

NUTS AND BOLTS II: THE THEORY, PRACTICE AND COMPONENTS OF UNITED METHODIST WORSHIP

Getting to a United Methodist Understanding of Christian Worship

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

In his book “Simply Christian,” N. T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, England states, “When we begin to glimpse the reality of God, the natural reaction is to worship him. Not to have that reaction is a fairly sure sign that we haven’t really yet understood who he is or what he has done.” He then asks the question, “What is worship?” His response is, “The best way to discover is to join in and find out.” He suggests that the best place to eavesdrop is the fourth and fifth chapters of the Book of the Revelation of John.

John has been privileged to watch something going on in heaven ... when he says that ‘a door stood open in heaven,’ he is insisting on one of the main points of this present book – namely that God’s sphere and ours are not far apart, and at certain places and moments they interlock. Sometimes the boundary between them is like a thin partition, in which, to some people and at some times, a door is opened or a curtain is pulled back, so that people in our dimension can see what’s going on in heaven, the worship of God which, in that dimension, is going on all the time ...

... we see the logic of worship. Worship means, literally, acknowledging the *worth* of something or someone. It means recognizing and saying that something or someone is *worthy* of praise. It means celebrating the worth of someone or something far superior to oneself.

That is what worship is all about. It is the glad shout of praise that arises to God the creator and God the rescuer from the creation that recognizes its maker, the creation that acknowledges the triumph of Jesus the Lamb. That is the worship that is going on in heaven, in God’s dimension, all the time. The question we ought to be asking is how best we might join in.

Because that is what we are supposed to do.

That is the theory of worship in a nutshell, now for the practice. The question really is, “How do we join in?” or to put it another way, “How do we make worship in our local, earthly setting reflective of the worship of the heavens?” To get to that we shall wander through a bit of history and a bit of worship service evolution and that wandering shall happen simultaneously. We will look at worship as a New Testament phenomena, then see how the worship of the earliest Christian communities has shaped and reformed worship through the ages, even into today’s variety of worship styles. We shall then set some boundaries defining Christian worship out of that body of common wisdom.

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

It may be and often is assumed that worship is a thing whose order is prescribed by God and handed to us in the Holy Scriptures. Andy Langford in the book “Transitions In Worship, Moving From Traditional To Contemporary” disputes that notion. He says:

Despite some pleas to the contrary, the Bible has never dictated only one way to worship. The Incarnation – God taking on human form – witnesses to God’s affirmation of humanity in a particular cultural context. Jesus, the Word become flesh, preached inside

and outside of the synagogue and temple and took the gospel to the lake, mountain sides, homes, and streets. Peter invited Gentiles into the church, and Philip witnessed in a chariot to an Ethiopian Eunuch. At the first Jerusalem Conference (as found in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15), Peter, James and Paul determined that Gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews. Paul on Mars Hill in Athens preached in Greek about an unknown God already worshiped by the Athenians.

There are two basic New Testament readings that inform us about the patterns of worship in the earliest Christian communities. They take place in the day and age before the church owned property or had dedicated spaces for worship. It is in the day when the Christian community still worshiped alongside their fellow Jews in the temple, but felt called to hold worship elsewhere to add the stories of Jesus to the historic worship of God. They gathered in each others' homes. The setting was determined by the size and shape of the house in which they gathered. Things were informal, and friends were invited to hear for themselves the stories of the risen Christ. Often things began around a meal, and the worship sometimes lasted late into the night.

In The Acts of the Apostles Chapter 20: 7-12 we hear of a time when, on the first day of the week while in the town of Troas, the people gathered to "break bread." Paul began talking. His intent was to leave the next day. He felt compelled to say all that he had to say ... until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they had gathered. It was late, the candlelight was flickering and a young man sitting in the open window drowsed into a deep sleep. He tumbled out of the window, falling three floors to the ground. Every one ran down to him. Paul embraced him and declared, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him." They all returned to the room, broke bread, ate, and Paul talked on until daybreak (presumably with no one else sitting in the window). So much for "inspiring worship." And so much for formal structure.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul instructs the church to "Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you; with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your heart to God."

In both of these we see elements of Christian worship as it is developing. The reading from Acts gives us the tradition of the service of word and table (worship focused on proclamation and on the communal / sacramental meal). The Colossians reading includes other acts of worship particularly the singing of hymns. But there is no format or particular thing that must happen in any particular order. Certainly, as Rev. Langford indicates, there is a wide diversity of the settings and the content of the service of worship within the Christian experience in the Apostolic days.

THE EARLIEST CHURCH PATTERNS OF WORSHIP

In spite of the vague patterns in the origins of Christian Worship it is human nature to want there to be order, to want there to be regularity. And our worship habits are no exception. So the pressure of time and human nature colluded to establish recognizable patterns of worship. This may not yet have taken on the complete shape of a full Order of Service, but within 100 years of the day of Pentecost there were traditions related to the shape worship was taking. Its shape is reported on by Martin Thielen in "Ancient Modern Worship, A Practical Guide to Blending Worship Styles."

This basic pattern of Word and Table was firmly established by the second century. For example, in his *First Apology*, written around 150 A.D., Justin Martyr describes services of Word and Table as normative experiences of Christian worship. Later, the church added to this basic order of worship a gathering and a dismissal, thus providing a fourfold order of worship:

- the gathering
- the service of Word
- the service of the Table
- the dismissal

However, the service of the Word clearly had two parts – the Word itself (Scripture readings and sermon) and a response (affirmation of faith, prayer, and offering). Therefore, in practicality, the basic worship pattern involved five movements:

- gathering
- service of the Word
- response
- service of the Table
- dismissal

This five fold order of worship has been a mainstay of Christian worship for most of its history (p. 20).

Thielen goes on to describe six strengths of this format of worship.

