

Ultimately the well-formed life of prayer is about unifying that experience: two sides of the same card.

## Gamifying the Liturgy

I go to school with a lot of people who design games. There are several reasons to envy that undeniably cool vocation, but the one that's always top in my mind is the prototypes.

My classmates are always bringing in their prototypes — “play testing” their latest creations with gorgeous game pieces, app mock-ups, instructional placards, etc. Some of the most intriguing prototypes involve decks of custom-printed cards.

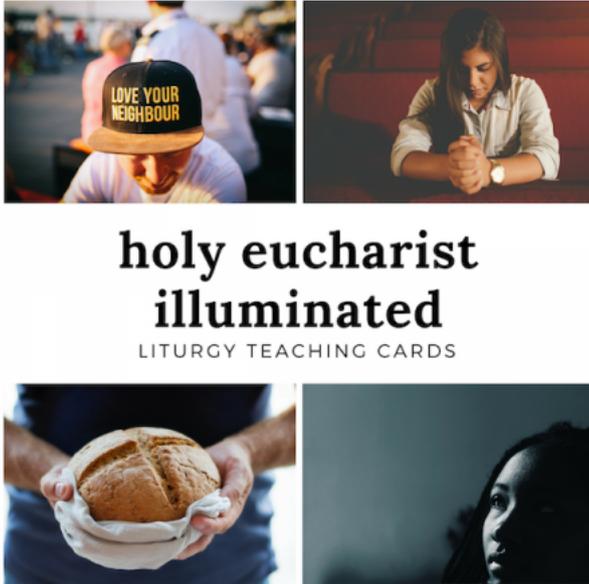
It was against that backdrop that I had a little formation breakthrough when working on a recent sermon.

As a part of a teaching series on the components of the liturgy, I was tasked with teaching about the Eucharistic prayer. Partway through my writing process I realized I was creating the verbal equivalent of flashcards: here's a term (“words of institution”) and here's the meaning or excerpt (“Do this in remembrance of me”).

As written, it would have been a lecture, and a pretty boring one. So I [wrote a real sermon](#) and then went to work drafting my own custom deck of cards to illustrate each piece of the Sunday service.

## Holy Eucharist Illuminated

That prototype deck was the beginning of what I've come to call [Holy Eucharist Illuminated](#). As soon as I posted the prototypes, a cadre of faith formation pros and liturgy geeks [chimed in with incredibly helpful feedback](#).



**holy eucharist  
illuminated**  
LITURGY TEACHING CARDS

**holy eucharist illuminated**  
LITURGY TEACHING CARDS

PURPOSE

Identify, illustrate, explain the components of the liturgy of Holy Eucharist

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AUTHOR

Kyle Matthew Oliver (@kmliver) is an Episcopal priest and a doctoral student in Educational Media at Teachers College, Columbia University. You can learn more about his work at [kyleoliver.net](http://kyleoliver.net) and [prayr.cc](http://prayr.cc) and support these endeavors at [patreon.com/kyleoliver](http://patreon.com/kyleoliver)

They also started asking how they could buy the cards.

I'm glad they did! Without the prospect of eventually getting compensated for my time, I never would have finished the process of revising my original nine cards and then creating twenty-seven more to "complete the set"—from entrance song to dismissal and (just about) everything in between.

With profound and only slightly exhausted thanks to everyone who offered inspiration along the way, let me tell you why I like the idea of using cards to teach the liturgy.

## Cards Break Down Components And Let Us Play With Sequence

This is the obvious one, right? A flashcard is a useful learning tool in part because making and reviewing one helps us isolate a single idea. Then once we have a bunch of ideas on a bunch of cards, we can stack them in little groups, and sequence those groups meaningfully on the table or a bulletin board.

Lots of faith formation ministers have commented about these cards that they will "fit right into the lesson where we put the parts of the service in order." Moreover, I like the way that cards can help us illustrate the differences between certain Eucharistic prayers or different liturgical seasons simply by changing that order around.

## Cards Have A Front and Back

Stay with me here, I think this is important. On a traditional flashcard, the front/back distinction is what makes self-quizzing possible. As my wife pointed out when I was pitching her the original idea, I don't think it's likely that anyone would want to use these cards for drilling and memorization. Don't call it a flashcard.



### sursum corda

LIFTING UP OUR HEARTS

#### PART OF SERVICE

Eucharistic Prayer



#### PURPOSE

Direct our attention toward God;  
fill our hearts with thanksgiving



#### EXCERPT

*Celebrant:* The Lord be with you.

*People:* And also with you.

*Celebrant:* Lift up your hearts.

*People:* We lift them to the Lord.

*Celebrant:* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People:* It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(All Rite II prayers: pp. 361, 367, 369-370, 372)

Still, for this learning resource, the front and back represents a kind of separation of modes of experience. As you'd expect, the back sides contain short annotations that explain the purpose of each liturgical component and give an example from the Book of Common Prayer.

The front sides are more sensorial. They offer four (for the original square cards) or two (for the more easily printable poker-style cards) images that try to capture the *feeling* of what happens when we're singing or hearing or seeing or tasting a particular bit of our corporate prayer experience. Sometimes these illuminations show people in liturgical settings, but more often the cards appeal to moments in everyday life that the liturgy invokes—and vice versa.

For some of our learners, "the head stuff" expressed in words on the back will be an entry point and their main interest. For others it will be "the heart stuff" in pictures on the front.

Ultimately the well-formed life of prayer is about unifying that experience: two sides of the same card.

## Cards Can Be Beautiful, And Beautiful Objects Invite Our Engagement

I recently encountered this lovely quotation from Maria Montessori. Those of you immersed in the world of Godly Play or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd surely know the sentiment, if not this exact passage, about the function of lovely classroom objects:

“‘Use me carefully,’ say the clean, polished tables; ‘Do not leave me idle,’ say the little brooms with their handles painted with tiny flowers; ‘Dip your little hands in here,’ say the wash basins, so clean and ready with their soap and bubbles.”

I believe that, ultimately, these cards struck a chord because they’re beautiful to look at, pleasant to hold. Beauty draws us in, urges us on, or bids us pause, depending on the form and context of our experience.

“Take these prayers seriously,” say the smooth, colorful cards. “Let them remind you that the beauty of the Divine Presence is all around us.”

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*Kyle Matthew Oliver (@kmoliver) is an Episcopal priest and a doctoral student in educational media at Teachers College, Columbia University. Previously he served as digital missionary in the Center for the Ministry of Teaching. You can find his work at [kyleoliver.net](http://kyleoliver.net) and [prayr.cc](http://prayr.cc), and you can purchase Holy Eucharist Illuminated as printed cards, digital download, or both at [prayr.cc/cards](http://prayr.cc/cards).*