



Leading
God's People
in Worship

A Basic Guide for Assisting Ministers at Hope Lutheran Church

—January 2010 Edition—

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What Is This Assisting Minister Stuff All About?

Each week, we the followers of Jesus Christ gather for worship of the God who has claimed us and called us beloved. We follow a pattern of worship called a *liturgy*, which literally means, “the work of the people.” That is, our gathered Christian worship is the task and calling of all of us who belong to the church, not just the pastor, or even just the people “up front” in robes. As Lutheran Christians, we have always been concerned to stress how *all* the baptized are priests before God, and all of us are granted the same access to God because of Christ Jesus—there is no sense that the pastor is any holier or “above” the rest of the church, but is simultaneously justified and sinful just like all of us. Your presence reminds and embodies for us all the “priesthood of all the baptized.”

*So the primary role of the assisting minister—you—is to help the **whole congregation** to be more fully drawn into worship, not as audience or observers, but as participants caught up in the great love of God and in the praise and worship of our God. In a way, as the assisting minister you stand in for each of the rest of the congregation, modeling for us all how God draws us in close, to the very table of Jesus’ meal, and there equips us to go out and serve others. You also help to hold up the beauty, holiness, and character of God for the worshipping congregation to see more closely, and so to praise more fully. By lifting God’s goodness up for our praise by leading the prayers, the Creed, and other parts of the liturgy, all of us in the worshipping congregation can see glimpses of God’s goodness around us once we have left the walls of the church building. Like the adult holding out a finger for a butterfly to land so the watching child can see it on the front cover of this document, the Assisting Minister helps to call our attention to the beauty of God for a brief moment on Sundays before the week ahead, where God will still be loose in the world. You help train our vision to see the God whom we worship at work for good all around us!*

What Does The Assisting Minister Do?

Obviously, the primary responsibility of the assisting minister is to assist with the liturgy on Sunday morning, so the first place to start is looking at the basic order of worship and to note where the Assisting Minister fits into the whole. Some of these pieces will be familiar to you from watching Assisting Ministers (**AMs**) on previous Sunday mornings, some will be new, and some will be slight “tweaking” of existing **AM** responsibilities. We’ll also note here where there are differences between the **AM** role in the Lutheran Book of Worship (green book), which we use on the first two Sundays of the month, and the With One Voice hymnal (blue book), which we currently use for the last two (or three) Sundays of the month. In the LBW, we switch between Setting One and Setting Two year to year (2008 is a Setting Two year), and in the WOV, we alternate month by month between Setting Four and Setting Five. The task of writing prayers will be addressed below in a separate section.

❖ *Before Worship:*

- Meet with Pastor Steve in his office to go over any changes or additions to the service, as well as any additional prayer requests to add to the prayers for the day. This will include any names added from the Hope Prayer Binder (kept in the narthex and incorporated into the worship bulletin, too). Then, if you are vesting (wearing a robe) for the day, be sure to put it on and have your hymnal and bulletin.

- It has been the tradition of Hope for Assisting Ministers to wear a robe except for the most extreme hot-weather days, but this is more a matter of local tradition than requirement. If you have any concerns about robing, talk with Pastor Steve. There are also two crosses you can choose from to wear around your neck—one, a Luther-rose style cross, and the other with colored in-laid pieces that is a fairly-traded handicraft from South America.
- The acolyte will have lit the candles before you and the pastor enter for worship; you might check to see the candles are lit before heading out into the sanctuary.
- On most Sundays, there will be no procession, but see below for those special notes. These following notes will presume it is an ordinary (non-festival) Sunday without processions. As you and the pastor enter the sanctuary for worship, you will stop at the center of the communion rail (at the front of the center aisle), facing and reverencing (slightly bowing) in front of the cross before taking your seat in the front pew for the prelude, announcements, and Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness.

Note: just to keep in mind, our act of reverencing the cross is not meant to indicate that God is only “up front” by the Table/altar, but rather to remind us that we are a people marked by this cross and that our Lord is the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The reverencing is also a way of calling attention to the God whom we worship, rather than ourselves in worship—the pastor and assisting minister are not the “stars of the show” at all, but it is the God who gathers, speaks, feeds, and sends us. It is a matter of helping to direct focus—away from ourselves, or better yet, beyond and through ourselves to the God who uses us, like looking through a window to see what is on the other side. Leaders in worship, at their best, are like stained glass windows, rather than paintings—the congregation doesn’t look at them by themselves, but through them as the light shines through. Be a window that catches God’s light and shares it with all.

