

Making Christ Known

in the



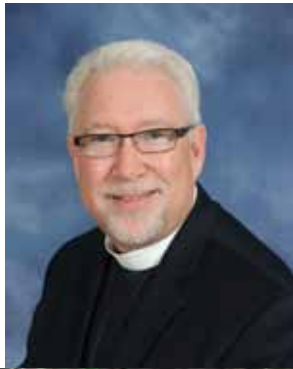
Northern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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Worship Matters

The Rev. H. Jeffrey A. Clements

My son was new to his position as associate director of Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp. He and his dog had moved to Montana that summer with what he could stuff into his small car. My daughter-in-law was still working in North Dakota as a National Park Ranger, so my wife went to help her pack up the house. I headed to Montana and spent nine days at camp.



Let's just say I love camp. I have great memories from my teenage years of retreats with my youth group at Caroline Furnace in Virginia. As a pastor, I have taken children and youth to Green Wing (a camp that used to be near Amboy) and our own Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center. I have even led retreats.

But, my love for camp apparently has its limits. After a week of morning and evening camp worship in Montana, I had developed a real need to praise God indoors and to sing some songs and hymns without hand motions and accompanied by something other than three guitars.

So, on Sunday morning, I headed to the closest ELCA congregation, not knowing what kind of worship I would encounter there, but hopeful that it would feel a bit more familiar to me.

Don't get me wrong. The camp worship I experienced was great. It really was. On that Sunday morning, however, I needed something else. As I worshiped, in a building surrounded by altar, font and pulpit, with a liturgy accompanied by piano and a sermon preached by a vested pastor, I had found what I needed.

*I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together*

- Psalm 34:1-3

But, I could not help but shake my head at just how subjective we can all be in our assessment of worship services. Here you have proof that I am as guilty as anyone.

If you serve on your congregation's worship planning team, you have my gratitude. You know that planning a worship service requires much more than picking singable hymns. Planning a meaningful and relevant worship experience for a multigenerational congregation presents some significant challenges and not all of your efforts are uniformly appreciated. Thanks for what you do. It is important work.

I also deeply appreciate those dedicated folks who work with me on the synod's worship team. This team is responsible for planning synod worship for our annual assembly, for ordination services, for the Congregational Resourcing Event and for the Professional Leaders Conference. In the course of a year, the

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Worship



The worship of God is both personal and corporate. As we grow in our experience of worshipping God together with the community of faith, our desire strengthens to follow Christ in daily life. As we gather to worship, we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament, respond by singing, praying and giving our offering and are sent by the Spirit to serve God and our neighbor in the world.



This issue is the third in a series on the seven Faith Practices. Find previous issues at nisynod.org/pubs/mck

Something Old, Something New

The Rev. Twila Schock

“Wow! I love worshipping here. I was afraid, hearing you were Lutheran, you would make us bow, cross ourselves, and say things at church that we didn’t feel.



Instead, we sing, we read the Bible, and we pray.”

* * *

“Thank God! When we heard about this church we were afraid we’d have to give up our beloved Lutheran liturgy.”

* * *

Ironically, these two statements were made about the same worship experience. The first, by a Methodist refugee from Liberia. The second, by a member of the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod. Both by parishioners of mine at the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy (MPC) in Moscow, Russia in 1999.

Planning worship for this congregation was not for the faint of heart; the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy was made of members from over 20 nations and 25 denominations. There were Roman Catholics. There were Copts. There were

monophysites. There were Orthodox, Pentecostals, Unitarians and more.

They were ambassadors. They were refugees. They were international health workers, educators, laborers and lawyers. And, they came from Ethiopia, the United States, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Andorra and Indonesia.

What we had in common were two things. Life in Russia was rugged: we needed Christian community. And, we wanted to worship.

But, as this community’s leader, the question of the day became “How do we worship? How do we pray as one in the midst of such diversity?”

Rev. Anscar Chapungco, a Benedictine monk and prolific writer on the cultural adaptation of the liturgy, offers two helpful – yet, seemingly, opposite – perspectives.