1. It is true to the Biblical and historical foundations of worship. 2. It provides a holistic and balanced worship experience. 3. It moves and flows; it provides a meaningful progression. 4. It is focused on God. 5. It is highly participatory; the congregation is actively engaged. 6. It is flexible; diversity and creativity can be implemented within each movement (p. 21).

Having stated that, we return to Andy Langford, as he makes this assertion about the movement and flow of the order of worship in the historical church:

No one normative model of worship can be discovered in church history either. In the fourth century, Augustine most often preached on the front steps of the cathedral in Carthage, engaging the best rhetoricians of his age in debate, then invited people to enter the doors of the church for the sacraments. 'Opening the doors of the church,' a standard phrase to describe the evangelistic task of the church, may, in part, be attributed to Augustine's physically opening the outer doors of his cathedral to the unchurched seekers standing in Carthage's forum. The Western church's lectionary developed in the fourth century as a systematic way to witness to a newly Christianized Roman world. ... The great stained-glass windows of the European cathedrals pictured the story of Jesus to people who could not read or understand the Latin texts, while the mystery plays of the late Middle Ages told the gospel story through raucous skits and acted by characters outside church walls.

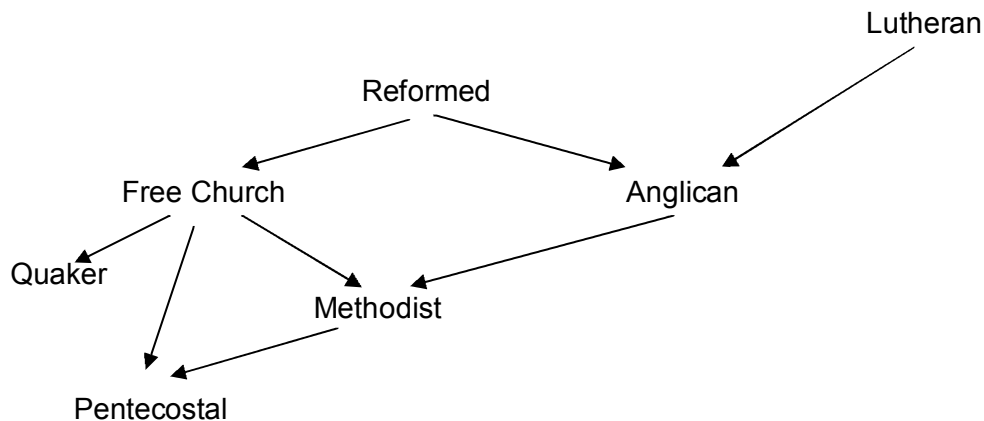
Re-forming liturgy continued. Martin Luther rebelled against the seven sacraments and wrote the Deutsche Messe (the service of Holy Communion), composed hymns and translated the whole of Scriptures into German so people could understand the gospel. The 1580 Lutheran Formula of Concord, one of the definitive statements of the Protestant Reformation, declared that 'we further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances.' Likewise, the Anglican Articles of Religion, adapted by John Wesley in 1784, declared that 'it is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and Custom of the Primitive Church, to have Publick Prayer in the Church, or to minister the Sacraments in a Tongue not understood by the People'. John Wesley in his own words, 'agreed to become more vile' by preaching and celebrating the sacraments outdoors (pp. 69-70).

HISTORICAL VOICES / FAMILIES OF WORSHIP STYLE

In "Introduction to Christian Worship," James F. White details seven ancient families of the Orthodox and Catholic liturgical voice. They are focused in the Mediterranean world and include, among others, the Eastern Church, the Roman rite, and one non-Roman western world family, the Gallic. He delves into the Protestant world of liturgical voice by saying:

Diversity characterized Protestant worship from the start. By coincidence, most Protestant worship also falls into seven fairly distinct patterns. It is not easy to distinguish these on the basis of eucharistic liturgies as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox liturgical families. Some groups, such as the Quakers, have no liturgies. But we can speak of distinct liturgical traditions, i.e., inherited habits and assumptions about worship as well as actual documents and practices. Some Protestant traditions, to be sure, can be easily defined in terms of service books. In each case, though, certain dominant characteristics have sufficient coherence to distinguish tradition.

It is not easy to differentiate the traditions geographically since they overlap considerably. Free Church people, Anglican, and Quakers lived side by side in seventeenth-century England, if not too happily. We can chart somewhat the dominant influences among the seven Protestant Liturgical traditions thus:



The chart moves downward from the sixteenth century to the twentieth and in a more conservative direction to the left. Lutheran worship, originating in Wittenburg, thrived in the Germanic and Scandinavian countries in the sixteenth century and since has spread through out the world. Reformed worship had its genesis in Switzerland (Geneva and Zurich) and France (Strassburg) but quickly spread throughout the Netherlands, France, Scotland, Hungary and England. Anglican worship, as its name indicates, was that of the national church of England and represented many of the political compromises necessary for a national church. The Free Church tradition is the hardest to define. It, too, had its origins in Switzerland, but persecution drove the Anabaptist underground. They surfaced in the Netherlands and various Germanic lands. Under a different form, the Free Church tradition appeared in England among the Independents (Congregationalists) and Baptists and found fertile soil in America, where it is the dominant worship tradition among Protestants. The Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ, and many others stand in this tradition.

The most radical tradition was the seventeenth-century Quaker movement. The Quakers' silent waiting on God without the aid of sermon, songs, or scriptures made a clear break with the past. Methodism, in the eighteenth century, combined many strands, from both ancient and Reformation times, borrowing especially from the Anglican and Free Church traditions. America gave birth to the Pentecostal tradition in the twentieth Century, with blacks and women among the earliest leaders in developing this tradition.

Once again, we see in these seven traditions a constancy in basic structures of worship and types of service books [hymnals] (the Quakers being the chief exception) but considerable diversity in style (pp. 41-43).

