for every season). Send pictures of your inspiration to one another and your synod - and always keep looking for ways to tell this old old story!

Rev. Sean Bell

## **WORSHIP Essential texts – quick reference.**

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**Sunday, June 5, 2022**

**Day of Pentecost, Year C**

### **Prayer of the Day**

God our creator, the resurrection of your Son offers life to all the peoples of earth. By your Holy Spirit, kindle in us the fire of your love, empowering our lives for service and our tongues for praise, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Readings and Psalm**

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

[Psalm 104:24-34, 35b](#)

[Romans 8:14-17](#)

[John 14:8-17 \[25-27\]](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord” (ELW 395).

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**Sunday, June 12, 2022**

**The Holy Trinity, Year C**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Almighty Creator and ever-living God: we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One, and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three. Keep us steadfast in this faith, defend us in all adversity, and bring us at last into your presence, where you live in endless joy and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Readings and Psalm**

[Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31](#)

[Psalm 8](#)

[Romans 5:1-5](#)

[John 16:12-15](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "Come, join the dance of Trinity" (ELW 412)

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**Sunday, June 19, 2020**

**Lectionary 12, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

O Lord God, we bring before you the cries of a sorrowing world. In your mercy set us free from the chains that bind us, and defend us from everything that is evil, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Isaiah 65:1-9](#)

[Psalm 22:19-28](#)

[Galatians 3:23-29](#)

[Luke 8:26-39](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: God of grace and God of glory" (ELW 705)

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**Sunday, June 26, 2022**

**Lectionary 13, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

Sovereign God, ruler of all hearts, you call us to obey you, and you favor us with true freedom. Keep us faithful to the ways of your Son, that, leaving behind all that hinders us, we may steadfastly follow your paths, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21](#)

[Psalm 16](#)

[Galatians 5:1, 13-25](#)

[Luke 9:51-62](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: O Jesus, I have promised" (ELW 810)

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**Sunday, July 3, 2022**  
**Lectionary 14, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, you are the city that shelters us, the mother who comforts us. With your Spirit accompany us on our life's journey, that we may spread your peace in all the world, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Isaiah 66:10-14](#)

[Psalm 66:1-9](#)

[Galatians 6:\[1-6\] 7-16](#)

[Luke 10:1-11, 16-20](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, you shall be my song" (ELW 808)

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**Sunday, July 10, 2022**  
**Lectionary 15, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

O Lord God, your mercy delights us, and the world longs for your loving care. Hear the cries of everyone in need, and turn our hearts to love our neighbors with the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Deuteronomy 30:9-14](#)

[Psalm 25:1-10](#)

[Colossians 1:1-14](#)

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: O God of mercy, God of light" (ELW 714)

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**Sunday, July 17, 2022**  
**Lectionary 16, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**



Eternal God, you draw near to us in Christ, and you make yourself our guest. Amid the cares of our lives, make us attentive to your presence, that we may treasure your word above all else, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Genesis 18:1-10a](#)

[Psalm 15](#)

[Colossians 1:15-28](#)

[Luke 10:38-42](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "For all the faithful women" (ELW 419)  
(Stanza 7 re: Mary and Martha)

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**Sunday, July 24, 2022**

**Lectionary 17, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty and ever-living God, you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and you gladly give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour upon us your abundant mercy. Forgive us those things that weigh on our conscience, and give us those good things that come only through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Genesis 18:20-32](#)

[Psalm 138](#)

[Colossians 2:6-15 \[16-19\]](#)

[Luke 11:1-13](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "Our Father, God in Heaven Above" (ELW 747)  
(Pre-choose which versus to sing).