❖ **Concerns and Celebrations/Announcements and Prelude:**

- Take note of any additional names raised up by the congregation for prayer to include in the petitions during the Prayers of the Church.
- During the Prelude, help to model quiet reflection and preparation for worship for the rest of the congregation.
- We may experiment in the future with putting the announcements at the *end* of worship, making this opening time just a time to welcome members and visitors to worship and give any notes about the service for the day.

❖ **Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness** (p. 77 in LBW Setting Two, p. 10 in WOV):

- Join with the whole congregation in speaking the ☩ parts. You have the freedom to kneel when the liturgy directs it, but you do not have to—this is your choice, and it is fine if there is not uniformity on this point.

Note: We will be moving toward a practice of not using the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness on the major festival Sundays and seasons of the church year. So for example, we will not use the Brief Order on All Saints’ Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, during the season of Christmas, at Easter, or on the Day of Pentecost. This is a way of marking the celebratory tone of these days.

- Following the Brief Order (or if we do not use it, the Prelude), you and the pastor will rise if not already standing, move to the base of the chancel steps, and wait until the first verse of the Gathering Hymn to move to your seats. As you step forward, you’ll again reverence the Table (*again, a matter of pointing beyond ourselves*) and together head to the seats at the pulpit side.

❖ **Gathering Hymn**

- During the second-to-last verse, you and the pastor will head up to the Table for the first part of the service. Watch for a signal—or, if the pastor seems to be overly engrossed in singing and oblivious to getting up front, a kind nudge in Christian love to alert the pastor would be helpful.

❖ **Gathering: Greeting, Kyrie, Hymn of Praise, Prayer of the Day** (starting on p. 78 in LBW, p. 28 in WOV Setting Five):

- After the pastor notes what page we are beginning on and greets the congregation, we will continue with either the Kyrie or the Hymn of Praise. In either case, there is often a part to be led by the **AM**, marked with in the **A** symbol. These are written to be sung, so here you have a choice: if you are comfortable singing (or *intoning*) these parts, you are invited to lead the congregation here. If you would prefer not to, the pastor can intone these leaders' parts. But check with the pastor before worship to confirm who will be doing what part. If you would like some practice with the sung parts, Pastor Steve is glad to go over that with you, and surely our accompanist Tom Bush would be able to help as well. If you will be singing/intoning, you will want to check with Tom for what musical introduction or pitch will come first.

Note: As you consider whether you will sing the Leader's Part for the Kyrie or Hymn of Praise, know that (1) no one expects professional singing—in fact, part of the whole point of having assisting ministers is to remind us that the church's worship is not "done" by paid professionals, but by amateurs in a literal sense—people who do this "for the love of it" (ama- = love). So it is okay to risk singing even if you are worried that not every note will come out right. But on the other hand, (2) it is also perfectly acceptable not to sing and to ask the pastor to take these lines.

- For the Kyrie in both LBW and WOV, the **AM** has a solo part; for the Hymn of Praise, the LBW's "Glory to God" and "This is the Feast" have solo introduction parts, but the WOV's "Glory to God" begins entirely in unison with the whole congregation.
- The Pastor leads the congregation in the Prayer of the Day, so you need only join the congregation in the prayer.

Note: You might want to give thought to what posture you will take when you pray, both when you are leading prayer (as in the Prayers of the Church) and when the pastor is leading prayer. There doesn't need to be a rigid or fixed choreography, but there is a long-standing tradition of prayer-leaders praying with open arms and hands (this is sometimes called "orans" position, which just means "praying"), although we are all certainly familiar with the custom of bowing our heads and folding our hands. You might also find a third position most comfortable when "up front" but not leading prayer (as during the Prayer of the Day), for example, with hands together but palms open, as when you receive Communion.