First, he offers, “Adaptation of the liturgy to various native genius and tradition is not a novelty, but fidelity, to tradition.” (Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy, Paulist Press, 1982, p.3). In other words, now is not the time to create something new! Rather, dig deeper than you’ve ever dug to find the worship of the early church.

On the other hand, he suggests, “Liturgical adaptation is a theological

imperative arising from the event of the incarnation. If the Word of God became a Jew, the Church in the various countries of the world must become native to each of them.” (Ibid., p. 87.) In other words, we have no choice in the matter. Something new will arise! In the same way that God changed (and willfully limited) God-self by taking on gender and a cultural form to meet us, our worship, too, will change as it takes root in a new culture. It must!

What were we to do in this context where there were multiple cultures operative? With no small amount of insecurity, we returned to the basics. We queried, “What did all of our worship traditions have in common? How did the early church worship?”

We found ourselves drawn to the four headings which shaped the earliest of Christian gatherings: Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. And, we seasoned the gathering with the gifts of the people: prayers petitions from Ghana, Zulu hymns of praise, banners from India, bread from Germany, Indian invocations and Latin American processions.

And, somehow, with no small dose of the Holy Spirit, it worked! Those who came from outside of the liturgical tradition took particular delight in the prolonged Gathering. Those steeped in the liturgical tradition, took solace in the Meal. We found our common ground in the Word. And, when we were Sent, we looked forward to gathering again.

Having now returned to parish ministry in the United States after 18 years of serving in other contexts, I find myself confronted with a similar, yet radically different, challenge. How, in our worship, do we maintain that fidelity to the tradition we have been handed, while – at the same – finding that marriage of culture and tradition in a digital, fragmented and individualistic culture.

With the same humble insecurity, I am finding myself increasingly drawn to the four headings: Gathering, Word, Meal and Sending. And, I trust that gifts of those I serve, steeped in the Holy Spirit, will bring about that new thing which continues to bring life.



Worship Is

The Rev. Robert A. Franek

Worship is from the beginning the Church's primary faith practice. A people gathered by the Holy Spirit around word and sacrament on the Lord's Day giving thanks and praise for resurrection of Jesus Christ is the church's primary activity. Everything in the baptismal life flows from the sending of the assembly from this gathering around the central things of faith: word and sacrament. In fact, it may even be said that everything that happens in worship is for the sake of being sent out to be the body of Christ in and for the life of the world.



Worship is a fully embodied and sensorial experience. It is filled with speaking, singing, washing, anointing, eating, drinking, and blessing, and yet also silence and stillness for reflecting on and listening to the Holy in our midst. All our senses are stimulated in the act of worship, though personally I wish we made more room for smell through the use of incense as a means of honoring Christ's presence in the word and the meal and the gathered assembly. Nevertheless, faith comes through hearing as Paul writes, and with the Psalmist we taste and see that the Lord is good. And with our bodies we enact the liturgy: standing, sitting, kneeling, walking, crossing, and bowing. We use many postures for prayer and practice many patterns for sharing Christ's peace in a act of ritual reconciliation before moving to the meal.

Worship is our weekly immersion in rehearsing life according to God's reign of justice and peace. The Holy Spirit's gathering of the Pentecost people that we are is itself a witness to the alternative community we are as the called and sent people of God. Where else is such a diverse people gathered? Here around the central things shaped by intercession and thanksgiving we are neighbor to one another that we may

be neighbor to all people and the whole creation. A book, a story, a person calls us to find abundant life by giving our lives away. A meal of bread and wine, ordinary food and celebratory drink, the body and blood of the crucified and risen one given from his own wounded hand, teach us an economy of abundance and enough. A pool of water, a cleansing bath, the font of death and new life, unites us to a community that transcends time and place and gives us the only identity that ever matters, child of God, and it is permanent. Born anew as children of God in the holy and living waters of baptism we are re-membered to one another around the table of our Lord Jesus Christ who with his own body and blood makes us again his body for the life of the world.

Worship is the foundation of all our faith practices. Through our worship we learn to pray for ourselves, our neighbors including our enemies, and the whole of creation. Through our worship we learn to give generously and sacrificially as the practice of our offering is rooted in caring for the poor in the world. The scriptures demand our study and our discipleship in daily life. And could it be that gathering on the Lord's Day, the Eighth Day, the day in time that stands for time beyond time to celebrate the paschal mystery of life coming out of death is so central to who we are as the baptized people of God we wouldn't want to miss it for anything and may even invite someone else to come and see what worship is – a transformative encounter with the holy and with us always God.



