

Worship and Music Way Group Report

PREAMBLE

Statement on Worship

As children of God we are called to worship God, and it should be our desire to worship God in all things. Worship is any act or attitude that acknowledges the worthiness of God our Creator and Savior to receive honor and glory. It should be our continual preoccupation as individual Christians to be a living sacrifice to the glory of God, which is our “spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1, NRSV). But we most commonly use the term “worship” to refer to our communal gatherings, on Sundays and on special days, when we come together to express our worship and praise to God and to seek God’s blessing.

Situation

The recent influx of people from diverse church backgrounds, particularly younger members and youth, has changed the traditional demographics of this congregation. Moreover, there has been a desire for renewal in the various ministries of the church, including its traditional forms of worship. It is evident that the forms of worship and music have not changed with the times and that, for this church to attract and keep younger people, there needs to be some adjustment to the expectations of a younger, more diverse audience. At the same time, there is the need to recognize and respect the continued needs and wants of the older members, so that any revision or change in style of worship must not cause offense or unnecessary discomfort to anyone. The full involvement and participation of all in the church, including children and youth, is the goal, particularly in our worship and music.

Process

Using the Way method of Bible reading, meditation and sharing, the group learned to listen to the insights of each member over a period of about two months. Since there was equal opportunity for expression during this time, each individual was noticed and appreciated and a feeling of trust was established. Once the discussions of the worship and music needs began, we still began each meeting with meditation on the scripture for that week and its application to our church and our work as a group. At first, we concentrated on what was important in worship for each of us and found a great variety. We endeavored to respect that variety in everything we considered thereafter. We identified what we currently do in worship (particularly as regards music, which plays an important role in Sunday morning worship) and noted the strengths as well as weaknesses. We identified various needs and gaps in the present situation and prioritized them. We discussed a wide range of related matters and agreed on a number of recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. The Sanctuary

The sanctuary influences the way we worship; it affects both how we feel and what we can do. The present sanctuary (like the rest of the church building) is a product of its time. The brick and timber construction and general design are solid, but while some find the ambiance of the brown brick and brown wood on brown fabric restful, many find it too dark. The need for more color in the building was mentioned prominently in the church study conducted early in 2006. Changes should be considered with input from architects and designers with experience in sanctuary design.

Recommendation 1: That the sanctuary receive a face-lift.

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Creating the possibility for more natural light and/or enhancing artificial lighting
2. Lightening the fabric or the wood-on-fabric decoration throughout the sanctuary
3. Replacing the carpet and linoleum with a brighter color and replacing the pew fabric with a complementary color

II. The Chancel

The design of the area at the front of the sanctuary poses a number of problems, with its heavy furnishings and inefficient use of space. The Way group is concerned that there is inadequate room for the choir and for other potential elements in worship such as drama and sacred dance and the use of a praise bands or other instrumental groups.

Recommendation 2: That the chancel be redesigned

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. A design study relative to position and size of furnishings
2. Repositioning of the blank wall to the right of the chancel

III. Audio-visual system

For a church building of its size, the sound system is inadequate. A sound board allowing for multiple microphones at differing levels in different places is an essential element in a modern sanctuary. Given the deadening effect of the choir loft structure, provision should be made for multiple microphones for the choir and other

groups when using the choir loft. Since no provision is currently made for audio-visual devices (except a temporary screen), this deficiency needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 3: That the audio-visual system be updated

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Installation of a better sound system, including sound board, multiple microphones, and adequate loudspeakers
2. Provision for adequate visual presentations

IV. Music

Music has traditionally been a large part of the worship services at this church, generally consisting of hymns from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and of choir pieces in a variety of styles. Since the current (red) hymnbook dates from the 1950's, a half-century of Christian hymns and praise music has not been available to the congregation for use in praising God in a more modern idiom. Many church members would like to include praise songs along with modern hymns as an expression of worship. The sanctuary choir has consistently provided good quality music, and in the summer there have been various kinds of special music, both vocal and instrumental. The introduction of a bell choir will add further variety to the music. However, the Way group is concerned that there is less participation than there might be in the musical praise offered by the congregation: relatively few people are involved in music groups; the congregational singing lacks enthusiasm and vigor; and the talents of those who play other musical instruments have no outlet in the church.

Recommendation 4: That a new hymnal be purchased for use in worship

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Purchase of the (blue) *Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990) and ancillary materials
2. Introduction of new hymns and songs as appropriate
3. Special hymn-sing services

Recommendation 5: That the sanctuary piano be overhauled

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Overhaul by a competent piano expert

Recommendation 6: That a variety of musical instruments be used in worship

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Formation of a small group of instrumentalists (particularly guitar, bass, and drums)

2. Formation of other groups of instrumentalists as needed for special occasions

Recommendation 7: That congregational singing be sometimes led by a praise group

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Formation of a small group of talented singers to lead singing

Recommendation 8: That vocal and instrumental solos be regularly scheduled as part of worship

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Identification of suitable soloists and instrumentalists in the congregation and community

V. Other Art Forms

The Way group has noted the importance of other art forms in the worship of other congregations, particularly larger congregations and those that appeal to younger and less churched attenders. The use of only aural media goes contrary to what is now understood about the way different people assimilate information and about what stimulates worship. Although some art forms may seem strange to some people in a worship context, others readily and eagerly use them to worship God. These expressions of worship through art should not usurp the centrality of the presentation of the Word or become distracting or an end in themselves but should be used as a way to bring praise to God or spiritual understanding to the congregation.

