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Procession

Engaging Worship Matters for the Next Generation

Thinking Ahead Together

In the Spring of 2001, a year-long consultative process began. It will yield principles for worship that undergird worship planning. This issue of *Procession* was written before the consultations began. But you can begin a parallel conversation in your own setting.

Have you talked about what you're trying to accomplish in your worship life? A fine place to begin is *The Use of the Means of Grace*. Adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 1997, this statement provides guidance on the proclamation of the Word and the Christian Assembly, on Holy Baptism, on Holy Communion, and on the relationship between our worship life and Christian

Starting on page 2, this issue of *Procession* offers discussion starters in the four areas of worship life that are being addressed by churchwide consultations:

Music in worship

Which musical qualities contribute to participation and inclusion?

Preaching

Why should people talk about the sermon at the workplace the next day?

The environment of worship: art and architecture

How do we "set the stage" so sensory impressions contribute to the impact?

Language in worship

Do the words we say and sing together really matter?

We invite you to join the conversation! In this issue of *Procession*, the ELCA worship staff has listed some of the issues which need to be discussed by the whole church as we proceed to develop the next generation of worship resources.

Over the next few years we will provide more structured opportunities for you to share your thoughts, and invite your reactions to trial-use resources. But let the conversations begin! E-mail is the most convenient way for you to give us your comments. You can go to our web site at <http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship> and click on "Contact Us," or you can simply send your comments in care of rallin@elca.org.

mission. The text of the statement is available online at no cost at <http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/sacpracst.html>.

A video, *These Things Matter*, will bring the sacramental practices statement to life for discussion. For a description and placing an online order, go to <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/idetail.asp?ISBN=6000090447>. The video, with leader guide, is suitable for use in adult forums and committees. It documents the unity of our tradition and helps form a natural respect for the diversity within the unity.

The Use of the Means of Grace, however, was not the last word to be said. At least four critical areas received only brief attention. The consultations will focus on those areas.

Issues for Discussion: Music

Discuss the role of music as a contributor to the overall impact of films and TV shows. How is it used to evoke various moods or historical periods? Then talk about how music fits into media treatment of religion. What music is used to give a scene a “religious” feel? And don’t forget commercials! Compare the ads for religious music you’ve seen at various times on Cable TV. Note the visuals, too! What does music “do?” How does it influence how we interpret what we see? Is there such a thing as “Lutheran music?”

What is the role of music in Lutheran worship? Is it another form of proclamation, a “servant of the text?” If so, is there a role for exclusively instrumental music?

The Use of the Means of Grace speaks about “unity, but not uniformity” as a goal. There are many different musical genres used today. How do they contribute to the goal of unity?

In Lutheran worship, as mentioned in *The Use of the Means of Grace*, “all the baptized...share responsibility” for making music. Do you agree that congregational song is at the heart of the role of music?

In your own experience, what are the qualities (tune, rhythm, etc.) of particular pieces of music that make them most and least likely to be sung with full participation by members of your congregation?

“Liturgical” music means a musical setting (in any style) of accepted texts that are in use among all or most congregations on a particular Sunday. Is

“liturgical music” as important as the hymns or songs that vary? Is it more important?

If you were to make a list of the “core” of congregational song, how would you decide what should be on it? Favorites of the present generation of your congregation’s members? Music that has been accepted favorably by the greatest number of U.S. Lutheran congregations? (over the past one hundred years? over the past ten years?) Music regarded by experts as having the highest level of technical excellence and textual integrity? Music that represents the broadest global range of favorites among many cultures? Music that has best bridged the gap among various Christian denominations?

What exactly are the differences in music that will be more useful in larger and smaller congregations? What are the “costs” and “benefits” of orienting music publication to higher and lower skill levels?

How could a congregation broaden and deepen the musical understanding of those who plan worship? What continuing education opportunities does it make available for musicians? How do pastors grow in understanding the role and potential for music in worship?

Our culture supports music-making less than it once did. People are used to listening passively, but how can congregations increase participatory music? If people see only the text, how will they get keyboard accompaniments and singable harmonies for use at home?

Among ecumenical liturgies, only the Lutherans call for a “Hymn of the Day.” Have we understood its role? Does it do what is intended? Should it be a renewed emphasis?

People prefer different styles of music. Is it better to draw the congregation together by promoting appreciation for a variety of styles, or is it better to cluster people with different tastes into separate worshiping assemblies?

Issues for Discussion: Preaching

“Don’t preach to me!” means, “Don’t bore me to death with your offensive platitudes.” Respectable verbs don’t get into that kind of trouble entirely by accident.”

(Frederick Buechner, in *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, revised and expanded edition, Harper, San Francisco, 1993)

The terms “Preaching” and “Sermon” have gone out of fashion in some circles. “Message” or “Homily” seem more acceptable, somehow.