JOHN WESLEY'S EXPERIENCE

John Wesley was born (1703) the son of an Anglican priest. He lived most of his life in England and was himself an Anglican priest. He died an Anglican priest (1791). He has referred to himself as a man of one

book. It is generally assumed that he meant the Bible as that one book. There are those who wonder (if only tongue in cheek) if he did not really mean the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Even when he sent documents to the people called Methodists in America to help them organize a new denomination he simply edited the Anglican Articles of Religion (primarily removing specific references to the king). He pastored Anglican churches and taught in Anglican schools. The Anglican way of doing things was the normative mindset that he used. He was Anglican and Anglican Worship was what he knew best. If there is one thing that defined the Anglican church in John Wesley's day it was the state of being a "High Church" body.

It was, though, a love / hate relationship that John had with the Anglican Church. There were things about it that he learned that he could not abide. After John's heart was "strangely warmed" by God, the Anglican Church found that it could hardly stand to have him as a part of itself. For him, then, to be in ministry, the old dog had to learn new tricks. He learned them reluctantly, at first, then with full vigor. He learned to preach in the open fields and to worship in coal yards. He learned to worship with little, to assist in the worship in terms of the usual furnishings and accompanying materials. In an article in the *Armenian Magazine* written in 1790 he describes the necessity of learning those new tricks in this manner,

From a child I was taught to love and reverence the Scripture, the oracles of God, and next to these to esteem the primitive Fathers, the writers of the three first centuries. Next after the primitive church I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national church in the world. I therefore not only assented to all the doctrine, but observed the rubrics in the Liturgy, and that all possible exactness, even at the peril of my life."

In this judgment and with this spirit I went to America, strongly attached to the Bible, the primitive Church, and the Church of England, from which I would not vary in one jot or tittle on any account whatever. In this spirit I returned, as a regular clergyman as any in the three kingdoms; till after not being permitted to preach in the churches, I was constrained to *preach in the open air.*"

Here was my first *irregularity*. And it was not voluntary, but constrained. The second was *extemporary* prayer. This likewise I believed to be my bounden duty, for the sake of those who desired me to watch over their souls. I could not in conscience refrain from it; neither from accepting those who desired to serve me as *sons in the gospel*.

What he never lost was the understanding of the New Testament notion of joining the Word and Table together in worship. It is said that he received Holy Communion on average of twice a week for most of his adult life. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker in an article titled "Form and Freedom: John Wesley's Legacy for Methodist Worship in the Book Sunday Service of the Methodist's" finds in this article by Wesley five fundamental criteria for worship as far as she is concerned:

The primacy of scripture; the normativity of Christian antiquity, especially the first three centuries of the Church's life; the example of the Church of England and its liturgy; the use of human reason...; and the necessity of evangelical experience or "Experimental" religion (implied in the two "irregularities" he describes).

In other words, properness of worship is based on the teachings of Holy Scripture, what happened in the early days of the Church, the Anglican way of doing things, and on circumstances giving rise to the need to be creative in accordance with reason. The worship he engaged in as an Anglican priest, even outside the church walls, followed the five-fold pattern when possible.

THE EARLY METHODIST EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

After the American Revolution there was no longer an authority for the Anglican Church in America. Some priests returned to England and others remained in America and helped to establish the Episcopal Church. Some of the people that had been part of the Methodist societies in America clambered for help from John in as much as they could not see a way clear to receive the sacraments without joining a new

denomination. Reluctantly, John sent persons and materials for the development of a new denomination called Methodism. Part of what he sent were the edited Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church and an order of service based on the Anglican rite. That not-so-new rite was titled "The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America." In 1784 the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized under the leadership of Francis Asbury with the Articles and Order of Service adopted as the founding documents. In a letter that accompanied the books Wesley advised "the elders of the church to administer the sacraments every Lord's Day." In that same letter he also wrote:

As our American brothers are now totally disentangled both from the State, and from the English Hierarchy, we dare not intangle [sic] them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in the liberty, wherewith God has so strangely made them free (pg. 49, *Worshiping with United Methodists*, Hoit Hickman).

By 1792, a mere eight years later, most of the order of service was abandoned officially. It was replaced by the Book of Discipline as adopted and approved by the General Conference in Baltimore, MD. That document contained the following statement, "let the morning-service consist of singing, prayer, the reading of one chapter out of the Old Testament, and another out of the New, and preaching." The rationale for this was stated as being for the, "uniformity in public worship among us, on the Lord's Day." The text for the Lord's Supper was retained as an add-on to the end of the service.

The pressures of time and space contributed to a reduction in the frequency of participation in holy communion. Hoit Hickman in his book "Worshiping with United Methodists" delineates four major causes for this;

1. Presiding at the Lord's Supper, unlike preaching, was restricted to the few ordained elders. Most Methodists could receive communion only occasionally, such as when the presiding elder held quarterly conference. 2. Methodists were influenced by customs of monthly or quarterly communion in other denominations and by prevailing enlightenment rationalism that considered the sacraments much less important than preaching. 3. Requiring that a prayer book style text be read as the Lord's Supper ritual made it less popular among Methodists because it was uncongenial to their oral culture and a jarring change of style from their preaching services. ... 4. The heavily penitential texts, particularly when combined with the warnings against receiving communion unworthily, would have been oppressive every Sunday and were more suited to the occasional service of penitence and renewal (p. 50).

The end result, combined with the revivalism that flourished and spread the Gospel into every far-flung community, was that there became a separation of the Service of Table from the service of word on a regular weekly basis.