Recommendation 9: That visual and dramatic art forms be sometimes used in congregational worship

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Coordination of interested individuals and formation of visual arts groups
2. Coordination of interested individuals and formation of a drama group
3. Coordination of individuals interested in sacred dance

VI. The Word of God

Since the Scriptures are fundamental to our worship, the Way group is concerned that there be no barriers to hearing and understanding the Word of God read aloud. For the understanding and involvement of the congregation, the Scriptures must be read well and with full conviction. While some members of the congregation choose just to listen to the reading, others prefer to follow along. Generally, it is advisable that pew Bibles be in the same translation as the one used by the pastor or the

reader at the pastor's direction. At the same time, it is essential that members possess and make frequent use of their own Bibles and be encouraged to bring and use their own Bibles in the worship service.

Recommendation 10: That the reading of the Word be enhanced

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Better preparation of lay readers
2. Replacement of the pew Bibles by New Revised Standard Version Bibles
3. Variety in the manner of reading of the Scriptures (e.g. responsive or choral readings)

VII. Inclusiveness and Diversity

God has called people from all cultures, all ages, and all walks of life to be members of the Body of Christ, the holy catholic Church. Like the Lord's Table, our worship times are open to all and should be welcoming events, where all are invited and made to feel part of the family. It is therefore important that people not be disturbed by use of language that makes them feel ignored or demeaned, or by any other sign of exclusivity, such as implied sexism or racism. Rather, in all things, we should attempt as a diverse congregation to be sensitive in our worship and actions to the feelings and situations of both members and visitors and both young and old.

Recommendation 11: That inclusive language and cultural sensitivity be evident

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Use of hymns and songs and of a version of the Bible (such as the New Revised Standard Version) that use inclusive language
2. Sensitivity to diversity in speech and artistic expressions

VIII. Alternative Worship Opportunities

Traditionally, the Church has met together on the day of the Resurrection, the Lord's Day, in the morning. However, worship services need not be limited either to this time or to the church sanctuary: we cannot meet to worship too often to glorify God and to build up the Body of Christ. A variety of different kinds of services can provide opportunities for significant spiritual edification and meet special needs of the congregation as a whole or members in particular. These services may not all be regularly scheduled; rather they may occur in relation to the ecclesiastical or conventional calendar (such as Lenten services or a New Year's service) or to the objectives of the congregation (such as prayer and spiritual growth or learning new hymns and singing old ones).

Recommendation 12: That special services be arranged as needed

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Organization of special times of worship for particular purposes (healing services, Christmas service for mourners, song services) or particular times (Lent, Good Friday)
2. Organization of different kinds of services (Taizé, prayer, ecumenical, spiritual growth)

IX. Coordination

At present, the pastor is responsible for the preparation and direction of the whole of the worship service. The Worship Committee of the Session assists in practical ways (recruiting lay readers, arranging for communion, etc.) and the Director of the Choir selects the choral music. The Way group considers that there should be greater congregational involvement in the planning and execution of the worship services. At the same time, one pastor cannot – nor should he be expected to – do everything in a growing, thriving church, particularly in the preparation of worship. The pastor is ultimately responsible for the worship service, but he should have those to whom he can delegate with confidence. Most of these will be church members who give spiritual worship through service and time. However, there is the need, as the church and its ministries expand – and as the worship service grows in richness and complexity – for additional full-time assistance to the pastor.

Recommendation 13: That a Worship Team be formed

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Expansion of the Worship Committee OR formation of a sub-committee of the Worship Committee as a Worship Team
2. Definition of the size, role, and responsibilities of the Worship Team

Recommendation 14: That a Coordinator of Worship and Music be appointed

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Elaboration of the duties of a coordinator of Worship and Music
2. Hiring of a qualified individual responsible to the pastor for
 - working with the Worship Committee and Worship Team
 - coordination of all elements relating to worship and music

X. Education on Worship

Innovations in worship require explanation, but sometimes one can be present even at traditional worship without understanding why we are doing certain things. The Way group is concerned that the congregation (longtime, as well as new members and youth) be aware of the meaning of the elements of our worship, so that they can

participate more fully in every aspect. New hymns (and some old ones) and spiritual songs should be fully explained, both in regard to words and music. The importance of the reflection time offered by the introit, the reason for the general and individual times for confession, for example, need to be noted. The meaning and value of the liturgical elements in worship should also be known and appreciated.

Recommendation 14: That attention be paid to education about worship

This may be accomplished by the following:

1. Brief explanations during worship services and/or in an expanded bulletin
2. Instruction during special hymn-sing services
3. Discussion during Adult Education and Youth Education classes

CONCLUSION

The recommendations of the Way Group on Worship and Music acknowledge both the need for change and the necessity for changes to be instituted gradually. There are here, we believe, no radical or surprising proposals but rather a series of suggestions that will enhance the worship experience for all, attract more people to the church, and help the church to fulfill its mission of making disciples and bringing glory to God.

Respectfully submitted,

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