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**Sunday, July 31, 2022**

**Lectionary 18, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23](#)

[Psalm 49:1-12](#)

[Colossians 3:1-11](#)

[Luke 12:13-21](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "Be thou my vision" (ELW 793)

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**Sunday, August 7, 2022**

**Lectionary 19, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may be ready to receive you wherever you appear, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Genesis 15:1-6](#)

[Psalm 33:12-22](#)

[Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16](#)

[Luke 12:32-40](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "Have no fear, little flock" (ELW 764)

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**Sunday, August 14, 2022**

**Lectionary 20, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God, judge eternal, you love justice and hate oppression, and you call us to share your zeal for truth. Give us courage to take our stand with all victims of bloodshed and greed, and, following your servants and prophets, to look to the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Jeremiah 23:23-29](#)

[Psalm 82](#)

[Hebrews 11:29--12:2](#)

[Luke 12:49-56](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "If God my Lord be for me" (ELW 788)

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**Sunday, August 21, 2022**

**Lectionary 21, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God, mighty and immortal, you know that as fragile creatures surrounded by great dangers, we cannot by ourselves stand upright. Give us strength of mind and body, so that even when we suffer because of human sin, we may rise victorious through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Isaiah 58:9b-14](#)

[Psalm 103:1-8](#)

[Hebrews 12:18-29](#)

[Luke 13:10-17](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "How firm a foundation" (ELW 796)

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**Sunday, August 28, 2022**

**Lectionary 22, Year C**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God, you resist those who are proud and give grace to those who are humble. Give us the humility of your Son, that we may embody the generosity of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Readings and Psalm**

[Proverbs 25:6-7](#)

[Psalm 112](#)

[Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16](#)

[Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

Hymn of the Day Suggestion: "Gather Us In" (ELW 532)

**ARTICLE from 2010 about what the church year looked like in Edson, Alberta:**

*We dreamed a theological vision of what the season and our space might be trying to say to us...*

Our story begins when Tien Young (Grace Lutheran Edson Member) and I sat down to begin to think about what our sanctuary space was saying. I love the sanctuary at Grace Lutheran Church in Edson. It has a lot of warm wood work but at the same time, it mixes in a colder stone work. In many ways I think that it strikes the balance of experience of God in transcendence and immanence.

The transcendence of God simply means the experience of how God is the Holy other. A stranger that we meet in unexpected places. This is the God who seems so powerful and almost scary. This is the God who speaks of death and has the power of resurrection. The 'high and mighty don't look straight at him or your eye balls will explode and your brain would melt' God. While this is true, there is another side to God.

The immanence of God simply means the experience of God as close. Language of family is employed to get at the sense that God is right here, right now. In, with, and under if you will. Jesus our brother, living in our hearts, travelling with us every step.

I think our sanctuary catches both and it's important to hold this tension. God is not one or the other, but both. So our space shows the warmth of the wood, the images of cabin, and the fishers of men theme that comes out in the iron work. But there is the cold stone. The tall, back lit cross that is against stone work that towers over the space.

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So Tien Young and I sat in this space and talked about the lines that move up toward the cross, drawing the eye up. We talked about the colour of the wood and stone. The images you can sometimes see in the stone work. We talked about where the banners had hung in the past and we looked at all of "Holy Hardware" that the church owned... and began to dream.

One of my favourite memories of seminary is the changing of the seasons and the liturgical imagination employed by Prof. Jann Boyd and the other students. We learned to dream about what could be. We learned to listen to what the space was saying. As Rev. Lisa Skogsrud said, "You can't fight the architecture... you have to work with it." Starting with what our space was saying, we began to layer on top.

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First Seasonal change: Advent. It's a blue season... not a sad blue, but the blue of the sky before the coming of the dawn and the light. This is what first grabbed our attention. How could we bring the idea of the approaching dawn into the narrative of our space?

Of the many ideas discussed, what was settled on was large strips of fabric (15 yards each). The first piece of dark blue fabric was draped over the cross, covered much

of the cold stone work up front, and brought a deep sense of blue and peace to the sanctuary... a sense of waiting for what might be. The rest of the altar furnishings turned to blue as well. Tien Young flew into action and produce 6 new banners to cover the cinder block walls and wrap us in the warmth of the blue. This was Advent 1.

We then added another piece of blue of the same length, only this one a little brighter to add to the coming of the dawn effect. With the extra cloth we noticed that we could stretch around the edge of the chancel and as we were exploring what to do with it. This is when Tien noticed that it looked a bit like a stable if we hung the fabric just right. She then remembered she had access to a large quilted nativity scene so we build our stable and now waited for the light and waited for the family. This was Advent 2 and 3.