FROM THE EARLY DAYS TO THE PRESENT

The older established communities of a new nation experienced a settling and domestication of lifestyles. The newer western expansion areas, the ever shifting frontier areas, remained free and wild. Each area had its own experience and expectation of what was valuable and acceptable in terms of worship. In settled areas new churches took on the flavor of the settled life. In the frontier areas the new congregations took on the frontier roughness and simplicity. Local congregations tended to live out their local tradition, being what they were at the moment of their conception with a fairly predictable pattern of development. A church born in the midst of the brush arbor revivalism was not likely to make an overnight change to adopt a high church form of worship. A church established in the altar and chancel mode is not likely to suddenly change its understanding of worship to adopt a revivalist format for worship. It is true that it seems to be part of human nature to move from the less formal to the more formal ... to a point. But that point stops and cannot be stretched too far out of shape without some conflict. In an article titled

“Divine Grace, Diverse Means: Sunday Worship in United Methodist Congregations,” Don E. Saliers describes what was existent in the most typical of Methodist churches’ worship. He uses work done by L. Edward Phillips to identify four basic styles of worship. This study of style predates the advent of the Contemporary / Praise and Worship phenomena. There are four basic patterns that are described: the revival pattern, the Sunday school pattern, the Anglican-aesthetic pattern, and the Word and Table pattern.

The lasting pattern of the revivalist tradition is a three-part service of worship. The normal Sunday service throughout most of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth for a majority of Methodists was a service of praise and song, still referred to in many churches as the “preliminaries,” followed by a sermon called “the message,” and concluding with an altar call and intense prayer at the altar. This became standard form and practice in city churches as well as rural.” [With some formalization by the addition of creeds, formal prayers, choral anthems specific scripture readings and a subtle change from “Altar Call” to “An Invitation to Christian Discipleship” this pattern still exists today in many congregations as the normative or desired pattern. Thus the aforementioned stretching of the point (editor’s note)].

The second major pattern of Sunday morning worship emerged from the Sunday school movement in American Churches. ... here we note that the Sunday school assembly had its own distinctive elements. It was lay-led and included a considerable interaction between leader and the congregation, with increasing focus on teaching and nurture, rather than a building toward a call to conversion. Despite its informality in leadership style, there was strong ritual character present in this pattern, seen especially in the collection, the development of “special music,” and the processions to and from the assembly space. The celebration of special days – such as Bible Sunday, Youth Sunday, Rally Day, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day – constituted a distinctive calendar. [The so-called Akron plan of church building is well suited to this form of worship service. And again, this is formalized over time to include the lectionary readings and the Christian calendar to expand the thematic days and the educational and nurturing nature of the style of service. The point is maintained, but stretched to accommodate new awareness. (editor’s note)].

With the advent of wealthier, settled, urban life came a growing sense of respectability. Despite many who preferred the lively, more informal style of the revival or Sunday school, the gradual introduction of liturgical elements from the Episcopal tradition (and, in some regions, Lutheran tradition) emerged. These included organs, altar candles and acolytes, more formal prayers, robed choirs, and eventually a divided chancel arrangements. This third pattern, still followed by many today, was, in effect a rearranged form of Anglican Morning Prayer, followed by church notices, an offering (now often accompanied by anthems or organ voluntaries), the sequence of hymns – sermon – invitation, and a concluding hymn with benediction. This is the pattern Phillips call the “Anglican Aesthetic.”

In contrast to the previously sketched patterns, this one appeals to a sense of beauty in the sanctuary and in the order and tone of worship. Depending upon printed bulletins for the congregation, this pattern represents a move towards dignified reverence and artistic enhancement in the Sunday Assembly ... the notion of worship that offers “our best” to God continues to shape the sensibilities and the actual practice in many United Methodist churches.

There is a fourth distinctive pattern which emerged in the past twenty-five years [this was published in 1996 (editor’s note)] which can be called “Word and Table.” ... it is based upon some of the earliest Church traditions which were recovered as a result of an intense period of liturgical reform and renewal among all major Christian communities.

Saliers goes on to indicate that, in regards to typical church life today, these historical patterns do not exist in isolation nor in pure forms. They tend to be blended together and overlapped, one congregation containing elements of two or maybe all four in some way, shape, fashion or form. Most of the congregations of some age have a worship style that has been influenced by their own history, by the

movement of folk in and out of the community over the years, by the personal preferences and training of their significant pastors, and by Christian cultural pressures. He quotes a letter he received that stated, "We have become so pluralistic, both in worship styles and theology, that visits to several United Methodist churches in a given area is like visiting churches of different denominations." His response to this lament is, "questions of unity and variety, and of whether there is something distinctive about United Methodist worship, are not new (p. 137).

MODERN / POST-MODERN WORSHIP

In our modern and now post-modern era Christian worship is often simplistically categorized as either traditional or contemporary. And many congregations are setting in place two sets of services based on that assumption. They continue what they always did, assuming that it is fulfilling some notion of "Traditional." What they really mean is that they are doing in worship 'what we have always (since as long as I can remember) done.' They then add a separate so called "contemporary" style service. This is often done to attract a missing audience. Or to put it in less market driven terms, "to speak with a new voice to a generation that is deaf to the older voice."

This "contemporary verses traditional" approach to formatting or style has resulted in what are commonly referred to as "Worship Wars" in some congregations with the various groups doing what is, in their eyes, the right thing to do. On the one side is a group that wants worship to be done the right way and on the other is a desire for relevance and an ability to speak to those for whom the older forms and language and styles no longer strike a cord. Both want a different "rightness" to take center stage and both see the other as wrong, or at least wrong-headed. In some instances the worship wars are avoided, but the traditionalists persist in thinking that the contemporary folk are simply dumbing down to the lowest common denominator. The contemporary folk think that traditionalist are just "sticks in the mud" who just resist change.

