

Special Sundays

Liturgy,
art, &
poetry
for special days
of worship

Liturgy for Pride Sunday / Imago Dei Sunday

Written by members of
More Light Presbyterians

We invite you to implement this service as-is, or adapt it for your context. Either way, please attribute credit as follows: Liturgy by Rev. Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava, Avery Arden, Rev. Brooke Scott, and Matt Webb | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

Introduction

About Pride Sunday

The first Pride marches were held on June 28, 1970 in cities around the United States, on the one year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Thousands of LGBTQIA+¹ people gathered to commemorate Stonewall and demand equal rights. Invisibility was not an option anymore. Within a few years, gay rights organizations were founded throughout the world.

The first Pride Sunday at a church is attributed to the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in the early 1970s, shortly after the Stonewall riots. The MCC is a Christian denomination founded in 1968 with a specific focus on serving the LGBTQIA+ community. In the decades after Stonewall, a number of Mainline Protestant denominations also began holding annual Pride Sunday worship services as a way to celebrate LGBTQIA+ identity and affirm the church's commitment to equity.

Both Pride and worship are acts of celebration and protest, acts of remembrance, and enactments of a world where all belong. We practice these acts in a world where the safety and rights of LGBTQIA+ people are threatened each day. On Pride Sunday—or Imago Dei Sunday—we cry out for justice and rejoice in the beauty of our embodied selves. We remember the suffering of those who came before us and imagine new ways of loving ourselves and our neighbors.

Pride Sunday is a celebration of the image of God in everyone and the diversity of humanity. In the beginning when God breathed the breath of life in us, God blessed us and called us very good. There is no better way to celebrate the fact that we were created in the image of the Divine than by being unapologetically ourselves and becoming the people God called us to be: authentic, whole, complex, and made to love, even when others say, “they have gone out of their mind” (Mark 3:21).

¹ This acronym is an umbrella term used to refer to people who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual, plus all those whose identity transcends the bounds of culturally-prescribed norms for gender and/or sexuality. For more resources on language and terminology, go here: mlp.org/language-terminology

Introduction *(continued)*

About the Service

This service is designed to celebrate all bodies, lives, and ministries, but especially those of our LGBTQIA+ siblings. The service should last about 50-60 minutes. This liturgy could be used anytime throughout June, which is Pride Month. Alternatively, there are many other times of year it could be used, such as LGBTQIA History Month in October, National Coming Out Day on October 11th, or Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20th. We have alternatively titled this service “Imago Dei Sunday” so you can use it for other times in the year.

Music Suggestions

Specific hymns and songs are suggested throughout this liturgy, however, you may also wish to pull from this longer list:

- “We Are a Rainbow” by David Kai (2017)²
- “Impartial, Compassionate God of All Lives” by Adrienne Stricker (2019)³
- “God Calls You Good” by Paul M. Vasile (2017)⁴
- “Hear, O Lord, My Plea for Justice” by Michael Morgan (2010)
- “All My Days” by Laurie Zelman and Mark A. Miller (2003)
- “All Belong Here” by The Many (2017)—*former guest musicians with A Sanctified Art*⁵
- “Plowshare Prayer” by Spencer LaJoye (2022)⁶—*former guest musician with A Sanctified Art*
- “Raise Up” by Semler (2022)
- “We’ll All Be Free” by William Matthews and Lisa Gungor (2018)
- “Good Day” by Flamy Grant and Derek Webb (2022)
- “Simple Gospel” by United Pursuit (Will Reagan, Brock Human), covered by Q Worship Collective (2023)

Scripture Suggestions

The following are suggested scriptures for this service. See the supplementary materials at the end of the liturgy for: commentary on each reading, alternative scripture options, a scripted version of the Esther reading, and an inclusive-language translation of Psalm 27.

- Esther 3:1-11, 4:1-17
- Psalm 27 [all of it, or abridged to 1-2, 5, 10-14]
- Mark 3:20-35

² This hymn is available on pages 78-80 of *Songs for the Holy Other*, a collection of hymns affirming the LGBTQIA2S+ Community, organized by The Hymn Society: thehymnsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Songs-for-the-Holy-Other-2020.pdf Please read page 4 in this document for instructions on permissions and licensing.