Advent 4 has traditionally been out "Christmas Pageant" Sunday so this is what it was.

Then came Christmas. For the Christmas eve candlelight service we added another layer of white to the fabrics that were hanging, and of course the altar and pulpit cloths also turned white giving us a very warm feeling indeed. The single white strip overpowered the blues as we celebrated how the light had entered the world and our waiting was finished.

Theologically an interesting thing happened as well. The stable was now made of blues and whites as we celebrated the birth of Christ, but also the same cloth that was the stable now draped the cross. Over the cross and down the other side it came to rest on the elements for communion. This spoke volumes of the faith we espouse... the hope of the new light... the love of God made human... the cross of sacrifice... the meal of forgiveness. Looking at the chancel, your eye couldn't help but follow the arc of the fabric and this lead to some great discussions on the interconnectedness of the whole story. The cross and the \_\_\_\_\_ cradle can never truly be separated.

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Leaving Christmas we were tired, and as the season after Epiphany rolled on we simply took out the white and added a layer of green. It's cold in Edson so the glowing warmth of the cross blanketed in colours was comforting. Then we pulled the rug out from everything. We were looking for some contrast.

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For Ash Wednesday, it all came down... everything... we went right back to wood and stone and cinder. On our altar for Lent their normally rests a striking purple cloth that has pierced hands and a crown of thorns. Rather than have this live on the Altar, we hung it behind the base of the cross, near the bottom. This left the altar bare except for the white cloth on the top and added to the sense of being barren... of being on a fast. Each Sunday of Lent those hands moved up towards the cross piece. Our journey to Easter was symbolized by these hands making their journey up the cross.

Passion/Palm Sunday rolled around and we left that purple cloth with those hands and crown up near the cross piece. We added the whites to the Altar and pulpit to give the sense that we were almost there. Then finally came Easter.

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The goal of Easter was to explode over top of the people (again, to contrast what we did for Lent.) We wanted to make the light of Easter jump off the cross and flood out and wrap around the people. We wanted to say, "Through this cross you are taken up in the arms of Christ." The cold dead cross needed to become the living symbol of grace and mercy that came out towards the people.

Again Tien Young flew into action and for Easter we had 6 new banners in a royal purple with white lettering to add colour and festivity to the space. She also made a new Alleluia banner that is now up all year.

\_\_\_\_\_And what says celebration? White and gold streamers (already in the right liturgical colour no less!) It's time to celebrate. 'Good' Friday was passed, the light had come, we once again celebrated what we celebrate every Sunday. Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.

The white and gold streamers from the cross to the first beam seemed to accomplish this effect. Eyes like to follow lines and as your eyes come off the cross they follow the line to the first beam where the 'Alleluia' is loudly proclaimed. Then following back down you come to the very centre which is the cross itself. Looking at the cross you felt drawn in, but it wasn't cold and dead. It was alive with new meaning: It spoke of new life!

This stayed up all through Easter (adding one chore to Sunday morning, getting the ladder and putting some of the streamers back up - use good tape next time!...). The wedding that we held during Easter loved the decorations and joined in the festivity with more decorations that stayed up as well. All the white stayed in place until we rolled into Pentecost.

For Pentecost (and confirmation Sunday), we just added the red and left up all the white and gold. Made for great confirmation pictures as well as making the space exciting for the Pentecost event and all the guests that we had in for a confirmation Sunday.

And then... we rested... back to the greens and the planning phase for next year.

We're thinking of a stars theme for Advent... but the group hasn't met yet so we will dream together and see what our space will say to us this year.

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A resource that was helpful in all this was "Keeping Time; The Churches Year" which is volume three of the "Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship" which is available from Augsburg Fortress (All three volumes are well worth the money.) This will give you some theological structure on which to hang your imagination as you try to get your space to speak to you for the season.

Perhaps the most important thing to do is to keep talking about why you have done what you have done. Let the whole congregation know why the colours are different, the font is moving around, the banners are in different places. Symbols need interpretation and the space can't speak to people unless they know what they are looking at.

And here is the greatest trick of all... assure people that this is "just for a season... it will all go back to 'normal' again soon." And then keep dreaming and letting the space speak.

Rev. Sean Bell