Yet, in a 1999 survey of 6,500 worshipers in ELCA congregations known to be exemplary in worship, hearing the preaching of the sermon was ranked as the most meaningful component of the worship experience. (In fact, it was ranked as the top three components. That the sermon was a good example of oral communication was first. That it was biblical was second. And that it made a helpful connection with life experiences was third.)

In what ways are the pastors you know working to improve their preaching? How are members of the congregation helping them do so? Are there regular opportunities for discussion and feedback? How’s the trust level - high enough for frank and helpful evaluation of preaching skills? Do the pastors ever have the opportunity to evaluate themselves—such as on videotape?

Preaching is an oral communication art form. Discuss other examples of oral communication and what makes it effective. We are all influenced by our culture and the various ways in which we are used to “receiving.” Note that some teachers are engaging lecturers. Seminar leaders often combine rhetoric with the use of audiovisual support (such as “Powerpoint” slides for outlines and detailed examples). Reflect on the way information is given

by a highly skilled news anchor on television. These are all oral communication. Do they give clues to more effective preaching?

Is the preaching grounded in Scripture? Does the preacher, over time, help people engage in the breadth of the Bible (usually through the discipline of the lectionary as the source for preaching)? Do worshipers experience the flow of how the whole church tells the Christ story?

There’s long been an assumption (typified by Fred Craddock’s *Overhearing the Gospel*, 1978) that hearers of sermons were familiar with the Bible and core Christian teaching. Is that our situation today? James W. Thompson, in his new book, *Preaching Like Paul* (Westminster John Knox, 2001) argues: “We do not face communities that have been shaped by the memory of the Christian message. Our communities, like Paul’s communities, live in a non-Christian culture. Those who have heard the Christian message have also been listening to numerous other voices in our culture, leaving them with a blend of Christianity, pop psychology and clichés.” What are the goals of excellent preaching today, and what forms of preaching are best suited to them?

Eavesdrop in a church parking lot and you’ll hear the question, “Did you get anything out of it?” Instead of wasting energy trying to convince people it’s an improper question, consider what you’d like the response to be. Some will point to a renewed sense of what it means to be, and motivation to more fully become, a Christian parent, spouse, citizen and worker. Some will suggest the experience, in William Willimon’s phrase, of “being transformed from an audience to a church.” Others will fit the sermon into a liturgical movement from repentance to praise and thanksgiving.

Does the sermon “fit” as an integrated part of the Christian liturgy? Discuss this insight from Charles L. Rice (*The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy*, Fortress, out of print): “From baptistry to table, by way of Scripture and encounter, in the sermon, of the way it is with us in this place here and now, the people are moving toward the moment when, once more, Jesus will eat with sinners.”

Issues for Discussion: Environment

Your situation, of course, shapes your discussion. Are you planning to build a new place of Christian assembly? Are you considering the best uses of a landmark church building? Will you, for the foreseeable future, be worshipping in a building designed for other uses? Is your building serviceable, but obviously designed with the needs and concerns of a previous generation in mind?

The Use of the Means of Grace says, “Music, the visual arts, and the environment of our worship spaces embody the proclamation of the Word in Lutheran churches....The visual arts and the spaces for worship assist the congregation to participate in worship, to focus on the essentials, and to embody the Gospel.... In these times of deeper contact among cultures, our congregations do well to make respectful and hospitable use of the music, arts, and furnishings of many peoples.” Translate these insights into the things people see and touch when they’re in your worship space!

Try starting here: assume that there are five “liturgical centers” in your worship space. Identify each on a floor plan of your church. Then try to “stretch” their definitions. Consider what people might want to do in each of those places. And give some thought to proportionality: should each of the five have roughly equal square footage?

Where people gather (for entering and sending) Hospitality is the key word. Look at your space through the eyes of people who don’t “know their way around.” Consider other places of public accommodation, like restaurants, banquet halls and hotels. Might people look for information centers or reception desks? Rest rooms? Would refreshments contribute to their integration into the community? If they want to take part in activities, how will they see their options and “sign up?”

Where the assembly is placed for participation

Is there enough seating without people feeling “packed in” or unduly isolated (80% of capacity is a rule of thumb to be “comfortably full”)? If you expect people to read bulletins or hymnals, is there adequate lighting to do so, even if their eyesight has dimmed with age? Can people hear what you want them to hear? (Consider both the acoustics of the room and support for those acoustics, such as sound systems with add-ons for the hearing impaired.) Are light and temperature well modulated?

Where the focus of attention is on the Word

If the goal is oral communication, is the ambo (reading desk) placed properly, including its elevation, to draw people’s attention? If our proclamation can be enhanced by choral music or dance or drama, is there enough performance space? If a preacher wishes to show a video clip from a current movie, how will everyone be able to view it?

Where people come to the table for the Meal

Visually, during the Great Thanksgiving, is there a strong focal point that underscores the importance of the action? Practically, are there unobtrusive places for the “stuff” that will be needed for the action? Is there space for “traffic flow” to enable a solemn, but efficient, participation in this central act of worship? Is there space for the ministers of communion to carry out their functions with grace and dignity?

