

MULTISENSORY WORSHIP IN TRADITIONAL SETTINGS

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BY  
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I would also like to thank my spouse, Amy Hodge. Without her support, this endeavor would not have been possible.

## ABSTRACT

Project Director: Dr. Joseph Jeter. This paper shares how multisensory worship is vital in reaching people today and how multisensory worship can be implemented in “traditional” settings – small and medium-sized churches where worship has primarily been an exercise of print culture. This paper shares information gathered from the implementation of multisensory worship and preaching at First United Methodist Church, Canton, Texas, from January 2004 until the present as well as information gathered from workshops and research of trends in worship.

In the first chapter entitled “Multisensory Worship in Traditional Settings,” definitions are formed to frame the discussion, a history of communication changes are given, multiple intelligence theory is introduced, the “contemporary-traditional” worship discussion matrix is critiqued and the current situation of worship of churches in traditional settings is described.

The second chapter, entitled “The Danger and Reality of Consumerism in Worship,” helps answer the criticism of many who feel that new styles and modes of worship are a capitulation to the consumer-dominant society that we live in today.

The third chapter, entitled “The Worship Corpus as the Word of God,” shares a theological construct by which the entire worship celebration of a church can embody the Word of God.

The fourth and fifth chapters, entitled “Elements of Multisensory Worship in Traditional Settings” and “Multisensory Worship Preparation,” give the practical aspects of implementing multisensory worship in churches in traditional settings, including a new way in which churches can use advanced planning to facilitate the production of many time-consuming elements.



## INTRODUCTION

This paper shares how multisensory worship is vital in reaching people today and how multisensory worship can be implemented in “traditional settings” – small and medium-sized churches where worship has primarily been an exercise of print culture. Information is presented about multisensory worship, gathered from the implementation of multisensory worship at First United Methodist Church, Canton, Texas, from January, 2004, until the present, and gathered from workshops and research from trends in worship.

This paper continues the conversation of many who are sharing the new frontier of worship today. This paper contributes to this discussion by sharing how small and medium-sized churches can worship using multi-sensory elements by implementing a creative planning and implementation matrix.

In the first chapter entitled “Multisensory Worship in Traditional Settings,” definitions are formed to frame the discussion, a history of communication changes are given, multiple intelligence theory is introduced, the “contemporary-traditional” worship discussion matrix is critiqued and the current situation of worship of churches in traditional settings is described. These are discussed to give a preliminary foundation by which the subject matter can be expanded.

The following chapter, entitled “The Danger and Reality of Consumerism in Worship,” helps answer the criticism of many who feel that new styles and modes of worship are a capitulation to the consumer-dominant society that we live in today.

Through a discussion and critique of H. Richard Niebuhr's typology given in *Christ and Culture*, the chapter shares a vision of how the digital culture of today could actually be the means by which consumerism is countered by churches in traditional settings.

"The Worship Corpus as the Word of God," shares a theological construct by which the entire worship celebration of a church can embody the Word of God. Using Karl Barth's idea of the three-fold Word of God, the chapter shares how different means of worship, including multisensory elements, can share the good news of God's grace and love to the congregation gathered.

The final two chapters, entitled "Elements of Multisensory Worship in Traditional Settings" and "Multisensory Worship Preparation," give the practical aspects of implementing multisensory worship in churches in traditional settings, including a new way in which churches can use advanced planning to facilitate the production of many time-consuming elements. At the end of each chapter, the story of First United Methodist Church, in Canton, Texas, demonstrates how one church has implemented these elements in their worship celebrations.

As churches in traditional settings continue to navigate the enormous changes that are inherent in today's worship and culture, these ideas and practices are offered as a way for these churches to not only survive but also thrive. These churches, many in number and present in every area of society, have much to share with a world that needs to hear the story of Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER 1

### MULTISENSORY WORSHIP IN TRADITIONAL SETTINGS

#### DEFINITIONS

To begin to talk about multisensory worship in traditional settings, one must first define two things: multisensory worship and traditional settings. These definitions not only identify the parameters of our discussion, but also create a place where dialogue can begin. Moreover, these definitions help clear some inherent baggage that comes with any discussion about worship by making the discussion more focused. (What does traditional, contemporary, praise, liturgical, emergent and ancient-future worship actually mean, and do these terms make the murky water of worship any clearer?)

First, there is the definition of worship. Many definitions abound concerning worship, but for the discussion at hand, worship is defined as the praise, prayer, proclamation and sacramental celebration in the gathered church. Although worship can be done privately as well as corporately, among groups and among the scattered, this definition provides a starting point for this discussion. Multisensory worship, as derived from this definition, is the intentional use of stimuli that engages the senses in the implementation of praise, prayer, proclamation and sacramental celebration in the gathered church. This includes using elements such as music, drama, art, aesthetics, and video to facilitate this celebration.