❖ **The Word: Children's Sermon, Lessons, Gospel, Sermon** (starting on p. 82 and p. 31 in WOV)

- As with the whole congregation, your primary task during the lessons, gospel, and sermon is hearing God's Word spoken to us. During the first and second reason, there is nothing additional that the Assisting Minister regularly does. You are free to be a reader, too, but usually our schedulers will be able to arrange other people to read when you are the Assisting Minister. The same is true for Psalm leading—you are free to be the psalm leader when you are assisting, but we do have other volunteers so that you don't have to wear too many

“hats” on a given morning. It would be helpful, however, at the reading of the gospel to stand at the pastor’s indication to the congregation to help model what the congregation is being asked to do.

- On major festival days (like Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost), we will continue the practice of a Gospel Procession, when the pastor reads the gospel in the midst of the congregation, and is led out into the center of the church by the acolyte carrying the cross and you, as assisting minister, or just the Assisting Minister and the Pastor. On a Gospel Procession day, you will receive further direction as to your role, but the primary thing is that at the time of the sung Gospel Verse/Acclamation, you will follow behind the acolyte to about where the baptismal font is (or lead the procession yourself), and you will hold the book from which the pastor reads the gospel text. But don’t worry—when this happens, all will be made clear in time.

❖ *Response to the Word: Hymn of the Day, Creed, Prayers of the Church, Peace, and Offering*

- As with the Gathering Hymn, during approximately the second-last verse of the hymn following the sermon you and the pastor will again go to the Table to be in place for the Creed and the Prayers.
- The Creed (*beginning on pp. 84-85 in LBW and on pp. 32-33 in WOV*) is either the Apostles’ Creed (used on most Sundays) or the Nicene Creed (used on festival Sundays or seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter).

The Creed is the confession of faith for the whole church, not just the pastor, so it has been my practice to encourage you as Assisting Minister to lead the Creed. This simply involves an introductory sentence that could be something like this:

“Together we profess our faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed, found on page 33...”

Or “Let us profess our faith together using the Nicene Creed, printed on page 84...”

Note: I would encourage you to give the page number for the Creed, since people will have just finished singing the hymn of the day and might more easily find where we are with a simple word of direction. It will be helpful to give the page number at any other point where the congregation is asked to read/pray words printed in the hymnal (the offertory prayer is another example). But you do not need to give the page number if everyone would already be following along or if they do not need to have the printed text of something in front of them (for example, when you lead the prayer after Communion, when the congregation only adds its “Amen” at the end).

- The Prayers of the Church—see below for thoughts and suggestions on composing prayers. Here are a few notes for the actual leading of the Prayers:

If you are ending each petition with a phrase other than the usual, “Lord, in your mercy/Hear our prayer,” (which is fine to do), please instruct the congregation first as to how they are invited to respond.

Consider your prayer posture (what to do with your arms and hands, etc.), and feel free to move to the center of the space behind the Table/altar—the pastor will move aside and let you have central position, because at this moment, you are the primary leader of the congregation.

When we open up the prayers to allow members to name those for whom we especially pray, let there be a healthy silence—you might even slowly count to ten in your head before

proceeding, just so that people really have a chance to name those in prayer who are on their hearts and minds.

Since Advent 2007, we have made available a Prayer Binder for members and friends to list those for whom they would request prayer, and this list is also being included in a prayer list in the bulletin. I would ask that in one of the petitions, these people be named, even if just with first names.

It has been our practice since Advent 2006 for the Assisting Minister to end the Prayers rather than to have the Pastor give the final “Into your hands...” piece. Again, we as Lutheran Christians affirm that by the grace and calling of God in baptism, we all have access to God in Christ and do not need a pastor’s conclusion to “rubber-stamp” approval on our prayers. Your prayers as assisting minister are *the* prayers of the church—which means both that you have great responsibility in the words you speak on behalf of the whole people of God, but also that you have great freedom and do not need to have me as pastor ratify your words.

