Worship Notes

What Does Worship Mean to Me?

I grew up in a non-liturgical tradition and when I first experienced the liturgy it grabbed me…there’s something about it that felt right. In the church I grew up in, there were no bulletins outlining the shape of the service or the congregation’s prayer and the pastor or worship leader directed everything. It was easy to blank out or to simply let the words go over your head. But what I love about our prayer and then the word and of course communion. Rather than letting my mind wander I stay engaged in the liturgy as we work through it together.

In my own personal worship and devotions I tend not to spend much time in worship or adoration. I may begin that way, but my attention quickly turns to petitioning God for my own concerns. What I love about participating in the liturgy every week is that it offers a much needed balance. There is time set aside where we offer our petitions to God and they do touch on my concerns, but I benefit from turning outward from myself to listen to the

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liturgical form of worship is that I am an active participant. The liturgy is the work of the people and we do this work together, we all have parts to play. I like that we purposefully start with confession, and then enter into adoration followed by participating in the liturgy.
wisdom in the lessons and the psalms. I also allow myself to be carried or enveloped by the music and the hymns which are often more positive than my own tendency to focus on the concerns of my life. When I follow the liturgy I spend more time in adoration than I do in my own private prayer. On my own, I struggle to find time to read and study and so I need to worship with others in order to keep being fed. As the words of one chorus say: I need the spark of others to keep the fire going. The liturgy provides me with the framework and community to have a more balanced time with God.

Of course, I love a worship service where there is great music, fantastic preaching and uplifting hymns. I can’t help feeling as if part of the kingdom of God has come down. But even a simple liturgy provides some refreshment as I go out into the world to share that kingdom with others once again.

Material for this reflection was compiled from interview with Darlene Johnson.

Darlene Johnson is Vice Chair, BC Synod Council and a member of Spirit of Life.

How Shall we Sing God’s Song?

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen* ELW #375 - Luis Bojos

If your congregation picks up rhythms easily, *Alleluia! Christ is Risen* is a fun hymn with Spanish roots. The text tells several post resurrection stories from Luke 24:1-42, John 20:19-31 and John 21:1-14; it is not specific to any one text and can, therefore, be sung on several Sundays of Easter.

Luis Bojos, who wrote the tune and Spanish verses, is from the Dominican Republic. Not much more is known about him. Martin A. Seltz provided an English version of the text which he calls more of a paraphrase than a translation. Seltz is publisher for worship and music at Augsburg Fortress, Publishers and also wears several editorial hats. He trained as a pastor and now serves as cantor at Christ Church Lutheran, Minneapolis.

Because the music is easier to sing than it is to read, have the choir or soloist learn the hymn first. Let the congregation hear it several times before they try singing it. The congregation could begin learning the hymn by singing only the refrain and the choir or soloist sing the verses. If the congregation has someone who speaks Spanish, that person may teach the refrain in Spanish.

The accompaniment should be played on piano; the Musician’s Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship has suggestions for adding percussion and trumpet. Using two percussion instruments each playing a different but complimentary rhythm would add to the energetic drive of the piece. The hymn could also be sung unaccompanied, or with percussion and voice, if the singing leadership is confident and strong. The tune begins with a B minor arpeggio; the added A sharp in the refrain makes it a harmonic minor tune. The dotted eighth note rhythm in the first bar of each phrase gives it the feel of the Spanish rhythm.

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen* is a different style from most Easter hymns in Evangelical
Lutheran Worship. It’s a joy to sing and hear and may just get you dancing!

With material taken from *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship* by Paul Westermeyer © 2010 Augsburg Fortress and from the internet.

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**Book Review**


Whether it is the altar guild contemplating how best to prepare the sanctuary for Pentecost or a worship committee deliberating the installation of a projection screen or a building committee considering a new building or the remodelling of an existing space, congregations are always facing decisions about improving worship space. Often these decisions are made based on local traditions, or approached with checklist in hand encouraging a falsely mechanical view of worship renewal. D. Foy Christopherson, pastor and former director of the ELCA’s art and design studio and a contributing writer of *Sundays and Seasons*, an annual worship planning guide, calls us to a larger vision. As he explores the twenty-five principles for worship space and the Christian assembly set forth in the ELCA’s Principles for Worship, he wants us to consider and place the following question front and centre in all of our worship renewal discussions: “How are we gonna get this thing to serve? How are we going get this building to serve something larger than itself? How can we use the visual arts as a tool for worship, for Christian formation, for evangelism, for mission?” (9-10).

