

For Insights:

### Flowers in the Pulpit: Worship?

God has given us life among plants and animals. God has made humanity responsible for their stewardship. Although most of us at Duke Memorial no longer live by the cultivation of plants or animals, we continue the agrarian tradition of offering the first fruits of our "crop" to God in the flowers and green plants. A worship historian in a thousand years would call this a continuation of our ancient Jewish ancestors' practice.

In the Early Church, the bishop was required to receive all offerings, milk, honey, olives, and cheese, whenever they were given. Today, we continue to offer our "first fruits" to God: the first portion of our "harvest", just as those of the Early Church brought their milk, honey, olives, and cheese, we bring flowers and green plants.

The plants and flowers we place near the altar are our praise of God as the Author of life. God provided God's own self and Son, Jesus Christ, as the sacrifice for our reconciliation to God. In our humble offering of the plants and flowers, we give God praise and glory for life abundant.

During the two "high" Church seasons, Christmas and Easter, flowers are given in honor and in memory of loved ones in the Church. In the giving of the plants in this way, we honor God, the Creator and Redeemer. We are able to find concrete connection between our lives here and those who are with God. In these two seasons, we celebrate anew the giving of God's Son to the world as a sacrifice for our reconciliation to God.

Flowers or green plants behind the altar rail are our offering to God of the "first fruits" of our community, a tradition of thousands of years. They remind us of God's gift of life and our responsibility to use good stewardship of it. Finally, in honor or memory of loved ones, they remind us of our connection with the communion of saints. Consider our offerings to God on Sunday mornings: music, praise, money, and plants or flowers. Each is but a return to God of God's abundant gifts to us.

*Para Drake,  
Altar Guild*



For Insights:

## Worship and the Opening Voluntary

The minister goes to the pulpit area and makes announcements. The bustling, lively conversations in the sanctuary hush, listening expectantly. At the end of the reminders, the minister greets the congregation, ~~and worship begins.~~ <sup>a signal</sup> ~~that begins worship.~~ Two ushers walk down the aisles and close the doors beside the pulpit area. The narthex doors are closed. The organist begins the Opening Voluntary. The procession of the crucifer and the acolytes begins. This is how worship begins at Duke Memorial.

The movement of the procession is paced. The music fills the sanctuary right up to the corners of the balcony. The lights, reminding us of God's presence in the sanctuary, also call us to quiet meditation and listening. Worship during the Opening Voluntary is a time for quiet prayers, for centering oneself in preparation for the rest of the service.

The Opening Voluntary is an offering to God. The music of the Church is played not as background music for continuing our conversations or as a concert for our enjoyment; it is our corporate praise of God's grace and blessings of life. When we sit quietly, listening or praying, we join in with the musicians and choir in the offering; we in the pews share "ownership" of the offering when our attention is focused upon the music or our prayers.

Our Wed. evening Covenant Discipleship group prays "for the Church and its ministry, for those who worship, and those who lead us in worship" during the Opening Voluntary. We wrote this clause specifically for this time so that we would be lifting our prayers for the Church as one.

Would you join our Covenant Discipleship group in prayer Sundays during the Opening Voluntary? Our corporate worship takes on new meaning when we prepare together by centering ourselves during the Opening Voluntary.

Para Drake, Altar Guild



Sarah + Minnie Mae

Here are other  
materials for  
the altar guild  
~~minutes note~~  
to notebook -

- Para  
P.S. A. Guild Guidebook  
is in AG Room!