Second, there is the definition of traditional settings. Any definition is certainly arbitrary and open for much discussion, but for this discussion these criteria will be used.

First, a church in a traditional setting is more than twenty years old. Churches formed in the 1990s and 2000s have, for the most part, different mindsets and challenges. They are peculiar when compared to older churches, more apt to start worship services that are strikingly different and that are indigenous to the community around them. They do not have years of history to preserve or overcome, and many already implement some elements of multisensory worship.

Second, a church in a traditional setting is not a mega-church, or a very large church. However, it is dangerous to give a worship attendance criterion because it has much more to do with the mindset of a congregation than the size of the congregation. Some churches that have 400 people in worship are still churches in traditional settings, while some are not. Most churches that are significantly over this mark, however, are not churches in a traditional setting.

Finally, a church in a traditional setting is a church that rarely implements rapid change, and implements rapid change only when extreme stimuli force change onto a congregation. This is a major reason why some churches of 400 in worship are in traditional settings and some are not, for changes in worship especially can usually be measured not in weeks or months, but in years or decades. The service of worship may look better on today's digital printed bulletin, and there might be an addition or two in the liturgy, but the basic form and function of worship for most churches in

traditional settings has not changed in many years or has very slowly evolved over time.

Churches in traditional settings are in the middle of town, out by the countryside, or in the middle of our largest cities. Most are small and medium sized congregations, but some are rather impressive congregations. There is some variety in the worship in these congregations, and it becomes problematic to narrow the scope to only those churches with “traditional” worship services, because many non-traditional churches that are growing, moving and changing are using “traditional” worship to implement such change. The focus of this definition, traditional settings, is not on style of worship, or size of congregation, but rather on the nature of the congregation itself.

#### COMMUNICATION CHANGES AND THE DIGITAL AGE

Inherent in these definitions and criteria are the many challenges faced by these congregations in today’s world, because the world is currently experiencing a new age of communication that is forcing rapid change on all things, including schools, businesses, professions, entertainment and families. Our age is commonly known as the digital age, and this change is affecting the way society and culture interacts, experiences and communicates.

Yet, when one looks back in history, one can see other paradigm shifts in communication and culture that mirror what the churches in traditional settings are experiencing today. Mike Slaughter in his book, *Out on the Edge*, shares these shifts

in communication and links them with technological changes.<sup>1</sup> The first shift in communication was from oral storytelling to manuscript. This shift took place during the formation of the Bible, where oral storytelling gave way to manuscript writing, first in scrolls and eventually in codex. The oral tradition of Jesus that gave credence to the use of parables and proverbs gave way to the written tradition that was characterized by the theological letters of the Apostle Paul. Although paper was still expensive at this time, and writing done by hand, the manuscript gave culture a way of remembering information apart from the dependence on oral story memorization.

The second shift in communication took place about 1500 years later, with the move from manuscript to print. The catalysts for this shift was Gutenberg's printing press and the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther.<sup>2</sup> The change in society was enormous, and the church shattered over the crisis of authority that took place because of this change. Slaughter points out that this new age of literacy brought a shift from visual imagery, feeling and experience to more complex and abstract thought and logic that fueled the Enlightenment and Modern eras.<sup>3</sup>

Today we are in the middle of another shift, from a print-dominated culture to the digital age. Although the gas that fuels this change is the computer, the change is much more encompassing than just the move from reading books to watching a screen. Tex Sample makes the assertion that, in many ways, this new age is kin to the oral culture, with a renewed emphasis on experience and story over abstract thought

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<sup>1</sup> Slaughter, Michael. *Out on the Edge*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998. 58-63.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

and linear logic.<sup>4</sup> Slaughter agrees, sharing “Experience is back! From remote control, to surround sound, to home entertainment systems, we are a visual, multisensory, emotive culture.”<sup>5</sup>

Whereas, just a few years ago, society and church placed value on lecture and the written word, today both society and church are in a different place. Walter Cronkite and the reading of the news from notes has been replaced by complex presentations, crawls on the bottom of the screen, video reports and web addresses where one can further investigate what is being presented on the evening news. What was once just a linear bullet of information has now become a shotgun blast of experiential media.

#### MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE THEORY

Another way of looking at these changes in culture is by looking at how people today learn and absorb information. In the area of education, one theory that coincides with the ideas of the digital age and multisensory experiences is Multiple Intelligence theory. Howard Gardner developed Multiple Intelligence theory as an answer to the substandard IQ tests that only measure verbal, mathematical and logical cognitive ability. Multiple Intelligence theory is based on more experiential ways of learning and retention. Gardner identified seven intelligences by which the human

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<sup>4</sup> Sample, Tex. “The Future Is Here but We Can’t See It From There” at Lumicon Digital Culture Seminar, Dallas, TX, September 18, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Slaughter, 62.

brain retains knowledge.<sup>6</sup> What follows is a short description of these intelligences and examples of how these are made manifest in worship.

The first of the seven intelligences that Gardner identified is verbal/linguistic intelligence. This intelligence is the most widely used intelligence in learning, mainly because our culture up to the present has presented most information through this intelligence. This includes anything with words, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Our worship in the church has been verbal/linguistic dominant since the print culture began.<sup>7</sup>

The second type of intelligence identified is logical/mathematical intelligence. This intelligence deals with cognitive skills that include problem solving, mathematical formulas, order and linear thinking. People who possess this intelligence are very good at finding patterns in stories, are interested in categorizing, interpreting and using metaphor, and finding order out of chaos. These people find acrostics and bullet points in worship and sermons stimulating.<sup>8</sup>

The third type of intelligence identified is visual/spatial. This involves things that are taken in by the eyes and through the surrounded space. In order for learning to be completed, people who are visual/spatial dominant must “see it to believe it.” Other clichés that describe this intelligence include “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and “using your mind’s eye.”<sup>9</sup> Two-dimensional blueprints, for instance, are

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<sup>6</sup> Gardner, Howard, ed. *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*. New York: Perseus, 2006. 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce, Barbara. *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 35, 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 49-50.



more difficult to translate into sight until a person with this intelligence sees them translated into three-dimensional objects. In worship, visual/spatial dominant people are affected by what they see, like the esthetics of the altar and the image portrayed on the screens. The blueprint of worship in a bulletin means little, but the acted out worship during the liturgy means everything.

The fourth type of intelligence identified is body/kinesthetic. This type of learning and retention is accomplished through physical movement. In worship, this intelligence is made evident through actions such as movements to music, kneeling in prayer, and raising of hands in praise. Such practices as dance and dramas that are incorporated in worship help involve the body/kinesthetic learner to experience God in profound ways.<sup>10</sup>

The fifth type of intelligence identified is music/rhythmic. Music is used in the classroom early in grade school to learn the “ABC’s” and the months of the year. Music also helps the brain identify past experiences and form present feelings.<sup>11</sup> In worship, music has long been known to have a profound effect on the worshipper, from the Psalter chants of the monks, through the theological treatises set to music during the time of Charles Wesley, to now, when repetition of familiar indigenous choruses invokes a sense of holy experience. In nursing homes, where mental ability in many has greatly diminished, a verse of *Amazing Grace* can be more powerful than dopamine.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 61-63.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 73.

The sixth type of intelligence identified is interpersonal. Interpersonal intelligence revolves around a synergistic process of community in which the “whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” This intelligence uses interactions among people to learn and comprehend. This intelligence recognizes the reality that learning can be done through group discussion and debate.<sup>12</sup> Worship, in much the same way, is corporate by nature. Ways in worship to incorporate more interaction with those around us include such things as unison readings, testimonials, and praying for the persons to our right and left during prayer time.

The seventh type of intelligence identified is intrapersonal. Intrapersonal intelligence deals essentially with the person’s ability to “gaze inward.”<sup>13</sup> In worship, there are many avenues by which this intelligence can be used, including the incorporation of time for silent prayer and journaling. Unfortunately, worship today provides little time for transition, silence, and introspection, leaving out many people whose main intelligence is intrapersonal.

#### “CONTEMPORARY” VERSES “TRADITIONAL” WORSHIP

Until more recently, “the” debate about worship was whether worship should be “traditional” or “contemporary.” A generation ago, the great “Worship Wars” took place, yet the battleground was mostly on the type of music used in worship, either music that was indigenous to the culture or music that was from the tradition of the church. Yet, the dichotomy of “contemporary” and “traditional” has not helped

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 81-82.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 91.

answer some of the more primal and problematic questions that come from worship in churches today. As Marva Dawn suggests:

Worship style isn't really the primary issue that it has become. Instead of getting caught up in the traditional-contemporary debate, we must always ask whether a style is really conveying the presence, the self-giving of God.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, music is very important to the life of worship, yet as the culture changed around us in a myriad of ways churches remained myopic, singularly focused on style of music. The result was a multi-system failure that has changed the church in profound ways. The great unity that was sought by the modern Church through such movements as the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical movements has been deemed impotent. A more scattered and postmodern Church has emerged, with the diaspora caused more by differences in worship music styles than theological debate. Much of this dis-unity has resulted in more “non-denominational” churches and a sharp decline in membership in churches in traditional settings.