The conclusion of the prayers can be your own, or it can be taken word for word from the printed liturgy, which reads:

“Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all those for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**”

- The Peace—Once the pastor has invited the congregation to share Christ’s peace with one another, share the peace with as many people in the congregation (the pastor and acolyte included!) as you are comfortable with.
- The Offering—The acolyte will get the offering plates and pass them out to our ad hoc ushers. Once the offering has begun, your role is to prepare the Table for the Eucharistic (Communion) liturgy which follows the Offertory prayer. At this point, you will re-arrange the Communion Table, moving the Leaders’ Book and stand to the side, bringing the chalice to the center of the Table, taking off the linen corporal and the purificators inside it, and giving a quick, simple cleaning of the inside of the chalice. *(My apologies if these terms are unfamiliar—as we go over the liturgy together, hopefully all of these will make sense to you; please know that memorizing obscure liturgical terms is not high on the list of requirements to be an assisting minister, and frankly, I am just as comfortable with calling these items by more functional titles. There is nothing more holy about calling a linen cloth used to wipe clean the chalice a “purificator” rather than simply calling it a linen cloth.)*

While the Offering is still going on, you can set the corporal cloth down and unfold it in the center of the Table, set the chalice (cup) down in the center and the remaining linen cloths at the side of the Table. The other, seasonally colored fabric pieces can be folded up and set aside. Uncover the trays of glasses at the credence table as well. When you are finished with these preparations, go to the front of the chancel steps where the acolyte will be waiting and face the Table in quiet reflection. When the Offering is over and the congregation begins singing the Offertory (“Let the vineyards...”), you and the acolyte will face the congregation and receive the gifts before bringing the wine and bread up to the Table. When the wine has been brought up, pour a small amount into the chalice (enough for you, the pastor, the acolyte, and the deacon/communion assistant to have a sip).

❖ ***The Eucharistic Liturgy: Holy Communion*** (starting pp. 67-68 in LBW and p. 35-36 in WOV):

- The Offertory Prayer—Since we are picking up our books again, please tell the congregation on what page you will be continuing (on p. 35 in WOV, where both prayers are listed, or on p. 67 or p. 68 for LBW, depending on which prayer you choose).

You will invite the congregation to pray, “Let us pray...” and then begin with the first line of the Offertory Prayer you have chosen. You are free to choose either prayer, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God...” or “Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving...” and in fact some variety here is good. So feel free to choose something different from what the other AMs have done recently and from what you have chosen in the past—just be sure to indicate the page and to clearly speak the opening line, so that the congregation will know which prayer we are using.

- The Great Thanksgiving, Preface, and Eucharistic Prayer follow, all led by the pastor. During these pieces, it is helpful to turn the pages for the pastor if your positions make that possible, especially between the “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and the Preface, which begins, “It is indeed right and salutary...” The Preface will change depending on the Sunday in the church year, so please go over this with the pastor beforehand. As our custom at New Life has been for the AM to be to the right of the pastor, this page-turning just may not happen, and that’s okay.
- During the Eucharistic Prayer, there may be a place where the congregation responds together with the words, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” At this time, it is again most helpful to speak this sentence clearly as a model for the congregation’s response. The same is true when the congregation joins in the Lord’s Prayer.
- As Distribution begins, you and the pastor will commune each other, and then you two will commune the acolyte and deacon who come and kneel at the steps. ***When distributing the bread to the pastor, you tear off a piece of bread and give it with the words, “The body of Christ, given for you.” When giving the wine, you give it with the words, “The blood of Christ, shed for you.” These are the same words you will use when distributing to the congregation.***
- You will then begin distributing the wine to the congregation as they come forward and kneel at the communion rail. If you are not certain if someone communes, pay attention to whether the pastor has given him or her the bread. If you did not notice, you can most often tell by a quick glance to the parents, who will indicate if a child communes or does not. After the congregation has come forward to receive communion, check with the pastor to see if there are any people who are not able to come forward who should also receive the sacrament. Most weeks we have not had anyone to bring Communion to in their seats, but it is worth checking. (You might also your eyes open to see if there is anyone the pastor might have missed on this count.)
- After the congregation has communed, you will clear the Table. The pastor may help take things from the other assistants to set them aside, but you are the primary person to clear the Table for the remainder of the service. The following things need to be done:
 - The tray of glasses are placed back on the credence table and covered again.
 - The paten is covered, with any remaining bread placed in a linen cloth separately, and both are set on the credence table.