It may be that some illumination can help every one find a new understanding and appreciation of the issues at hand. In his work "Transitions in Worship," Andy Langford indicates that worship styles and formats have always been in transition. He argues that there are a wide variety of traditions and a multitude of branches on the tree of Christian worship. Even within a particular denomination over time the flow and style of worship has changed. In his book he attempts to give some explanation of what he views as the three major types of services occurring in Christian churches in this day and age. He names them as follows: the liturgical service, the praise and worship services, and seeker services. The first is most likely akin what is commonly called "traditional." The latter two are usually what we call "contemporary."

Of Liturgical worship he says it "is God centered worship that at its best creates a sense of awe" and, "tends to be formal. The goal of worship is hearing and seeing the Word in rational and reasonable ways and toward that end ... to honor or esteem the wholly other God."

Liturgical worship's primary audience is the Churched believer who accepts, or is willing to struggle with, the received faith. These persons may be members or visitors, but most of them grew up in church ... Word and Table describes the shape of Liturgical service.

Rev. Langford would place all of the previously discussed types of services as fitting into the Liturgical service with the possible exception of the revival pattern. His critique of this type of service includes the notion that it excludes those who are outsiders. They are the uninformed who do not know the proper responses or even which book to use when. "Liturgical worship's audience thus perpetuates itself and excludes persons who have not shared in this formation."

The Praise and Worship service is more typified with the use of a less than formal atmosphere. Music plays a large part of the service. Often the service begins with a long block of songs / hymns that are sung in unison led by a single musician or leader or by a band. This may be interspersed with extemporaneous prayers. The worship leaders makes their presence known by introducing the Scripture reading for the

day. Usually the reading is focused to be only that reading that pertains directly to the sermon or teaching for the day. This is followed by a time of response that includes the passing of the offering plates and more music and singing. The tempo may be mellow and laid back or it may be quite lively and vibrant. Persons may sing softly to themselves or loudly with arms held high.

The audience is composed of both churched and unchurched believers. ... These people know religious settings and traditional religious language, but feel more relaxed in an amphitheatre, auditorium, cafeteria, or movie theatre with a lectern ... flexible seating allows each person to see faces of others. ... Because the Praise and Worship audience identifies more with brokenness and incomplete lives than with sin, the evangelistic task of the service is to be a therapeutic entry way into the community of faith through justifying or converting grace. The shape of Praise and Worship is two-fold: worship and teaching. ... The songs are personal and corporate, enthusiastic and reflective, Christocentric and infused with the Holy Spirit ... what is even more significant about the scriptural choruses is their function in worship ... the goal is to create an environment of sound in which singers lose themselves. Functioning like an eastern mantra, the ongoing repetition of scriptural texts and memorable music transports singers from earth to heaven. The text and music then begin to shape one's life.

Technology is often used to help set the mood and to facilitate worship experiences as well. The arts, both performance and visual, are included in the teaching and mood setting aspects of the service. While critics of this form of worship point out that the services seem to do away with the historic and traditional symbols of the churches life they seem to develop their own sets of symbols. When they are done well these new symbols are based on a deep and abiding understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the life of faith.

The third form of contemporary worship as described by Andy Langford is that of the Seeker Service. Of these he says, "these seeker services are new and unique to our culture, and the most intriguing of these three options of contemporary worship."

They offer Jesus to the unchurched and the pre-churched who did not grow up in church and are unfamiliar with traditional religious language or culture. The goal ... is to introduce unbelievers to Jesus that they may have a vibrant relationship with Jesus. ... Seeker services are tightly choreographed presentations about contemporary real-life issues. Through word, sound, sight, and action, they present problems and offer solutions. A primary characteristic of these services is drama – through monologues, set skits, or improvisational theatre that asks seekers' questions as the prologue to a teacher's comments. While to an outsider the congregation appears passive, the service is intensely engaging. The teaching moves from the issues of a particular community of faith to scriptural texts ... the goal is to introduce Jesus to people who know nothing about him. ... Seeker services come in two major styles: high participation or high performance.

The difference in the two is more a matter of how one wants to treat newcomers. Those who know nothing of what is about to happen may be invited to watch others worship and then to join in as they are comfortable. Or the service may be designed so the newcomers join in by listening and viewing.

There are other newer forms of services that have emerged in the past few years. The most modest is that of the blended service. This is an attempt to bridge the gap between the Liturgical and the Praise and Worship styles. It may be thought of as Mainstream loosening up or of Praise and Worship growing up. It tends to exist some where betwixt and between the two, as the name implies blending the old with the new to make something a of a middle ground.

Others are more radical changes for the historical norm. The Emerging Church has established itself with a worship style that is highly participatory for the individual and the community. There may be

corporate actions that the assembled body participate in, but there are also times in the service for personal reflection and meditation. Service will take place in larger open areas with lots of candles and crosses, with the arts being prominent and with a full use of what are referred to as “smells and bells” that have been re-interpreted by a new generation. There may be several meditation stations available for persons to move to and from during the service time. The experience is intensely personal yet carried out in the midst of the community of believers. The intent and the focus is to create a community of people that share common experiences in Christ. Finally, Taize services are highly meditative in nature. The focus is on silence, prayer, and reflection. They are for the believer who wants to enter into the presence of God, while part of a community. These services are characterized by repetitive simple chorus phrases sung together by the assembled community but directing an individual inward journey.

FREEDOM AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Obliviously diversity is the norm of the day. As Andy Langford says,

If a faithful member of an established congregation fell asleep in the 1960s and then awoke in the late 1990s, the sleeper would be astounded at the variety of worship options available. A whole new world of worship has appeared.

In that diversity there is a freedom that can be a bit overwhelming. And if one is not smart enough to be overwhelmed he may stretch his wings so far that the shape and content of Christian worship is lost. Freedom can lead us to exciting adventures of new understandings or it can lead to disastrous (blasphemous or self-absorbed or performance or change for change sake) ends. How then does one, within this freedom, design worship experiences that are faithful to the task of Christian worship?”

