

Contemplative Morning Prayer Service
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
Greensboro, NC

Rev. Greg Farrand and Kristen Leigh Mitchell, M.Div., co-created this liturgy in April 2016 for Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Greensboro, NC. Holy Trinity is a large, program-sized parish with three standard Sunday morning services (8:00 Rite I, 9:00 & 11:15 Rite II).

Greg noticed that there were a number of people who had recently become interested in the Episcopal Church through their involvement with the Servant Leadership School—an ecumenical Christian formation program at Holy Trinity. Many participants, who were coming from a more evangelical background, wanted to be part of the Episcopal church but felt that the “traditional” services were incompatible with their cultural, economic, or spiritual values. The liturgy seemed to them to lack spirituality and community-building interactivity. Our experiment was to see if we could introduce a Sunday morning experience that was based in the liturgy, but that would appeal to those who felt put off by their perceptions of what “liturgy” means.

Towards this end, we used the basic outlines of Morning Prayer and the Sunday Eucharist as the “bones” to craft a Sunday morning experience with a much more casual and interactive atmosphere, focusing primarily on spiritual formation. The liturgical outline itself was only a small part of what made this service work. Much of it had to do with the atmosphere: the space, songs, and conversation. The chairs were arranged in a semi-circle, coffee and donuts were served, casual dress was the norm, and conversation was encouraged right up until the moment that the service began.

Kristen Mitchell, trained in leading paperless chant and singing, led the music in an interactive, participatory style that integrated with and facilitated liturgical movement. The opening song, for example, created a “soft start” that got everyone’s attention and encouraged them to find their seat, as well as a gesture to rise for the call to worship. The music was introduced very simply: “Our music today is in a communal chant style that would have been common in the early church, and I will be leading you through the ancient practice of call and response, so I’ll sing a melody and then you just repeat it back to me. Then we’ll sing it together a few times, as we let the words sink deeper and deeper into our hearts and our spirits...”

Liturgical sections were grouped/named in the bulletin to help people who were unfamiliar with liturgy connect spiritually with the movement of the service (gather, center, awaken, connect, go forth). Greg led the group in an open-ended “Q&A” response/discussion section after the sermon, which invited honest reflection and interaction within the liturgy itself, which was a powerful experience for many. Rather than providing pat “answers,” Greg invited real wrestling, questions, and holy discussion.

GATHER: We come together as God's beloved

Opening Song

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you. (Isaiah 60:1)*

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator,
the love at our beginning without end,
in our midst, and with us.

People: God is with us. Here we find new life.

Let us pray: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, so that we may truly love you and worthily praise your holy name; through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

People: Amen.

CENTER: We ground ourselves in God's presence

Confession

Let us now confess to God our sins

**People: Merciful God, we acknowledge that we have sinned
in what we have thought and said,
in the wrong that we have done and in the good that we have not done.**

We have sinned in ignorance;

we have sinned in weakness;

and we have sinned through our own deliberate fault.

We are truly sorry. We repent now and turn toward you.

Forgive us, for our Savior Christ's sake,

and renew our lives to the glory of your name.

Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

God the Creator brings us new life, forgives, and redeems us.

Take hold of this forgiveness and live your life in the Spirit of Jesus.

People: Amen.

Song of Presence

Draw me deeper into silence; draw me deeper into You.

Practice of Three Deep Breaths

I invite you now to take a *first deep breath*, to consciously let go of the past, the residue of the morning, and whatever tension, fatigue, or preoccupation you might have carried in with you.

I invite you to take a *second deep breath*, to arrive more fully in this present moment—to really land in the here and now, and in the knowledge that God is here with us.

And I invite you to take a *third deep breath*, to open yourself to what comes next—open heart, open body, open mind, open spirit, to what God has for you in this moment.

Silence

Song of Presence (refrain)

AWAKEN: We open ourselves to God's wisdom

First Lesson

Revelation 21:1-6

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

People: Thanks be to God.

Hymn

“We Are One in the Spirit”

Gospel Reading (please stand)

John 13:31-35

The Holy Gospel according to John.

People: Praise and glory to God.

This is the Gospel of Christ.

People: Praise to Christ, the Word.

Sermon

Facilitated Time for Questions & Discussion

CONNECT: We reconnect with the world a renewed people

Closing Prayers (please stand)

Lord, you have called us to serve you. Grant that we may walk in your presence: your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills; until, at the end of our journey, we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: Amen.

Closing Song

*Remain in the company of God this day
Remain, Remain, Remain.*

Dismissal

Go in peace. Go in love. Go in hope.

People: Amen.