- The chalice is emptied (you may drink the rest or share it with the pastor—there will not be much left in it), covered, and set aside on the credence table.
- Linens are folded up, including the corporal, and the whole credence table is re-covered with a linen cloth.
- The Leaders' Book and stand are placed back in the center of the Table.

❖ ***Sending—Blessing, Post-Communion Canticle and Prayer, Benediction, Sending Hymn***
(starting p. 92 in LBW, and p. 40 in WOV)

- For the Communion blessing and Canticle, you do not have any additional responsibilities. But when we get to the Post-Communion Prayer, you take the lead again. In both the LBW and WOV we will have just sung the Canticle in the book, so you do not need to introduce the page number. In the WOV, there is no choice of prayers—there is just one given for you to lead the congregation in. In the LBW, there is a choice of three, and you can choose any of them; since the whole prayer is offered by you, you do not need to announce which one.

(Note: You may have noticed a developing tradition with the Post-Communion Canticle in the With One Voice Setting when we sing the alternative “Thankful hearts and voices raise...” two times through as a number of people clap for the second time through the song. You are welcome to join in clapping, but are by no means required to—one of the beautiful things about Hope’s worship life is that we are a congregation that can clap and not clap together.)

- Following the Benediction, we begin the Sending Hymn, during which we’ll move to the center of the chancel and then recess out (most likely during the second-last verse, as with other hymns). Then you get the last word, so to speak, with the dismissal, “Go in peace. Serve the Lord,” to which the congregation responds, “Thanks be to God.” From there, we greet the congregation as they go out to do just that—to serve the Lord in their weeks.
- *Note: There may be weeks, for example on Healing Sundays (5th Sundays of a month), when we do not recess all the way back to the main entrance of the church. Depending on the situation, I may ask you to recess all the way to the back to greet people and I will stay up front, or we’ll both wait at the foot of the steps, where we start worship with announcements. This will be a case by case kind of thing, but just an FYI.*
- That ends our Sunday worship service—thank you for your leadership and gifts in worship. You are a blessing for us all!

Prayers of the Church

At the heart of the Assisting Minister's role is the leading of the Prayers of the Church, which are yours to prepare. This can mean *either* using something prepared from written resource *or* writing the prayers yourself. If you go the route of using existing prayers, there are several resources available to you: we have a copy of *Sundays and Seasons*, an annual Lutheran worship resource that is arranged by each Sunday of the church year and keyed into the texts for the day, as well as several previous editions from past years. I would be cautious about lifting prayers from other resources, especially on-line ones, unless you have looked through them first both to be clear on any copyright issues and for content. You can use *Sundays and Seasons* materials freely, even word for word, with no copyright issues.

If you choose to write your own Prayers of the Church, which I'd at least invite you to experiment with at some point, there are additional resources that may be helpful, which are completely available to you. Of course, *Sundays and Seasons* can always be helpful to see an example of how one might go about the prayers for this day and this day's needs. Also, the short text, *The Prayer of the Faithful* is a sort of theological how-to about the history and process of the church's prayers. And then, of course, feel free to make use of the handouts from today's session—the excerpts from Jane Vennard's *Praying for Friends and Enemies* and the following materials give you a basic overview of the pattern for writing prayers. Know, too, that Pastor Steve is available for further help and direction if you are interested in writing your prayers.

❖ *A Model for Composing Prayers*

Our current practice with the Prayers of the Church is for the main petitions to be led by the Assisting Minister, with the congregation responding to each petition. Most frequently this has been the pattern of the **AM** ending the petitions with, “Lord, in your mercy,” and the congregation responding with, “Hear our prayer.” But you are surely free to change the language of the responses, especially as the season or Sunday readings suggest (for example, you might be moved in Advent, when we prepare for Christ's coming among us, to end the petitions with, “God of our hopes”/ “Hear our prayers and come,” or something along those lines). Please just be careful to tell the congregation before the prayers begin if there is something different expected of them.