Christopherson recognizes that while no architectural or artistic style is distinctly Lutheran, “our history and heritage keep us particularly edgy about clear proclamation of the gospel” (60). Just as we apply this criteria to the
ministry of word and sacrament he encourages us to apply it equally to our worship spaces which primary purpose should be to facilitate an encounter with Christ. Rather than rely on traditional descriptors such as chancel, nave, or narthex that define a specific place, he invites us to think in terms of “centers of liturgical action”—places of God’s activity where we encounter Christ. If we were asked where do we expect this encounter, most of us would not hesitate to say it is in the reception of holy communion, or in the waters of baptism or through the preaching of the word. But how many of us think of the assembly as no less a place of encounter with the risen Christ? Christopherson reminds us that it is the assembly which is the primary symbol of Jesus in the room because the people embody Christ (1 Cor.12:27). It is in the assembly that we meet God, “in the warmth of a worshiper’s greeting of peace, in the promise of absolution, in a song sung as we breathe as one body.”(34) The “Place of the Assembly” therefore deserves equal attention alongside the other centres of liturgical action and God’s activity: the “Place of the Bath,” “Place of the Meal,” and the “Place of the Word.” He encourages us “to minimize the perception of stage and audience or that different parts of the room are more sacred than others” even as we address the necessity to define a space in relation to the assembly. (35)

I especially liked his emphasis on how worship space is formational, with the power to shape people for ill or for good. Our attention to the importance of physical space and design often goes no further than addressing issues of accessibility by installing a ramp or elevator. Christopherson invites us to go beyond looking at architectural blueprints and consider our building’s theological blueprint and to recognize the power of our worship spaces to form our faith and understandings of God and the church by “whispering in our ear.” He highlights how the theological function of our worship spaces and art is also becoming more critical in our post-modern visual culture as more unchurched people visit our places of worship and how “the first whispers of the gospel, for them, may very well come from our worship spaces.”(53)

Christopherson underlines that worshipers and worship operate in a world of symbols and therefore emphasizes the need to avoid clutter and the use of secondary symbols as well as the duplication of primary symbols such as crosses which dilute their power. Missing from his discussion was the use of competing symbols such as the placement of national flags in the sanctuary or worship space. While some may argue that this is more customary in churches in the United States, some churches in Canada—particularly those
of our Anglican full communion partner—but also some Lutheran congregations do subscribe to this practice. Drawing on the Lutheran World Federation’s Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture (1996) Christopherson reasserts the principle that Christian worship is transcultural, drawing people from around the globe to Christ in the presence of powerful symbols of bread and wine, water and the Bible. In light of this I would have appreciated for him to address the appropriateness of placing national flags in our worship spaces—a practice which elevates the place of tribe and nation, rather than our unity in Christ.

At 96 pages, Christopherson has written a very accessible volume which deserves a wide reading, especially among those involved in changing or creating worship spaces—pastors, worship committees, altar guilds and building committees. Ultimately, Christopherson reminds us—it is the presence of Christ which makes a space holy. That’s why we come together week after week on the first day of the week. . . “we want to meet Jesus, to hear the story again.” (51)

This book will help those involved in worship planning and renewal to theologically reflect on our use of art and architecture and learn how these gifts can be better used so that when people come, they will taste, see and touch Jesus in our midst. (83)

Editor’s Note: Since publication of the book D. Foy Christopherson has written a companion study guide, “The Place Where We Worship,” a module about the thoughtful preparation of existing spaces, or creating new ones. It can be downloaded here:

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository /Formation_The_Place_Where_We_Worship.pdf?_ga=1.94269021.1322006422.1399975541

Another good companion to this volume and available online is the website of liturgical artist, William Wolfram. He examines the theology of the visual arts, including architecture used in worship. Some of the questions he explores are, “Should there be communion rails in a church?” “Where is the best position for the baptismal space, by the entrance of the church, or in the chancel?” His website can be accessed here:

http://wwolfram.com/theology/

The ELCA’s Principles of Worship can be viewed and downloaded here.

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository /Principles_for_Worship.pdf - See specifically the section, “Worship and the Christian Assembly.”

For a discussion of the placement of national flags in the church please see the ELCA’s guide, “Are Flags Appropriate in Church?”

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository /Are_flags_appropriate_in_church.pdf?_ga=1.124193354.132 2006422.1399975541

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