Once again from Hickman’s book “Worshiping with United Methodists” we find wisdom. He delineates five basic principles for faithful Christian Worship. 1. God’s Word is primary. Every thing begins and ends with the Scripture readings for the day. Whether the lectionary or self-selected the service must flow from the wisdom and insight that they bring. 2. Active congregational participation is crucial. Worship is not a spectator sport. The congregants must come ready to involve themselves spiritually and physically, and the service must include some way for the congregants to make response to the Word for the day. 3. Spontaneity and order are important. While order is usually the case (and is desirable) it must not be restrictive so that the Holy has no room to move. And if order is not in place there is only chaos. 4. Worship should be relevant and inclusive. Worship should touch every area of human life, the tragic and the exalted as well as the mundane. It should welcome everyone in and make none a stranger. It should include thought as well as emotion. And there should be something for everyone of every age and stage of life. 5. Worship is communion. Worship is a coming together of God and God’s holy people. It is a coming together of those who are followers with each other, and it is a coming together opportunity for those who are outside the faith to have a chance to come to faith with God and the Community. Worship is the chance for each to know themselves to be “one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world” (UM Hymnal, p. 10).

Andy Langford offers these four cornerstones of faithful worship: the Word of God, the sacraments, prayer, and fellowship. He insists that these four have been emphasized in every revival of the church from Augustine to Wesley, from the frontier camp meetings to the effective congregations thriving today. Once when asked if there was one thing that made for a Methodist ethos or something that made for a particularly distinctive Methodist way of doing worship his verbal response was something along the lines of re-emphasizing the four cornerstones and then adding the idea that if Wesley’s notion of prevenient grace, saving grace and perfecting grace are preached it is Methodist.

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR THE MOVEMENTS AND COMPONENTS FOUND IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

THE GATHERING:

The gathering is a time when the congregation comes together for worship. It is a time of an outward visible gathering and a time of an inward and spiritual gathering. During this time one or more of the following activities may take place:

1. *Informal greeting and welcoming*
2. *Announcements, welcoming of visitors, or attendance registration*
3. *Rehearsal of unfamiliar hymns*
4. *Informal prayer, singing, and testimony*
5. *Quiet meditation and personal prayer*
6. *Instrumental or vocal musical offering*

Prelude:

The Prelude is the music played to set the mood for worship. Often this is played as the people gather, in which case it should be understood that the worship service begins when the people begin to gather for worship. What takes place during the gathering includes both what the people do as they are entering the place of worship and what happens after they are seated. Alternately, the music may be played as the worship leaders make their way into the worship setting. If there is no formal procession, it denotes that the time for worship has begun.

Chiming of the Hour:

The chiming of the hour is a signal to the congregation that the time has arrived for formal worship to begin.

The Procession:

The Procession is a means whereby the worship leaders (pastor in charge, deacons, assistants, lay readers, choral persons and others) enter the sanctuary. Although there is no "rule" for the order of the procession, it is customarily as follows: Crucifer (cross-bearer), the choir, the acolytes, the lay ministers, and finally the clergy; the highest-ranking clergy last.

Lighting of the Candles:

The candles on the altar are traditionally lighted by the acolytes or other designated persons. The lighting of the candles is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. At this time the congregation should assume the appropriate decorum for the worship service. Generally there are two candles on the altar. The candle on the left as the congregation sees it is the Gospel Candle and the one on the right as the congregation sees it is the Epistle Candle. There are varying traditions, each with merit, as to which candle should be lighted first. The important thing to remember is that the candles are symbols of a living God and they should be lighted with reverence and dignity.

Voluntary:

The Voluntary is a musical offering, usually on the organ, during which people may exit the sanctuary, greet one another, or continue in meditation while the music is playing.

Introit (choral):

The Introit is a fragment of a psalm, with its antiphon (response), sung while those who are the worship leaders enter the sanctuary and approach the altar. It may be said, sung, or chanted.

Call to Worship:

The Call to Worship is a phrase read or spoken by the worship leader to call the individuals to the beginning of the service of worship. It may be a responsively read interaction between the leader and the people. It is used to call the people to set aside the distractions of every day life and to be focused on the life of faith and the work of worship.

Opening Prayer:

The Opening Prayer is similar to the Call to Worship in that it may be extemporaneous on the part of the worship leader or it may be read. It may be a single voice of prayer or it may include the voices of all persons present. It may be in unison or it may be responsively read. It differs though from the Call to Worship in that it is directed to God as a way of gaining God's attention to the body of the faithful as they have gathered for worship.

Invocation:

The invocation is similar to the above items in its format. It differs in that it is a means whereby the presence of the Holy Spirit is invited into the midst of the community of faith to be involved in the heart of the activities of the day.

Announcements:

The Announcements are the time where in the life and activities of the congregation are shared. This is often thought of as an interruption to the flow of worship. In truth it is not if the congregation and pastor alike can think of this as the time when we offer these activities up to God for God to bless.

Welcoming / Greeting:

The Welcoming or Greeting is traditionally words or phrases, often with scriptural references, which encourages the body of the faithful to prepare for worship. Or this may also be a less formal time whereby the congregation greets each other warmly; in less traditional settings this is often a way to greet guests without calling attention to them in the larger group.

Passing the Peace:

The Passing of the Peace is a time when all, including the pastor, exchange signs and words of peace and reconciliation with one another. This is more formal than the welcome / greeting above. It maybe viewed as an act of seeking and granting forgiveness.

Hymn of Praise:

The Hymn of Praise is a hymn that reflects corporate praise to God, centering on the attributes and deeds of God that call forth gratitude and praise. It should be familiar, upbeat, and affirming. This hymn may be omitted in favor of a processional hymn if a processional entrance into the worship space is desired.

