

Report of the Worship Task Force



**Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church
Anno Domini 2001**

Basic Principles of Worship Renewal

1. Christian worship is intended to be a life changing experience

Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God. In worship the people of God acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives. As they respond to God's claim and redemptive action in Jesus Christ, believers are transformed and renewed. In worship the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service in the world.

-*Directory for Worship, Book of Order*

2. Worship is centered on, and belongs to, God

The opportunity we have as Christians to meet together and interact directly with the God of the universe is nothing less than extraordinary. Sadly, many of us take worship for granted. Worse, we craft it around human agendas that often have nothing to do with the divine activity of meeting and honoring God. Our worship of God either affirms or contradicts our message about God. Unbelievers [and non-practicing believers] will draw conclusions about the veracity and uniqueness of our God based on what they see or do not see happening in our weekly services.

-*Sally Morgenthaler, Worship Evangelism*

3. Worship is both active and contemplative

A wholesome life calls for a balance between contemplation and action, work and prayer, community and solitude. True worship allows us to experience a workable rhythm, one that moves us from silence into praise.

-*Marv Hiles (direct quote)*

4. The ecumenical movement has opened the church to new worship styles

Churches of nearly every denomination are discovering each other...and what is happening is the convergence of worship traditions; a blending of worship old and new.

-*Robert Webber, Worship Old and New*

5. Authentic worship should attract and be open to all

The church is the only society in the world that exists for its non-members.

-*Archbishop Temple, (widely attributed quote)*

6. Reformed worship is open to change in order to speak to new generations

Lastly, because [the Lord] has taught nothing specifically (concerning worship ceremonies), and because these things are not necessary to salvation...it will be fitting...to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly...But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe.

-*John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion*

7. Our culture has changed and worship must adapt, especially in order to reach younger people

The ordering of worship should also reflect the richness of the cultural diversity in which the church ministers, as well as the local circumstances and the needs of its congregations.

-*Directory for Worship, Book of Order*

8. The worship service is the main item by which people select a church family to join

The worship service...is the primary entrance door for new people to become involved—most people decide to join or not join a church based on their experience of worship.

-*Charles Arn, How to Start a New Service*

9. The worship service must be presented with power, beauty, and excellence

We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendor or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you; only this we know, that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty.

-*Report to Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, from emissaries who worshipped at the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople*

10. We need to preserve our identity as Reformed Christians even as we plan for change

Growing denominations are slow to change their theology and quick to change the cultural forms and styles in which they communicate their theology; declining denominations, however, are quick to change their theology and slow to change their forms and styles.

-*George Hunter, A Church for the Unchurched*

Introduction

The Session entrusted the Worship Task force to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our current worship offerings. We were to engage in serious study of Reformed worship, reach out to other churches in order to discover new models and styles of worship and report back with a plan for worship renewal at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church.

In acknowledging that all worship targets certain types of people, we proceeded from the observation that our current worshipping congregation is basically congruent with the general demography of the community in which the church is situated. One glaring exception is the reduced presence of younger adults and families with young children in the life of the congregation. While earlier studies of community demographics have indicated that this segment of the population has been underrepresented in our community, there has been a dramatic influx of these persons into our community in recent years, especially young families. The church has not adequately reached out to serve and minister to them.

Based on our work and research, we believe that it is possible for the church to experience dramatic growth in coming years from this population of new young families. Worship renewal will provide a powerful tool in achieving that end. We propose a continuing emphasis on a distinctively Reformed worship experience, the celebration of diversity, excellence in music and the proclamation of the Word, and worship that is characteristic of dignity and depth. There must also be movement, however, towards incorporating worship elements and styles that are capable of reaching out to and drawing in younger adults and families.

Basic Structure for the Report of the Task Force

The Worship Task Force has divided its report into three general categories:

1. Hospitality - Welcoming the Stranger in Worship
2. Aesthetics - The Environment of Worship
3. Liturgy - The Structure and Flow of Worship

1. Hospitality – Welcoming the Visitor in Worship

Our worship experience is shaped and framed by the act of welcoming those who are called by God to be part of this worshiping community. We welcome them into this church as we welcome expected guests into our homes, with grace and sensitivity.