Where people are baptized and affirm their baptism through their actions

Is the importance of the “living” water easily seen by how it is contained? Can enough people gather to form a “congregation” around the newly baptized? Remembering that a baptismal promise is to “provide for their instruction in the Christian faith,” is there is a connection between the baptismal and instructional spaces? And what about funerals, when the Paschal Candle provides a reminder of the person’s baptismal joining to Christ’s resurrection life? Might there be an architectural connection as well?

“Form following function” has been the focus of the preceding discussion. Aesthetics are the other part of the environmental equation. Building materials, textile arts and decorative items also deserve extended attention.

Issues for Discussion: Language

Words matter. Children hear words that shape their self-understanding and behavior throughout life. Dying people cling last to treasured words of comfort and faith, even when all else is beyond recovery. The beginning of God's nature and self-disclosure to us (see John 1) is not being or feeling, but self-expression: "Word."

When Christians speak of humanity, it is incumbent upon us to speak of "all" because God has loved and Christ has died for all. Discuss ways in which we can show full respect for all people, as well as ways in which our words show disrespect. Do our words ever denote or connote who the "bad guys" are, obscuring our unstinting proclamation that even though "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," God has loved all of God's creation?

In *The Future of Worship in the ELCA*, it was proposed that we should test our liturgical language on whether it is "Christ-centered, Scripture-driven, Community-sensitive, and Evocative of a response to God's grace. Rejected should be language that harms and diminishes in favor of language that heals and empowers." These are some of the areas for discussion.

ECUMENICAL CONSENSUS

Are our "worship words" those that are assented to by Christians of our language group in other places in the world and in other theological traditions?

INCLUSIVITY

Do our words recognize varied human experience and the way words are used in daily life?

CLARITY

Do our words mean what we intend them to mean in contemporary usage?

FELICITY

Are the words we use the best example of appropriateness and beauty?

LANGUAGE OF HYMN TEXTS

When hymns have been translated or adapted, have they held onto their meaning? Have we respected the role of tradition and memory? Is there still a good "fit" between text and tune?

LANGUAGE OF LITURGICAL TEXTS

Have we "put words in people's mouths" that embody the full richness of the church's proclamation transcending time and place? For the sake of Christian memory, do our current expressions forge a bond with older ones? Is there consistency over time that helps people "take the language to heart?" What are the benefits and risks of formal, stately language compared to more accessible informal or extemporaneous speech?

TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES

A root meaning of being a part of the church "catholic" is that human-devised boundaries (age, socioeconomic class, culture, degree of physical ability, ethnicity, gender, social role and behavioral traits) are not pertinent to us. In what ways can our words exemplify truly universal human experiences, and in what ways should our words celebrate the particularities of human cultures?

NAMING GOD

Christians have battled in recent years about whether or not to name God in gender-specific ways, since "in his image he created them, male and female" (Genesis 1). Try to speak frankly about how our preferred names for God reflect our own views of the world. Two related issues are involved here: how we speak about God and how we address God. ELCA worship staff has provided material for further discussion on this issue at <http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/qa/language.html>.

re:sources

SOME SURVEY FINDINGS:

HOW WOULD YOUR MEMBERS RATE THE CONGREGATION?

The ELCA identified 34 congregations whose worship was regarded by others in their synod as exemplary, and who had sustained a growth in attendance. In 1999, we asked for permission to survey those who attended worship on one particular Sunday. 6,413 people responded to the survey.

The high regard these people have for their congregation's worship is underscored by this finding: Two thirds of those surveyed (65.2%) said that "in the past year or so, [they have] told someone that [they] get a lot out of worship in this congregation and invited them to attend."

We asked people about their priorities, how important various elements of worship were to them. Here, in order, are the top ten, all of which were rated as "very important" by more than two-thirds of the people:

1. The preacher is a good public speaker: interesting and understandable, keeping my attention.
2. The sermon/message is based on the Bible and makes the Bible more clear to me.
3. The sermon/message helps me think about real life situations and apply faith to daily living.
4. Overall, when I worship here, I feel like I have been lifted out of my everyday world and been encountered by that which is Holy.
5. Visitors and newcomers feel welcome and are able to participate in our worship.
6. The prayers that are offered are prepared with care and include a wide range of meaningful concerns.
7. Children are welcome and generally feel comfortable in our worship.
8. Our worship folder or bulletin (and other help) make the service easy to follow and participate in.
9. Music supports the congregation's worship and participation rather than being just a performance.
10. Our musical leader(s) are skilled. Their playing and singing shows artistry and careful rehearsal.

HOW TO REACH US:

The Division for Congregational Ministries worship staff welcomes your questions.

Through our site on the ELCA home page:
<http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship>.

We are available toll-free at 1-800/638-3522 (dialing the extension listed below). Messages can also be sent through the Internet to the e-mail address listed below:

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