With our pattern of prayers, an average of four or five petitions might be a good rule of thumb—getting too much longer than six gets to become unwieldy, and as Martin Luther once reminded us, “The fewer the words, the better the prayer.” (*Jesus had something critical to say, too, about those who like to impress people with their long prayers and pious words.*) And then, of course, following the petitions, there is a closing to the prayer (which I am asking the **AMs** to take on now), which traditionally ends in words similar to, “Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There is no divinely ordained sequence or content for prayers, but there is a good pattern I would suggest to start with to organize your thoughts and petitions. We pray for:

- **(1) *The needs of the church, broadly speaking***—Here we have in mind the whole church, not just Hope or even our local NWPA Synod, but all the followers of Jesus. What do we as the people of God ask God to grant to us—this might include forgiveness for our individual and collective failings, strength and courage to speak the Good News, wisdom to know how to live and act, passion to serve others, humility, etc. Of course, it could also be quite concrete, not abstract—we pray for faithful and courageous leaders, pastors, and congregations; we pray for unity among God's people, etc. Often a good place to start is with the Bible texts for the coming Sunday—what needs for the church do our readings

point out? The goal is not for the Prayers to be a second sermon, but they might at least make a connection with what the Bible speaks to us. For example, on the Sunday when the Gospel text is the rich young ruler whom Jesus calls to sell his possessions, we might pray for all disciples of Jesus today to use their possessions as God would have us use them, or that God would free us from our enslavement to our money, etc. This petition may well be fairly broad, but that's okay—we will name specific needs before God later in the prayers.

- **(2) *The world's needs, broadly speaking***—We move from the church out to the whole world, again thinking in somewhat broad terms. What are needs of the whole world that are especially pressing this week? This might include needs like hunger, poverty, war, disease, loneliness, our culture's emptiness or materialism, etc. We call on God to provide for those who are in need, and we also call on God to stir us up to be used as God's instruments in doing this. What needs come to the forefront in the week's events in the world?—when Hurricane Katrina struck or the tsunami hit southeast Asia, our prayers had to include the devastation and need they created.

Two powerful quotations have always helped me to think about praying for the world's needs that I would offer to you to keep in mind as you compose prayers for the world, both broadly and specifically:

The 20th century theologian Karl Barth said about preaching (but I think is true of praying, too) that one needed to preach/pray *“with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”* That's good advice—what are needs of our world crying out from the front page? A second quotation comes from Thomas More, who says in his own prayer to God, *“The things, good Lord, which we pray for, give us the grace to labor for.”* In other words, we call on God in prayer not only to address the needs of the world, but also to *use us* as answers to those prayers.

- **(3) *Specific needs in our communities, world, and congregations***—We get more specific and focused as the prayers continue, and this could take many forms. We might pray for particular needs in our own congregation or others—including praying for our bishops, pastors, and sisters and brothers in other congregations. We might pray for local needs or issues—a teachers' strike or factory closing or other congregation's needs, for example. We might also pray for more seasonal or occasional needs—for a good harvest in the fall, for favorable weather for planting in the spring, for wise, just, and good public leaders before elections (but see below on the elections note, because it needs to be clear that we are not advocating a single party or candidate as *God's* chosen party or candidate). Seasonal prayers might arise out of the church's year, too—as we enter Lent, we may specially pray for the church to be able to confess its sins and hear God's word of forgiveness. As we come up on the time when people affirm their baptisms or are confirmed, we pray for God to strengthen their faith, etc. Also, we can include prayers for people in various fields of work—for all doctors and nurses who heal, for those who protect peace and justice, for those working in disaster relief or social agencies, etc. We pray for families and communities, too, even without having to name specific needs all the time.
- **(4) *For the healing of the sick, and special needs known within the congregation***—We broadly pray for all people's distress—in body, mind, or spirit. We might pray broadly for all those who suffer from mental illness or addiction on a given Sunday, but we also pray for specific needs we know which have been shared with the congregation to pray for. This is also usually the spot where we leave a space of silence for people to add additional names and needs—as mentioned before, give people the time they need to offer names before

proceeding. We are often uncomfortable with silence in worship, but it is important to allow, even to cultivate, spaces of silence in our worship like this.

This is a place to pray for those names included in the Hope Prayer Binder or any additional names and needs brought up in Concerns and Celebrations.

As a new practice, I am also asking that beginning in 2008, we pray for the people, ministry, and mission of our sister congregations throughout the NWPA Synod. An additional schedule arranging those to pray for each week will be provided for you. We will also begin in 2008 praying for members and households of Hope with just one or two each week, cycling through the whole congregation over a year—Pastor Steve will also include a schedule of those names, too, for you.

