

## Why Do We Do That?

*This is the fifth in a series of articles on Lutheran customs and practices. Do you have an idea for a church practice you would like to have explained? Suggest it to Pastor Becker*

### **Movement in Worship**

Lutheran worship is not a concert or lecture in which people sit watching while a leader or a group faces them. It is an activity in which all participate in various ways.

The Pastor moves in various ways during the service. Sometimes he faces toward the people and sometimes faces the same direction as them. This is because he is the spokesman of the church in speaking to people for God and in speaking to God for the people. In parts of the service, God speaks to us through the invocation, scriptures, benediction, etc. For these parts, the pastor faces the people. In other parts, we address God in prayer and praise. For these parts, the pastor faces the altar and the cross. In our church the pastor stands behind the altar facing the people for the Introit, which includes both speaking to God and from God. He also stands behind the altar to consecrate Holy Communion, using words which Jesus addresses to us.

At the beginning of the service, the pastor stands on the first step for the confession of sins. This would be outside the altar rail in many churches. By his position there, he is joining the rest of the congregation as a

sinner seeking God's mercy. After the absolution, he represents the congregation as he steps up to the altar, symbolizing our being brought near to God.

The pastor goes to the lectern to read the scripture readings and to the pulpit to explain them in the sermon. Traditionally, the side of the altar on the side of our lectern is the "Epistle" side, from which the Epistle reading was read, and the side toward our pulpit is the "Gospel" side from which the Gospel reading was read. The Gradual, between these two readings, was sung as the pastor stepped from one side to the other. (gradual means step.)

The congregation also gets involved in moving. Our worship begins with greeting one another. Traditionally, as in some congregations, the "Greeting of Peace" is done just before receiving Holy Communion (see #25 on pg. 171 in Lutheran Worship). It originates in Jesus' instruction, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." Matt. 5:23-24

There is movement when the offering is received. Why is this a part of worship, rather than just having a basket at the door? It is because our offering is an act of worship. It is not just a way of collecting money but a way of expressing our faith and thanks to God.

Members of the congregation move when the

come forward to receive Holy Communion. Jesus' body and blood, which takes away our sin, invites us to come near to God and draws us close to one another. We do not just carelessly pass it down the pew as if it did not matter who received it and what they believed.

Worshippers also stand and sit during the service. Ordinarily, we stand when God is speaking to us – as servants standing respectfully before their master – for the invocation, absolution, Gospel reading, benediction, etc.

We also stand when speaking to God in prayer, as in the confession, hymn of praise, collect of the day, general prayer, etc.. In churches which have kneelers in the pews, the pastor and congregation may kneel for the prayers instead. In our church, the posture for prayer is typically head bowed and hands folded. Others may pray facing up with hands raised. All of these postures are mentioned in the Bible, as well as lying face down!

Some churches have a custom of standing for hymns, as we do for the closing hymn. A historic practice followed in some churches is standing for the last verse of a hymn if that verse is a doxology – praise – to the triune God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Each of these movements is saying something with our bodies as we worship. We honor God as our Lord, that we seek mercy from our Savior, and that we come to him as dear children.