

LITURGICAL FORMATION & FOOTPRINTS OF GOD

Liturgical Postures: Significance In Anglican Worship

Whether it is liturgical or freeform of worship, whichever it is, the kind of posture indicates how we express our prayer. Postures serve as a way to communicate nonverbally with God. Postures are essential to liturgical worship and help orient one's heart and mind towards God's presence. It should become second nature and help us focus our hearts and minds on the divine.

Types of Postures

Many things happen when we come for worship: we stand to sing, sit to hear the Word of God and stand when the priest reads the gospel and during the creed. These impressions invoke thoughts of sacred moments. We kneel when it is time for intercession and bow when we receive the sacrament.

As human beings, the physical sensations we experience can shape our intangible experiences and ideas. Through actions, we can build a bridge between the visible and the invisible - by using our body and sign language as a sensory recreation of the mystery. In essence, this represents the unknown and helps bring it to life in a way we can better understand and appreciate, writes Angle Manuel Rodriguez in her article on postures.

The great commandment reminds us how we must honour and worship God.

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” The correlation between the body, mind and spirit. Enables prayer to uplift or calm and promote healing.

What are the different liturgical postures, and how can we understand the importance of them in the way we worship and show reverence to God?

Sitting

Sitting and praying is rare in the bible but not absent. An example is King David, who “went in and sat down before the Lord, and he said . . .” (2

Sam 7:18;). When David used this posture, he sought instruction from the Lord through his prophet. (e.g. 2 Kings 4:38; Eze 8:1; 33:31) Who is ready to serve him?

Sitting, not slouching, not sideways, is associated with the act of listening. Keep your hands open and your arms at your sides. Avoid clamping your body or crossing your arms and legs when listening. Sitting reminds us of how the disciples sat at the feet of their Master, eager to listen and learn.

During worship, we spend a lot of time sitting. We usually choose a comfortable place to sit and listen to the reading (unless it is from the gospel). We also sit during the Psalms and other canticles (although local customs may vary and standing may be required) and during the sermon.

Sit in silence and focus on God. Avoid distractions like phones or any other activities.

Standing

In the Old Testament, the preferred practice was standing over kneeling in the presence of God. In 2 Chronicles 20:5,13, it describes a corporate act of prayer. When the Kingdom of Judah was about to be invaded by the combined military forces of Moab and Ammon, King Jehoshaphat called on the people to pray. He stood in the assembly in the house of the Lord and prayed for release from captivity while the people were standing before the Lord.

Hannah presented her petition to the Lord while standing, and the Lord answered her (1 Samuel 1: 26). Job, too, prayed to stand. (Job 30:20)

Standing expresses a readiness to carry out the good news.

When do we stand? We stand at the Opening prayer, Gloria, Creed Gospel, the sharing of peace, Eucharistic prayer and other points indicated by the officiating minister.

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Kneeling

In the scriptures, there are many examples of people kneeling and praying. For instance, Daniel prayed on his knees three times (Daniel 6:10). Stephen fell on his knees and talked to God before he died as a martyr (Acts 7:60). Peter knelt before the corpse of Tabitha and prayed. And she came back to life (Acts 9:40; Acts 20:36; Eph 3:14)

Humbleness and prayer are expressed by lowering oneself to the ground. "humble" and "humility" stem from the Latin word for earth. Kneeling has been a gesture of humble submission to God. Kneeling and genuflecting indicate respect and adoration.

In Mark 1:40- A leper comes to Jesus and begs Him for help. He falls to his knees before Him and says: "If you will, you can make me clean". It is hard to assess the significance of the gesture. What we have here is undoubtedly not a proper act of adoration but rather a supplication expressed fervently in bodily form while showing trust in a power beyond the mere human, adds Pope Benedict XVI.

Philippians 2:10 states, "So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God."

We kneel for

1. Preparing for Worship
2. Confessions.
3. Intercession.
4. Consecration of the Eucharist
5. Absolution and Benediction.
6. After service, we offer our prayers.

