

A Common Liturgy A Summer Experiment in Worship Times and Style

Hi Friends,

We wanted to write to you, letting you know about some changes coming to our liturgy this summer and, possibly, beyond this summer.

"Liturgy" comes from the Greek word *leitourgia* and has come to refer to the Church's act of public worship. The word literally means "the work of the people." Worship is meant to be a workout for our imaginations because it invites us to see reality through a lens other than the one the world gives us and incorporates us into practices like confession and praise through which we learn to become citizens of God's Kingdom.

We're sure you know that Christians worship in a variety of ways. But in all that diversity, there is a common liturgy all Christian traditions share. They all gather in praise that God is the one who gathers us. They all submit to hearing the Living God through the Word read and proclaimed. They all respond to the Word in prayer, sacrament, and singing. And they all depart acknowledging that it is the Holy Spirit who sends us as the Body of Christ to bear his grace to the world.

From Sunday, July 23, through Sunday, September 3, Aldersgate will experiment with its worship times and styles, moving from the three current Sunday services to two Sunday services at 9:00 and 10:30. (The Saturday service will continue at 5:30 p.m.) Rather than offering a choice of traditional or contemporary worship, we will offer what we are calling "A Common Liturgy."

It will be a Common Liturgy in that both Sunday services will be identical. It will also be a Common Liturgy in that both services will worship God using the diversity of gifts and expression common to the Church across time and traditions: ancient, classical, and modern; from Latin to Americana. Just as Psalm 150 tells us to praise God with every imaginable kind of instrument, we will worship God with all the gifts our music staff and volunteers bring to the table.

Worship is about participating in the praise of the Creator; it's not about personal preferences. Because God is the giver of every gift, we will give thanks and praise using every kind of gift God has given us, from praise songs with guitars to Bach organ pieces. So you should expect diversity, but diversity without dissonance. As Brian Zahnd told us when he visited this winter, liturgy is neither alive nor dead; it's either true or false.

Our lay leadership team have identified several reasons to transition to two common services this summer:

- They've noticed that 3 services on Sunday are difficult for our volunteer rosters of communion servers, scripture readers, and ushers, particularly in the summer months.
- It's a burden on the choir members to be here all morning to cover two traditional services (from 8 to 12:30 or later).
- The best, most well-received services we do tend to be collaborations across the services' staffs and volunteers.
- The 9:45 service currently is our largest service but cannot grow. Between people in the pews and in Sunday School we're maxed out in terms of parking.
- A takeaway from our Service Sundays when we had single worship services: People have a better time when they're around more people having a good time. Two full services will feel more vibrant.
- There are all kinds of churches--from Catholics to Black Baptists and even Methodists--who every Sunday use a diversity of music, from bands to choirs, together in the same service. Not to mention, no one listens only to one style of music in their personal life; why should the church require them to do so!

This is a pilot project over the summer and no decision has been made about what will happen after Labor Day, although we will observe carefully and listen closely during the summer. We've already met with a group of our top givers and gotten their enthusiastic buy-in. We'll be consulting our Sunday School teachers and parents soon. We'll be in conversation with our musicians and singers for feedback. We'll be monitoring our parking to make sure two services doesn't create too low a ceiling for growth. And we'll be listening to you as we experience a Common Liturgy, together.

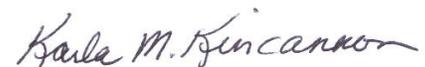
In Christ,



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