- **(5) Prayers offering thanks for those who have died and comfort for those who grieve.** We Lutherans tend to avoid this last piece sometimes because it feels strange to pray for the dead, and perhaps rightly so. But we still can offer thanks to God for the witness of those who have gone before and to call on God to comfort and heal those who are grieving. This fifth kind of petition, then, may best be used only occasionally—if there has been a recent death in the congregation, or if we are commemorating a particular member of the church triumphant (for example, it is more than appropriate to offer thanks to God for the witness of Martin Luther King, Jr. on the Sunday nearest Jan. 16th).
- **Concluding Petition**—As mentioned, you are free to use the traditional, “Into your hands...” but you can also compose something else that accomplishes the same thing in other words—the point of this concluding prayer is to name once again that all of those for whom we pray are in God’s care and that we pray for these people in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

❖ *A Pattern for Writing Individual Petitions*

- Again, you have a lot of freedom with writing/composing prayers, but sometimes that freedom can be stifling if you don’t know where to start. So here is one approach you might use if you find it helpful—it is at least a starting place. Each petition can be broken up into four major motions: (1) addressing God; (2) recollection of who God is/what God has done before; (3) request of what we are asking God to give or do or provide; and then (4) the result we hope comes about of God’s answering. Here is an example:

(1) Lord of all nations, (2) you have loved this whole rebellious world enough to give your Son for us. (3) Let that love rule over all peoples and countries at war or who threaten the innocent, especially Israel and Palestine, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and in the Sudan, (4) so that we might all live in the peace you desire for the whole world and might begin to work for that peace right where we are. Lord, in your mercy...

❖ *Rules of Thumb in The Prayers*

- **Prayer is not gossip.** In other words, when we name specific needs within our community or congregation, we need to do so in good faith and not make public things that people do not want to become public. Not everyone is at a point of wanting the whole congregation to know the specifics of their cancer diagnosis or pregnancy complication or marital problems, and we need to respect that. We as church can support people in prayer with whatever level of specificity we are granted by other people, but it is not our *right to know* all the details in the lives of those we pray for.
- **Prayer is not a second sermon.** Sometimes it is pastors who are most guilty of this, but it’s worth remembering all around. God was there at the beginning of the service, and God

heard the sermon. In fact, God knows theology better than any of us, so we don't need to spend much, if any, time in our prayers reinforcing "lessons" or "morals" or "points" from the Bible lessons. In our prayer, we communicate *with* God; we do not send messages to people in the pews *about* God—that gets to be dangerously manipulative. (So there is no need for prayers like this, "O Lord, we all know that you want us to give a 10% tithe—please make those people in our church who give less than 10% realize that they are sinning against you." This is not prayer, this is passive-aggressiveness.)

- **God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and God is not American.** All right, so we can't get away from the fact that we bring our own convictions and politics with us in church. And often, people's faith strongly informs their politics—or at least we convince ourselves that our religious beliefs are the rationale for our politics (whether this is true or not is another question...). But even when we are convinced that *we've* got it right, ***no single political party, candidate, issue, or agenda is the touchstone for being truly faithful.*** There are faithful Christians who disagree about war, about capital punishment, about the benefits of democratic capitalism, and all sorts of political issues. Christians on both sides of the aisle are seeking to be faithful as they arrive at different conclusions.

What this means practically is that we ***DO NOT*** pray for a particular party or candidate to win an election, and we do not speak for God as to how Jesus would vote. This really just equates to more of that passive-aggressive stuff really aimed at people in the pews rather than at the God to whom we ought to be praying.

This also means that we need to recognize that God is not necessarily always on the "side" of our home country. As much as we like our home country, America is NOT God's chosen nation that can do no ill, and America is not guaranteed always to be in the right. Our prayers, then, are not that all nations would become more like the United States, but that all nations, including our own, would become more in line with the Kingdom/Reign of God in which justice, mercy, and abundance are present for everyone.

