

Sit, Stand, Kneel

What's all the commotion?

Episcopalians at worship are a people in motion. At any given point during our service we might be kneeling, standing, or sitting. Sometimes all stand at once; sometimes some are standing and some are kneeling; on occasion all 3 worship postures are in practice at the same time! Visitors are often confused and intimidated by the physical commotion. What follows are a few notes on sitting, standing and kneeling in Sunday morning services in an Episcopal church.

First of all, know this – you cannot do it wrong! You worship with your heart and with your mind. What your body does has no bearing on how much God loves you!

Gathering for worship– Before the service it is appropriate to **sit or kneel** in quiet prayer or contemplation.

Processional Hymn– It is appropriate to **stand** and sing during the opening hymn. For a multitude of reasons some folks are simply **unable to stand**. If you cannot **stand**, or if standing is uncomfortable then by all means **sit**!

Opening Acclamation through the Collect of the day– Following the processional hymn the officiant and the congregation engage in a sort of prayerful call and response conversation which includes a hymn of praise and concludes with the collect of the day. If you are able, it is most appropriate to **stand** here.

The Lessons– This is a listening portion of our worship service. **Sitting** to listen is appropriate here.

Sequence Hymn– **Stand** to sing.

The Gospel– We **stand** during the Gospel which sets this reading apart.

The Sermon– **Sit** here for this listening portion of the service.

The Nicene Creed– The whole body of worshippers **stands** together to read the Nicene Creed, which is a summary of what we believe about God.

Prayers of the People– **Stand or kneel**. Here is where it starts to get confusing! You will find folks both **kneeling** and **standing** from here on out. It is an ancient and biblical practice to stand during any encounter with God. Kneeling is a custom that has developed more recently in the church. The Prayers of the People are most hopefully an encounter with God, so standing is appropriate; however, some have grown so accustomed to **kneeling** that to **stand** would hinder their praying.

The Confession– The confusion continues! In the Rite One (8AM) service there is an explicit instruction to kneel. However there is no instruction in the Rite Two order. Some find kneeling a particularly confessional posture, and others find standing a more comfortable posture for the confessional conversation – either is fine, and again it is the content of the confession that matters most, not the posture of the body. **Stand or Kneel**.

The Peace– **stand if you are able**.

All **stand!** Everyone rises in body and spirit to share Christian greetings.

The Eucharistic Prayers– Everyone **stands** at the start, and then **some stand and some kneel**. The most ancient posture for this space in the service is **standing**. The Eucharistic prayers are the prayers of the entire body, and it is therefore appropriate that everyone stand for this elegant conversation with God. Indeed everyone in the room is a celebrant in the Eucharistic feast- the priest cannot conduct communion by himself. After the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) some are accustomed to **kneeling**. Either **standing or kneeling** is fine. Don't be surprised if there is a mix of standers and kneelers at this portion in the service. Enjoy the variety!

The Postcommunion Hymn– This is a nice spot, post-meal, to **sit or kneel** to sing a familiar hymn.

The Postcommunion Prayer– This is a good place for the entire body to **stand**. This prayer is spoken by all and standing as one is an appropriate posture. Here **some stand and some kneel**.

The Blessing– If you are **standing** for the post-communion prayer, remain standing for the blessing. Likewise if you are kneeling remain so.

The Recessional Hymn– If you are able – **stand!** We have prayed our prayers, shouted our praise and thanksgivings, the feast is done, now we go out into the world to spread the love that has been made known to us in Jesus Christ...and we leave singing!

The Dismissal– You simply must **stand** if you are able to call out in a loud voice, “Thanks be to God!” in response to the dismissal.

After the service– **Stand or kneel**. Some like to **kneel** for quiet prayer after the dismissal, and some enjoy quite the opposite – they remain **standing** and carry on with the momentum of the final hymn and the dismissal by greeting one another with smiles and laughter as the organist plays a spirited postlude. Expect both to go on at once and know that either is fine.

We hope you will enjoy the various modes and measures of expression both verbal and physical in our Episcopal Church service, and we hope you will feel welcome to try on different postures from time to time all the while seeking to deepen your fellowship with God and your neighbor.