³ This hymn is also available on page 39 of *Songs for the Holy Other*.

⁴ This hymn is also available on page 19 of *Songs for the Holy Other*.

⁵ This hymn is also available on page 7 of *Songs for the Holy Other*.

⁶ Sheet music (lead sheet + SATB choir) can be licensed here: major7publishing.com/team-4/plowshare-prayer

Introduction (continued)

About This Liturgy Outline

- *Italicized lines are notes for worship leaders.*
- Unbolded lines are to be spoken by worship leaders and, when appropriate, printed in bulletins or projected on screens.
- **Bolded lines are to be spoken by the congregation and printed in bulletins or projected on screens.**

Materials & Setup

Materials

The following materials are needed for the service:

- Colorful paper slips large enough to write a sentence or two on (for example, 2"x8"); there should be enough slips for each worshiper to have 2. These will be used for the belovedness prayer and ritual after the sermon and can be turned into a communal art piece afterward.
- Writing utensils, 1 for each worshiper.
- 1 large poster or foam board, large enough to display a paper slip from every worshiper (for example, if 50 worshipers attend, the board should be able to fit 50 paper slips).
- Glue or tape to attach the paper slips to the poster or foam board.

Preparation Before the Service

During the Belovedness Prayer and Ritual after the sermon, worshipers will be invited to write on two slips of paper in response to the leader's prompts. Make sure each worshiper has access to two paper slips and a writing utensil. These materials can be placed in pews or under seats, stuffed in bulletins, or passed out by volunteers. On one of these prayer slips, worshipers will write a word or phrase that reminds them of their belovedness. During the offering, these prayer slips can be collected with the monetary gifts. Afterward, we encourage you to tape or glue these prayer slips onto a large poster or foam board for display. Get creative! You could arrange them into the shape of a rainbow, or organize the colors by ROYGBIV if you want. May this art piece become a reminder to your community of the belovedness of each member.

Additionally, the prayer of confession can be led by 4 different readers who are sitting among the pews/seats and stand to read their assigned sections. You may wish to have a diverse group of readers to reflect the diversity of God's people. They may each need microphones, depending on the size of your sanctuary.

Order of Worship

We Gather Around the Word

Gathering Music

Suggested hymn:

"We Are a Rainbow" by David Kai (2017)⁷

Welcome

In your welcome to the gathered community, you may wish to pull from the liturgy introduction to share more about the history of Pride. Below is a paragraph you can adapt to include in your welcome and/or print in the bulletin:

In the beginning, when God breathed the breath of life in us, God blessed us and called us very good. There is no better way to celebrate the fact that we were created in the image of the Divine than by being unapologetically ourselves and becoming the people God called us to be: authentic, whole, complex, and made to love, even when others say, "they have gone out of their mind" (Mark 3:21).

Both Pride and worship are acts of celebration and protest, acts of remembrance, and enactments of a world where all belong. We practice these acts in a world where the safety and rights of LGBTQIA+ people are threatened each day. On Pride Sunday/Imago Dei Sunday, we cry out for justice and rejoice in the beauty of our embodied selves. We remember the suffering of those who came before us and imagine new ways of loving ourselves and our neighbors.

Today, you are welcome in this worship service exactly as you are, embracing all aspects of yourself: your doubts, curiosity, anger, hope, disappointment, complexities, faith, and joy. You were made very good. Let's rejoice in this truth and worship the One who made us all.

Call to Worship

Source of Life, in the beginning,
you made us and called us beloved.

When we forget how to love,
you remind us we are beloved.

When the powers of the world try to oppress us,
you name us beloved.

When our siblings in faith condemn us,
you claim us: beloved.

We are your beloved, so today we sing your praises, Source of Love.

⁷ This hymn is available on pages 78-80 of Songs for the Holy Other, a collection of hymns affirming the LGBTQIA2S+ Community, organized by The Hymn Society: thehymnsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Songs-for-the-Holy-Other-2020.pdf Please read page 4 in this document for instructions on permissions and licensing.