Finally, this means that we pray for our elected leaders, as the Scriptures call us to do, whether we like their policies or not. We pray for wisdom, guidance, justice, goodness, and courage in our leaders, not that our particular party would beat theirs in November. We do not have to pray that God would preserve policies that we feel are contrary to the will of God, but we do need to pray that God would use, shape, and work through even those leaders we do not like to provide for all people's needs. (*So, suppose I am strongly opposed to the death penalty on religious grounds—I do not have to pray for God to make Pennsylvania uphold the death penalty because the incumbent legislators are pro-capital punishment. But I am called for all of our leaders to be guided by God's own vision of justice and mercy, which I must admit is bigger than my full understanding.*)

- **As Jesus taught us, we pray for our enemies.** As with the issue of engaging political issues, praying for our enemies does not mean that we pray that our enemies would be victorious over us, at whatever level that might mean. We do not pray for terrorists to "win" or to be hidden from justice. But we do pray for God to bring reconciliation between warring parties, we pray for justice for *all* people, and we pray for the well-being of those caught in the midst of war—regardless of "side." For anyone else we might be tempted to regard as "enemies," we are especially called to pray for their well-being and to give them "faces" in prayer, so to speak, rather than regarding others as part of a faceless, evil "*them*."
- **God is free to choose *how* prayer is answered—and it may not be the way we would have chosen.** This means that in our prayers, we do not need to lay out a plan to tell God how *we* want things accomplished. So, for example, it *is* appropriate to pray for God to raise

up and equip faithful leaders in the church, but it would *not be* appropriate to then give God a list of acceptable candidates for bishop, from whom God must pick. We pray for our teachers and students, but we do not tell God what compromise compensation package the teachers on strike should accept. In other words, the God we meet in the Bible does listen and act in the process of prayer, but God is not a genie at our beck and call. We pray in such a way that lets God, and not us, be God.

- **Faithful prayer will change the persons praying.** Be careful—prayer is potent, even risky stuff! When we pray, not only do we lift up concerns and needs before the God to whom we pray, but also to the whole worshipping community. What we pray for becomes what we think about, what we are committed to, and how we act. Praying for peace leads us, if we will let it, to become people who make peace. Praying for healing leads us to a deeper concern for the needs and hurts of others. That makes prayer both an incredible gift and a great responsibility—just keep that in mind as you lead us in prayer in worship.
- **Prayer *does* something, even if we do not have a good explanation for how prayer “works.”** We can get caught up in all sorts of mental questions about prayer: why bother praying if God already knows what we need? What if we’re praying for the “wrong” things? Does enough prayer *make* God do something—and if so, why doesn’t God act first with my praying for it? We can get ourselves twisted up in lots of mental knots—and yet we are still called to pray. We are called by God to be in conversation with this same God, trusting that it is meaningful and purposeful.

Final Thoughts on Being an Assisting Minister

- ❖ Pray honestly.
- ❖ Speak clearly, slowly, and loudly, but also naturally. You don’t need a “holy tone of voice.”
- ❖ For Lutherans, even *our* worship of *God* really centers on God’s coming *to us* in Word and Sacrament—the living God is the center, not the pastor or assisting minister. Let your leadership point beyond yourself to the God who has called us, rather than calling attention to the robed people up front. Remember, at our best, we are an extended finger for the divine butterfly to land on for a moment, so that everyone else can look on in wonder and awe.
- ❖ The Lord’s Supper is first and foremost a shared meal at which Jesus is the host. If you’re not sure how best to handle something, or if you forget what the “right” way to do something is, remember (1) this is Jesus’ meal, and Jesus will “make it happen” regardless of our mistakes, and (2) ask how you would handle this issue if you were helping to serve a meal at your house.
Note: This is the logic (at least it’s Pastor Steve’s logic) for not heaping lots of “stuff” on the Communion Table—because at home, we lose the power of the meal if the table is cluttered with “stuff.” It is not so much that the Table is too holy for common things to touch it, but that it ceases to be a Meal Table if it become a desk or storage facility or even a museum of holy artifacts. The Table is a Table—period.
- ❖ Worship is less performance and more practice—it is in Sunday worship that we practice being followers of Jesus so that we are able to dare it out in the world during the rest of our week.
- ❖ And one last time, remember, you are a gift in the life of the congregation—thank you for your leadership among the whole people of Hope.