Act of Praise:

The Act of Praise is, by tradition, an act that may be a Canticle or a Psalm that is read responsively by the congregation. (See Responsive Reading below.)

Responsive Reading:

The Responsive Reading, as it is generally used today, is a verse of the Psalms (and the Canticles which are taken from the Psalms) divided for antiphonal singing into two halves separated by a colon or an asterisk. The second half is usually a repetition in meaning of the first half. It should be noted that our present-day custom of the minister reading the first verse of the Psalm and the congregation the second, etc., is entirely inconsistent not only with tradition, but also with the purpose and the construction of the Psalms.

Gloria Patri:

The Gloria Patri (from the Latin for "Glory be to the Father") is an ascription of praise to the Blessed Trinity used after the Psalms and most Canticles. It is often called "the lesser Doxology." (The Gloria Patri should follow the psalm to make it Trinitarian / Christian.)

THE PRAYERS

By prayer we communicate with God. Prayer may be personal or corporate, formal or informal, written or extemporaneous, silent or spoken. It is that time in our worship of God when we may:

- 1. Give thanks*
- 2. Implore holy intercession either for ourselves or others*
- 3. Ask for forgiveness*
- 4. Express our joy*
- 5. Glorify God's being*
- 6. Confess our sins*
- 7. Or make our supplications known unto God*

Joys and Concerns:

The prayer time for joys and concerns in the service may be led by either the liturgist or pastor. It is a time when the congregation is invited to rejoice in the presence of all worshipers, to celebrate births, or to support those in difficult times or who mourn the deaths of loved ones. Sometimes special guests or laity also lift up specific prayer needs or missions as ways to actively respond to the Word.

Prayer of Confession:

The Prayer of Confession is a prayer where in the presence of the Infinite God, we publicly confess our shortcomings. This may be followed by a time of silence for personal confession or reflection.

Absolution:

The Absolution is a prayer that the pastor offers in assurance of comfort. Often taken from Scripture, the absolution assures us of the forgiving, restorative nature of God. The pastor does not make this declaration by his own power and volition, but rather he is officially declaring the fact of God's forgiving nature.

The Lord's Prayer:

The Lord's Prayer is that prayer given by our Lord to his disciples when they asked him to teach them how to pray. Traditionally this prayer is said aloud in unison by the congregation. It is found in both the Service of the Word and the Service of the Table, but should be used only once during any service.

Pastoral Prayer:

The Pastoral Prayer is that prayer, offered by the pastor, on behalf of God's people who have glorified His name, affirmed our faith, confessed our sins, and been assured of His pardon. Our supplications and petitions are brought before our God with boldness through our mediator, Jesus Christ.

Collect:

The Collect is a short prayer that summarizes a foregoing series of prayers or a worship service. The Collect is usually one sentence long and consists of three parts, an invocation, a petition, and a doxology.

Prayer of Intercession:

The Prayer of Intercession, which takes its name from the Latin for "a passing between," is a prayer or petition on behalf of another or others asking God to intercede in their lives and, by His Grace, free them from the burdens of this world.

Bidding Prayer:

The Bidding Prayer, which takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon for "invite," is an exhortation to prayer that may be said by the pastor before the sermon, especially in services of the Word only.

Prayer of the People:

The Prayer of the People is a prayer offered by the pastor or liturgist on behalf of the congregation for themselves, the church, the broader community, and God's world. It is a brief statement of the truths of Holy Scripture upon which the Christian Church is built. It may alternately be a prayer offered by the assembled congregation either by printing in the bulletin or by rote memorization.

Proclamation

While most of the service of holy worship is directed to God by the people of God, this section is that other time when God speaks to us through the use of the reading of Holy Scripture, the preaching (which John Calvin considered, when done faithfully, equal with Scripture), anthems, children's object lessons / sermons, and/or dramas.

Choral Anthem:

The Choral Anthem is derived from the term "antiphon." This term refers to any musical setting of words (usually scriptural) bearing upon the service of the day, other than the congregational hymns and or chants. Historically, anthems were sung responsively. An anthem is sung to glorify God or to enlighten the word. It is not entertainment.

Choral Worship:

Choral Worship is traditionally an extended song selection sung by the choir. The songs may be scriptural in nature, they may be prayerful or declarative. Like the anthem they, being a part of worship, are not entertainment.

Drama Presentation:

A Drama Presentation may be either a live performance or videotaped presentation that has a bearing on the point of the service or the sermon. This mode of presenting the Word of God to the gathered congregation must be contiguous to the readings and the sermon. Its use must be to bring some awareness to the observer of the point of the day. Like the anthem, it is not entertainment. Its purpose of use is enlightenment.

The Lessons (Old Testament / The Psalm / The Epistle / The Gospel):

The Lessons refer to the collective readings from Holy Scripture that are the basis of the whole service. Some congregations use lectionary readings each week that include the four readings listed above, each of which will have a bearing on the whole focus of the service. Other congregations will focus more closely on self-selected readings and use only those that are overtly a part of the service. Regardless, the idea is that these readings are the place from which the whole service begins to take shape and the primary voice through which God speaks to us.

Prayer of Illumination:

The Prayer of Illumination is a prayer spoken by the pastor or liturgist. It may be focused on one of two things. First, it may ask that God bless the readings of Scripture so that the hearers may find God's holy truth in them. Secondly, it may be a blessing by the pastor or request of the pastor to have God bless their preparation and presentation such that it may bring to light some divinely given insight for the gathered people.

Hymn of Preparation:

The Hymn of Preparation is often sung prior to the final Scripture reading. It is another means whereby the congregation is prepared to hear the Word of God for the day. This hymn ought to lead out of or into the readings, depending on their placement, in relation to this hymn.