Genuflection or genuflexion

This is an act of bending a knee to the ground, as distinguished from kneeling, which more strictly involves both knees. It has been a gesture of deep respect for a superior from early times. Today, the gesture is a common Christian religious practice of the Anglican Church.

However, it is not often practised within our churches.

The Latin word "genuflection", derived from the English word, originally meant kneeling with both knees rather than rapidly dropping to one knee and immediately rising, which became customary in Western Churches. It is often called "going down on one knee" or "bowing the knee".

When genuflecting, it is customary to kneel on the left knee before a human dignitary, whether from an ecclesiastical or civil background. However, in Christian churches and chapels, one should genuflect on the right knee when the Sacrament is placed in a tabernacle or veiled.

When the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in a church tabernacle, the customary gesture of genuflecting is observed. The prayer book does not require this act of personal piety and adoration. It is generally performed by those who enter the church and acknowledge the presence of the consecrated Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, which are stored in a tabernacle. Many need to be aware of this, but it is good to know about it.

It is often a customary practice to pay reverence to the presence of the Lord in a church through a brief act of worship while entering or exiting the premises. This typically involves a respectful genuflection in the direction of the reserved area.

The sign of the cross.

The sign of the cross shows our consent to the mysteries of the Trinity- In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and the redeeming act of God.

This sign traces back to early Christianity within the Apostolic Tradition. " directs it to be used during the minor exorcism, the sacrament of baptism during ablutions and before praying at canonical hours (Mattins, evensong, compline and in times of temptation.

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At baptism, the Lord marks us with the Sign of the Cross as a symbol of claiming us as His own. When we make the sign of the Cross, we reaffirm our loyalty to Him. By tracing the Cross on our bodies, we reject the idea of owning ourselves and declaring that we solely belong to Him (see Luke 9:23). It is a mark of discipleship.

We make the sign of the cross during:

- I Private prayers before the service
- II Beginning of the gospel
- III Absolution
- IV Before receiving the Holy Communion
- V The Blessing

Bow

Throughout history, many cultures have shown respect for royalty and the divine by using bows. Parents teach their children to bow their heads, close their eyes and hold their hands in prayer. We bow our heads during mealtime prayers.

Bowing is an essential part of prayer life, as in Psalms. But by your great love, I can come into your house; in reverence, I bow down toward your holy temple (Psalm 5:7 NIV). Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker (Psalm 95:6 NIV). I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your name for your unfailing love and faithfulness (Psalm 138:2 NIV).

The bow shows submission and humility. Each psalm and canticle sung during the Divine Office concludes with the doxology, and we bow at the words, “Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” During the creed, we bow at the mention of the Incarnation (and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man)

Though this is not widely observed in worship, it is an act of worship that needs to be revisited in keeping with what our parents have taught us and how we show reverence in prayer.

Raising our Hands.

There are references in the bible to raising hands, clapping and raising both hands in prayer.

In the Old Testament, Moses raised his hands to God to seek divine help in prayer (Exodus 9:29). King David writes, “I will praise you as long as I live and in your name I will lift up my hands. (Psalm 63:4)

David, a songwriter and worshiper, writes, “I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name, I will lift up my hands” (Psalm 63:4), and he encouraged others to do the same (Psalm 134:2). Likewise, the prophets prayed similarly. Ezra said, “I fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord. (Ezra 9:5). During worship, he stood and praised the Lord the great God, and all the people lifted their hands and responded, Amen. (Nehemiah 8:6; Lamentations 2:19)

It can be an act of surrender, an act of adoration, a sign of our dependence on God, like a child who lifts up their hands to a mother for a father.

In the past, Anglicans stuck to liturgical postures and were expected to behave appropriately and formally. Things have changed; more church members express their devotions freely and openly, lifting hands, clapping, speaking in tongues, and even dancing. Although this practice was once considered alien in the Anglican liturgy, it has been accepted as a sign of commitment to worship. This is because worship is not just about our hearts and minds; it involves our postures, which can tell a story and our relationship with God.

In conclusion, these liturgical postures in worship serve well in our Anglican worship and should be observed as much as possible.

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