A. Parking

- We have come to the conclusion that the extent and quality of the parking at the church will directly influence the worship experience of visitors.
- The front line of contact for visitors could be with identified parking lot attendants who are ready to assist visitors as they arrive.
- Visitor parking needs to be clearly indicated upon entrance to the parking lot, and attendants could be ready to greet visitors who park in this special area.
- Additionally, members might be encouraged to utilize street parking, thereby freeing up off-street parking for visitors and families with young children.
- Generally speaking, the church should consider expanding its off-street parking in order for worship attendance to be significantly increased. We think this should be a high priority of the long-range facilities planning of the church.
- The landscaping, both in the parking lot and on the approach to the church up Knox Drive could be upgraded.

B. Signage and Information

- The signage throughout the church could be upgraded in order to provide more readily comprehensible direction to visitors. It is currently irregular and frequently not clear.
- The areas designated for special access and visitor parking could be reallocated and relocated in order to maximize their usefulness.
- The information kiosks could be upgraded, possibly through utilizing computer technology, to provide easily accessible information on the broad range of activities in the life of the church.
- An attendant could be stationed at the kiosk in order to provide further assistance to both visitors and members alike.
- Signage could be better illuminated in order to maximize its utility into the evening hours, and the facility should generally be well lit.
- In the context of the service itself, care should be taken to provide information and encouragement as to how the worshiping congregation can be hospitable to guests.
- Before, during, and immediately after the Sunday morning worship hours the reception desk in the church office could be staffed to assist visitors and members alike and answer the telephone.

C. Greeting and Ushering

- The first element of visible hospitality rests with those who serve the church as greeters and ushers.
- We believe it is time to develop an enhanced greeting and ushering process, including a core group of youth and adults who are trained and possess the resources to provide visitors with generous and helpful assistance. There should be an adequate number to allow them to take visitors personally to the nursery, or assist them directly in finding their way around the church campus.
- The ushers would need to be clearly identifiable, and they could take responsibility for ensuring that the congregation is properly directed and placed for worship, especially during crowded services.

D. Recognition

- In a large congregation, such as ours, it is quite difficult for worshipers to know one another. How we greet and welcome visitors and members alike will, to a large degree, influence their desire to return.
- The roses distributed to visitors are used unevenly; a more effective way of reaching our visitors could be introduced.
- The congregation could be more consistently encouraged to fill out the friendship folders (including addresses and phone numbers, thereby encouraging visitors to do the same), and they could be given regular exhortation in worship to be hospitable to visitors, young and old alike.
- Of special concern is the degree to which the congregation is led in reaching out to welcome young adults and families in worship. The congregation could provide additional support, encouragement and adequate resources to fully draw them into the worship experience. Parents with children could be provided with assistance before and after the service.

E. Contact and Accessibility

- Since worship in a large congregation, such as ours, often can be impersonal for both visitors and long time members, opportunity could be given to receive prayer and support after each service by one of the clergy or trained lay leaders in the form of an open invitation extended to the congregation.
- Clergy could be more visible before and after worship service, moving among the people as they are welcomed into worship or invited to return.
- Visitors might be directed towards church members, such as the ushers, available after the service to answer questions regarding the life and ministry of the church.
- A team of individuals, perhaps comprised of active or inactive Elders and Deacons, could be trained and deployed to engage visitors and new members during the fellowship hour following each service.
- In addition to increasing the accessibility of our clergy and lay leadership, the time may have come for the church to upgrade its facilities to be fully accessible to those of all ages and stations with physical limitations.
- There could be a “care and concerns” table in the foyer so that worshipers are provided the opportunity to write down their needs and concerns.
- The Session could more faithfully take up the responsibility, mandated in our Book of Order, of reaching out to members who have been absent for a prolonged period or who have fallen away from worship altogether.
- The Session might also explore effective ways to reach out to college-aged young adults.