Time of Personal Witness / Testimony:

The Time of Personal Witness is a time wherein a member of the congregation has the opportunity to speak to what God has done on their behalf. While often not truly eloquent, testimonies serve the fundamental purpose of allowing laypersons to hear each other speaking about their faith in personal terms. Dr. Timothy Luke speaks of the need to "talk ourselves into being Christian." By this he means that by speaking of our faith out loud we somehow make it more real. Those "overhearing" the Gospel, are allowed to do the same in as much as it helps them learn how to speak of their faith.

Children's Sermon / Moments:

The Children's Sermon is a short time spent in the company of the children in the sanctuary during worship times. This time should be quality time directed to them. Pastors or lay Leaders should not use this time to speak to the adults through the children. This time should have the same focus as the rest of the service.

Introduction of the Preacher:

This is often a part of the African-American worshiping community. The preacher for the day (even if they are the home pastor) is introduced to the congregation as the bearer of the Word of God. This sets them and this time apart as something extraordinary – they are the speakers of God’s Word and this is the time of that speaking.

Sermon:

The Sermon, which takes its name from the Latin word for “talk” or “speech.” It makes reference to a discourse based on the scriptural text read earlier in the service. It is delivered from the pulpit and is intended to give religious or moral instruction. Sermons are traditionally categorized into four basic types: 1. Homily. A commentary, without formal introduction, division, or conclusion, on some part of sacred Scripture. The aim is to explain the literal, and evolve the spiritual, meaning of the sacred text. There are two different approaches to presenting a homily type of address: The first method consists in treating separately each sentence of the text. The second method is the opposite; it focuses the entire content of the text on a single idea. Homilies are usually a less formal and occasionally shorter speech than other types of sermons. It is often extemporaneous. 2. Proclamation. A public declaring of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is a declarative speech, based on the readings for the day. A proclamation is intended to make known the good news of some matter God desires to make known to the gathered body. Its particular form is that of a formal statement to which one may not reply in any other way than to ascent. 3. Postil. The term is derived for a Latin term indicating a notation concerning a biblical commentary. Its first usages were in reference to expositions of the Gospels. This form of preaching soon became commonly used to give voice to the doctoral or theological stances of biblical text. A proper use of this form of preaching would best be used to explain those moments of the life of Christ that offer metaphor and parallel to our experiences of faith in the Christ’s teaching, example and spirit. 4. Exhortation. A sermon that is intended to incite or to encourage a response of some sort. Most often the desired response is that of accepting the faith for ones own, of coming into right relationship with God, or of being saved.

Response

*The Word of God is active and evokes active response from those who hear it.
The response begins immediately and extends beyond the worship service
into every aspect of our living.*

Affirmation of Faith:

The Affirmation of Faith may be a response to the Word proclaimed by standing together to affirm what we believe, using an historic or contemporary creed from either our hymnal or other sources. A statement of individual Christian faith and belief, for example the Apostle’s Creed or the Nicene Creed, is usually spoken or read in unison by the congregation.

Litany of Response:

The Litany of Response, which takes its name from the Greek word for “a prayer,” is a general supplication of great earnestness said responsively by the pastor and the people.

Altar Call and Conversion:

Many churches are accustomed to having an altar call at the end of their worship services. The idea is that when a pastor or evangelist preaches a message, the hearers are subsequently called to salvation.

This call is to actually come forward and stand at the front of the church to confess one's sins and accept Christ as Savior. It is said that this is how a person is saved.

Invitation to Discipleship:

By the Invitation to Discipleship a worship leader invites all worshipers to continue their response to the Word in faithful ways. This may include invitations to come to the altar and pray or it may invite the Congregation to go out into the world to practice their faith in specific ways.

Offertory:

The Offertory is that part of the service during which the alms of the people are received and presented and in the Communion Service, the Bread and the Wine are offered and placed upon the Altar. The singing of a hymn or anthem at this time is customary and is also called the offertory and the verses of Scripture spoken by the Pastor at the announcement of the Offertory are called the Offertory Sentences. Technically speaking, the term "offering" refers only to the gifts of the people, the bread and the wine. Monetary gifts are referred to as "tithes" or "collections."

Doxology:

The term "Doxology" comes from the Greek word for "Words of Praise." Any form of words in which glory is ascribed to God or the Blessed Trinity is a doxology. The usual reference is to the metrical verse that begins "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." It is often called "the greater Doxology." (See the "Gloria Patri" above.)

Hymn of Response:

The Hymn of Response is an opportunity for worshipers to focus on the transcendent nature of God. Not only is God the great creator God, but also a God of personal relationships. This hymn gives us a chance to respond as we are inwardly moved.

Going Forth

In response to the Word of God, we are prepared to be sent out of the sanctuary and into the world as active disciples of our lord and savior Jesus Christ .

Benediction:

The term "Benediction" is taken from the Latin term meaning "good word." This final prayer invokes God's blessing on the worshipers as they are sent forth to bear God's love and peace into the world.

Closing Prayer:

The Closing Prayer may be in the form of a benediction, a responsive litany, or a choral response. Like the Benediction, its intent is to prepare us to go out into the world with God's grace as his disciples.

Extinguishing of the Candles:

The act of extinguishing the candles, particularly the Gospel and Epistle candles, is traditionally the responsibility of the acolyte. The acolyte may "catch up" a bit of the flame from the Gospel candle and

precede the congregation out of the sanctuary. Symbolically this is the Holy Spirit leading the faithful out into the world to spread the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Choral Response:

The Choral Response is a vocal or musical response, usually from the choir, in direct response to the benediction. The phrase “God be with you till we meet again” is a typical choral response.

The Recessional:

The Recessional is the retiring of the choir and clergy in due order after a church service. A hymn sung while thus retiring, is called the Recessional Hymn.

Postlude:

The Postlude is music played after the conclusion of divine worship.

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