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team makes use of various liturgical and musical styles. We seek some common ground in these days when there is far more variety congregation to congregation than in any time in the past and expectations are harder to meet.

Worship is really at the core of who we are and what we do as Lutherans. It is one of the first things we emphasize as we discuss our faith practices. Yet, it seems that worship has become less important in the faith lives of many. The current trend is for even the most regular church attender to worship less often.

Does this mean that we should expend less effort in worship planning? By no means! Worship matters. If people did not care, they would not so freely express their opinions (or drive to town on Sunday from camp).

But, we need to remember that worship is contextual too. Worship that fits in one place may not be appropriate at all in another. As long as we follow our pattern of gathering, hearing the Word, sharing the meal and sending into the world, we are worshipping faithfully regardless of the musical style or instrumentation, architecture, color of wine, or length of sermon.



Worship Is the Heart of All We Do

Given competition, is it 'hub of our week, space of our regrouping'?

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA Presiding Bishop

There is a Seattle-based caffeinated beverage company that goes to great lengths to provide excellent customer service. Its campaign is to make itself everyone's "Third Place." "First Place" is home, "Second Place" is work and "Third Place" is the local coffeehouse. There is meticulous training for employees, relentless market research and creative adaptability employed by the company to retain customers.

Employees practice the "hand-off plane" where they are taught to make eye contact when handing over the vente mocha latte to the customer. This is so the customer will have a transformative experience while sipping a cup of joe. And it works. In a letter to thank the staff a woman wrote: "You are the hub of our week, the space of our regrouping," and she went on to describe a multigenerational, multicultural, multi-socioeconomic community where she and her family found comfort and a sense of belonging.

This is our competition.

We are church. At the heart of what we do is worship, and at the heart of our worship is the crucified and risen Christ. Everything else we do is formed, nourished, sustained and transformed by our life as a faith community gathered around word and sacrament, abiding in the love of God. Without this intentional, regular communion with God and each other it's not possible for us to speak an authentic word of hope to a broken world — the world God so loves.

When we gather for worship we hear God's word of promise; we confess our helplessness; receive forgiveness; we pray; and we welcome new brothers and sisters through baptism, promising to support them in their walk in faith. We are fed with the bread of life and receive our Lord poured out for us. And then we are sent back into the world. Worship is essential for the church's life and service.

But how much attention do we pay to the preparation and execution of our corporate worship? Is it the "hub of our week, the space of our regrouping"? Do we expect to have a transformative experience? The Third Commandment (Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy) and Martin Luther's explanation (We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it) remind us that worship is central in the life of faith. Worship is not just another item on the list of programs and activities in a congregation. It is the heart.

Sometimes worship can become a sort of lived-in room — everything has become so familiar that we don't notice the frayed furniture. What if we entered worship as if it were our first experience of it? What if we saw the congregation and the liturgy through the eyes of a guest? Is the building clean? Where is the real front door? Does anyone greet us? Is the bulletin

Worship is essential for the church's life and service.

easy to navigate?

Where are the nursery and the restrooms? Are instructions for communion clear?

And what about the worship service itself? We are a liturgical church. There is a certain humility and beautiful communion in not trying to reinvent the service each time, but to join with brothers and sisters throughout the world and across the centuries. And please, please do not rewrite the creeds. It took the church a couple of centuries to come up with the Nicene Creed. Why do we think we can do better knocking it out on our laptop?

This has nothing to do with styles of music — there is a breadth of hymnody in Evangelical Lutheran Worship and related resources. Gospel, Bach, contemporary and world music are all powerful ways of hearing God's word and singing praise. It's good to be fluent in the musical vernacular of our communities and to try those of others.

Most of all we should come to worship expecting to be changed. We are touching, tasting, feeling, hearing and seeing the one who knows us and loves us completely. Our lives are restored. We are set free. Fed for the journey we are set loose to go in peace and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

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