2. Aesthetics - The Environment of Worship

Our worship experience is shaped and framed by the physical aspects and elements of our environment. What we see, touch, feel, taste and hear facilitates our ability to enter into God's presence.

A. Sound

- We believe the time has come to replace the current system, and to assure better continuity of sound reinforcement quality, and that this is not an item that should be put off until some point in the future. The sound system in the sanctuary is in bad shape and wholly inadequate for our needs. The sound quality is uneven throughout the sanctuary, and our team of rotating volunteer technicians has struggled in their attempts to adequately support the service.
- The sanctuary could be temperature controlled, so as to negate the need for opening the doors during hot summer days, thereby keeping competing noises from entering the sanctuary from the outside.
- The sanctuary could have a well equipped "comfort room" that is replete with audio and video input from the service, so that parents would not feel uncomfortable when their babies or toddlers make noise.
- Designated ushers could also be ready to assist worshipers experiencing difficulties with their hearing aids that often produce a high-pitched whine, often inaudible to the worshiper.

B. Sight-lines and Lighting

- The chancel lighting system in the sanctuary does not adequately illuminate the chancel area, and it does not provide suitable flexibility in allowing the use of lighting in order to direct the attention of the congregation during the worship service. We believe it needs to be thoroughly overhauled.
- In addition, the sight lines in the sanctuary are not optimal for fully drawing in the worshipping congregation, especially those who are seated in the rear of the sanctuary. Either the sanctuary floor could be "raked" in order to provide better sight lines, or the chancel area could be raised.
- If the church wants to truly incorporate innovative worship styles and formats, the chancel area could be converted from a fixed to a flexible layout, with movable seating and pulpit/lectern configurations.

C. Leadership

- Worship leadership could more adequately reflect the level of inclusiveness towards which the congregation is directed.
- While we recognize that the formal robing of the clergy during worship has traditionally reflected the majestic presence of God among the people, and that this age-old practice has symbolic and aesthetic merit, the pastoral staff might consider whether or not this practice may create a barrier between themselves and the laity.
- Lay leaders' participation in the worship service could be increased, and we recommend they should be trained to provide worship leadership with excellence.
- Children and youth could be given additional opportunities to provide worship leadership.
- The Chancel Choir, and other worship leadership teams, could be more inclusive of younger worshipers.
- Generally speaking, the worship services could become more effective in incorporating the gifts, talents, and abilities of the entire worshipping congregation.

D. Decoration

-Worship space at LOPC is austere and simple by design. The use of visual arts, ranging from banners to visually evocative displays would strengthen our worship by appealing to a broader sensory range.

-Additionally, the narthex could be redesigned and expanded, if possible, in order to create a more inviting and welcoming gathering place as worshipers enter the sanctuary.

E. Atmosphere

-We are convinced that a sense of spontaneity and warmth should pervade our worship experience.

-Even in recognizing that we have traditionally valued cognitive expressions of worship, we can open ourselves up to more expressive modes of relating to one another and God. The spirit of a contemporary mode of worship, so attractive to most young families and children, is characteristic of warmth, informality, engagement and joy.

-The organ, which provides powerful and effective worship support and leadership, is nonetheless a potentially imposing instrument when it is the sole instrument utilized in the worship services. The use of the piano, and other forms of instrumentation, along with the organ, can effectively create a more engaging atmosphere, especially before and after the worship services, and during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

F. Video

-In an age where technology is found everywhere and the technical support is also worldwide, it is prudent to begin using computer and video technologies as an aid in worship. It is a logical support to audio, which is already recognized as an important part of worship to assist people to hear the service better.

-It might be desirable for the leadership of the church to help worshipers "see it, hear it, and get it," by employing all the tools of learning (visual, aural and kinesthetic) for the totality of what we want people to experience in worship.

-Video can be provided via the Internet to give seekers an opportunity to be blessed by our worship services.

3. Liturgy - The Structure and Flow of Worship

Our worship experience is shaped and framed by the various elements of our liturgy. Worship is a journey of faith from one point to another, in which basic theological themes are explored from a Reformed perspective. The structure of worship should be inclusive of both set and varied worship forms capable of leading people in a faithful approach to the transcendent God while reinforcing our connection to one another through the Holy Spirit.

