After the opening hymn, the presider (the priest leading the service) and the assembly (everyone else) say the Opening Acclamation – a formal way of greeting one another – usually followed by a short piece of music praising God or asking for God’s mercy. (Music like this, part of the liturgy itself, is often found in the front of the Hymnal in a section where the numbers are preceded by “S-“ which stands for Service Music.”)

Next the presider will say a prayer called a Collect which is mean to collect us and our thoughts together; it is the concluding piece of our gathering time.

**THE LITURGY OF THE WORD (Readings, sermon, statements of faith, prayers of the community)**

We all sit to hear readings or lessons. Most of the time there is a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament); a psalm; a reading from the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) and a reading from the Gospels. These lessons are part of a set lectionary which assigns readings for every Sunday on a three year cycle. Members of the congregation normally read the first two lessons. The psalm is said or sung by everyone. Your bulletin will either have the psalm printed in it or tell you where to find it in the Prayer Book.

Because the Gospel, stories of Jesus’ life and death, are central to our faith, that reading gets special treatment.  The Gospel book is brought into the middle of the assembly and read by the priest. Everyone stands for this and turns to face the Gospel Book.

Following the Gospel a sermon is preached, usually by a priest, but on occasion it might be a lay person. The sermon is meant to take what we have heard in the lessons and engage those learnings with our current lives.

After the sermon, the next several parts of the liturgy provide a way for us to respond to what we have heard. Because we are actively responding we stand up. We say the Nicene Creed, an ancient statement of faith used by most Christian churches which binds us together with Christians of all generations. We pray the Prayers of the People. These are a series of petitions led by a member of the congregation with a response from the entire assembly at the end of each one. The petitions include prayers for the Church, for the world and the nation, for those who are sick and those who have died. The presider concludes these with a collect, once again collecting our prayers.

After the prayers we say together the Confession. (This is sometimes omitted during very celebratory seasons.)  It is an opportunity to confess together the ways we have not loved God or others.  At the conclusion of the confession, the presider says the absolution, words reminding us that God forgives our sins.

The priest then bids The Peace.  Sometimes this might be an awkward moment for people who are newcomers or visitors. What we are doing is ritually enacting our need to be in right relationship with one another before we go to communion. We do that by saying to one another, “Peace be with you.” People may shake hands or embrace each other. You can greet the people right around you. In some places the Peace is a little more exuberant and people will actually leave their seats to exchange the Peace with more people. We sometimes forget the ritual we are enacting and devolve into more casual greetings and other conversation because we are so glad to see each other!

**THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE (collecting gifts, preparing and praying over meal, sharing bread and wine)**

A collection of money is taken at this point, often while a piece of music is sung or played. Our offerings not only support the life and work of the community, they also symbolize our bringing ourselves to worship and to this work. It is fine for you to put in whatever amount of money or put in nothing at all. (You may wonder why so many people don’t put anything in. There are many reasons, but one big one is that many church members make their financial contributions in ways other than putting it in the plate, i.e. through credit card deductions, monthly checks, etc.) The bread and wine for communion are part of our offering; they, along with the money gifts, are brought to the Altar Table where the liturgical ministers set the Table for Communion.

The presider prays an extended prayer. It begins with a dialogue between the presider and assembly called the Sursum Corda (literally “lift up your hearts”). The presider then praises God for God’s action in our lives. The initial section can be specific to the church season and it concludes with the Sanctus, Holy, holy, holy, a response sung by the entire assembly. Then the prayer continues with a retelling of the story of the Last Supper. The presider asks the Holy Spirit to come into the bread and wine and into us. At the end we all say Amen, our way of assenting to the prayer. We stand at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer. After the Sanctus some people kneel and some continue standing. Different communities have different sensibilities around this; in some places most people stand, in others most people kneel. Either one is perfectly all right.

At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer everyone prays the Lord’s Prayer and the presider breaks a piece of the bread symbolizing Christ’s body being broken for us. After this symbolic breaking, some practical preparations are made for the Communion which might include pouring additional chalices of wine, breaking the bread into pieces for distribution, etc. And then words called the Fraction Anthem are either spoken or sung reflecting the actions taking place. Once the bread and wine are ready the presider invites people to the meal.

At St. Brendan’s people generally come forward and stand in a semi-circle facing the altar. Depending on how many are attending this may be done all together or first with one side of the church and then again for the other half. It is a good time to watch what others are doing and follow their example. St. Brendan's invites anyone who is seeking God to join us in receiving communion.

If you don’t want to receive communion that is completely fine. You may remain in your seat, or you also may come forward and cross your arms over your chest which signals the priest to offer you a blessing instead of communion.

If you do want to receive, hold out your hands and the priest will put a piece of bread in your hand. Then another liturgical minister will come with the cup of wine (and it is wine). There are a few choices here. You can eat the bread when it is put in your hand and then take a sip of wine from the cup. It is okay and actually helpful for you to touch the cup and help guide it to your mouth. If you don’t want to drink from the cup you may leave the bread in your hand and the person with the cup will dip it in the wine, then place it in your mouth. It is also totally fine to receive only the bread or only the wine; either is considered a full receiving of communion. There are many reasons people want to receive only one so don’t feel self-conscious about that. Once everyone in front has received, simply return to your seat. Sometimes music is sung during or near the end of communion.

**AFTER COMMUNION (giving thanks, being sent forth)**After everyone has received communion we all stand and say a prayer that you will find printed in the service bulletin. The priest then asks God to bless us. Normally another hymn is sung while the priest recesses out.

An organ postlude usually follows the recessional and after it come any announcements. Often we ask visitors to stand and introduce themselves - only if you are willing. At the very end we are dismissed by our priest and sent out into the world.

Please join us in the hall after the service so we may greet you and introduce ourselves. There is always coffee and tea and sometimes light refreshments as well. Many times we all sit around for a discussion. We hope you’ll feel welcome to be with us for any and all of our time together.