A. Relevance, Simplicity and Energy

- We believe that every element of the service should focus on the worship of God.
- Each service should contain elements suitable for reflection and contemplation, as well as those of a high energy level that draws people into worship and sends them out into the world to serve.
- The language of our liturgy could be updated to reflect the manner of speech characteristic of people in our present-day context. Consideration could be given to providing a more contemporary translation of the Scriptures in the pews.
- Music and hymnody should be stimulating and powerful, capable of evoking soul-stirring worship.
- Care must be taken to explain the elements of worship to the congregation in order to maximize meaning potential.

B. Flow

- We have observed that our worship tends to have a significant level of segmentation and awkward transitions. The worship experience could be constructed to be more “of a whole,” and the production of seamless worship given high priority.
- The worship theme should be clearly discernable to the average worshiper.
- Sound and light technicians should be ready to support transitions.
- Worship leadership should be capable of “weaving” the worship experience through relating one segment to the next.
- Music support could be upgraded to assist in flow management.
- Announcements can be disruptive, and care should be taken to limit their scope.
- Speakers who are invited to share information about ministry opportunities, could be coached, or interviewed by worship leaders, with care taken to integrate their message into the total worship experience.

C. Blended Forms

- Various worship styles and forms provide the church with an opportunity to reach new constituencies. While not every worship style represented in the range of Christian practices is suitable for our purposes and worshipping population, we can reach new people through incorporating worship styles that speak present-day language.
- If we are serious about drawing in younger adults and families, we might consider introducing a “blended” approach to worship, in which the worship forms recently developed in “contemporary” churches are incorporated creatively into our traditional worship experience.
- Alternative liturgical forms could be selectively introduced into our worship experience in order to provide variety and range. Use of instrumentation adequate to support alternative worship styles should also be incorporated.

-A worship opportunity should be considered on Saturday or Sunday evenings in order to reach out to those members or potential members of our congregation and community for whom such a schedule would make worship more accessible.

D. Life Giving Worship Structures

-Worship leadership could be less dependent upon the written word, and more directed towards an oral presentation capable of engaging the congregation. The general intent is to “lift the faces” of the worshipping community as they participate in worship, relating them to one another and the spoken word.

-Carefully planned and constructed worship services can produce an ethos of spontaneity and informality that is especially valued by younger worshippers.

-The current orientation towards the printed word in the bulletin can limit ability of the people to enter into the meaning and purpose of the texts.

-Video technology might be creatively utilized to facilitate a more expressive and engaging worship experience.

E. A Transformational Experience

-A primary element of congregational worship is the promise of personal and corporate transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit. The expectation that God is present and ready to communicate a life-changing experience should be cultivated throughout the worship service.

-Sermons should focus on illuminating the manner in which the Biblical texts produce changed lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

-Opportunities for individuals and ministries of the church to share transformational experiences might be made available from time to time and woven into the worship services.

-In order to help the congregation prepare for worship, the theme of the service and the Scripture passages can be publicized in advance, using a variety of media options available to the church.

-A greater emphasis could be given in worship concerning the manner in which the church is working to transform the world into the reign of God.

Plan for Implementation

Due to the limited scope of responsibility given to this task force, we recognize that the actual implementation of the items addressed in this report will fall largely on the staff and committees of the church.

-The Worship Task Force will ask Session to receive its report as a guide for the future direction of worship at LOPC. It will then report its findings and recommendations to the congregation. At this point, the Worship Task Force will formally have completed its work.

-The Session will give the appropriate committees the task of developing goals and objectives informed by this vision for worship at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church.

-The staff of the church whose areas of responsibility fall under the areas addressed by this report is invited to use it as a resource in developing their own goals and objectives.

-Special attention should be given to communicating creatively and carefully the rationale for all changes in worship to the congregation, along with ample opportunity for feedback and input from the worshipping community.

Worship Task Force Composition

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Soli Deo Gloria!