James White, in writing about the future of the Church, writes that this diaspora is actually necessary for reaching more people for Christ. Finding fault with the ecumenical document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, he states:

Perhaps we should do more to encourage diversity rather than to seek consensus. We do not yet have enough varieties of Christian worship. What can be done to help liturgically disenfranchised groups to express their worship of the Christian God in forms that are natural to

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<sup>14</sup> Dawn, Marva J. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. 94.

them? How do such groups learn to be themselves in their worship of Jesus Christ?<sup>15</sup>

The “contemporary” and “traditional” debate has had other effects as well. First, many churches that looked for a “fix-all solution” in contemporary worship found that just changing the music and ditching the liturgy did not cure all ills. Just as there was sub-standard “traditional” worship, there is also substandard “contemporary” worship. Second, with the emphasis placed on music for many years, there was a de-emphasis on preaching. Sermons became shorter and blander, and singing became longer and shallower. Third, the dichotomy brought forth a middle-ground called blended worship to match the bland sermons. Blended worship, instead of providing everyone with something they like ended up giving everybody something to dislike. Fourth, the audience-performer gulf in worship became much more prevalent, with less focus on congregational praise and more focus on group performance. Finally, what came forth from all of this was not a church speaking to the culture around it, but rather another church culture, with all the trappings of the same exclusivity of the previous church culture. As the culture around the church started to embrace a more experiential, multisensory, and authentic world around them, the church moved farther away into an enclave of passivity, unknown rhetoric, and inauthenticity. Leonard Sweet has termed the church’s current situation in this

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<sup>15</sup> White, James F. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1993. 179.

way: “To say that the church’s worship has become as dull and lifeless as a museum would be an insult to museums . . .”<sup>16</sup>

## THE CURRENT SITUATION OF WORSHIP IN TRADITIONAL SETTINGS

The current situation of worship in traditional settings, in light of all things previously mentioned, is a moment of crisis. Just fifteen years ago, one could make a strong case that traditional churches were the backbone of mainline Protestantism. If that is still the case, then the diagnosis might be osteoporosis. Churches in traditional settings must come to terms with an aging constituency and a changing world around them.

Furthermore, the idea of invincibility that many churches have is short-sided. Many parishioners of churches in traditional settings believe that no matter how the culture changes, “their church” will always be around. Churches in traditional settings that were strong even until this last decade are now facing a perfect storm. First, a generation of faithful, sacrificial parishioners is dying away. Second, an aging clergy has become disconnected from the many changes that are taking place in the culture today, creating worship that is stuck in the 1970s that does not speak to younger generations. (The church says, “We play some of the contemporary songs out of the hymnal!” yet fail to realize that those songs are now 30 years old or more.) Third, many churches have a “program” mentality that de-emphasizes events, experiences, small groups and spiritual formation. Finally, the leadership structures

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<sup>16</sup> Sweet, Lenoard. *Faithquakes*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994. 45.

of churches in traditional settings are too cumbersome and slow to navigate the fast changes that are necessary for transformation.

How can multisensory worship help? It can help by creating an atmosphere for a movement and experience of God. It can help by connecting people's hearts to God instead of connecting people's heads to abstract ideas about God. By using elements in worship such as drama, art, music, sound, light, silence, guided prayer, video, and visuals, churches in traditional settings can reach more people. By using teams to prepare worship, churches in traditional settings can begin to recapture the idea of liturgy, the idea that worship should be a work of the people, not just an audience for a speaker. By placing a renewed emphasis on experiencing God, churches in traditional settings will have congregations that will be more willing and able to give of themselves in mission and ministry, and that will birth renewal groups interested in spiritual formation. The church will shift in focus from being an organization motivated by self-preservation to a movement of people working for the Kingdom of God. Multisensory worship can help move churches in traditional settings into this new direction.

Barbara Brown Taylor believes that this multisensory involvement should be the norm for worship: She describes the true worshipper in this way:

We bring all of who we are to worship. It is a bodily experience and not one for our spirits alone. There are faces to be looked at, voices to be heard, hands to be touched, bread to be tasted, and wine to be smelled. We sing things we could just as easily say and bow when we say other things, some of us touching ourselves gently on forehead, chest, and shoulders as if we were tracing a cross. Sometimes we kneel, assuming a posture that is all but gone from our world – like

troubadours, like lovers, like servants, we kneel before the Lord our maker and our hearts follow suit. Then we stand to sing and sit to listen, dancing the peculiar ballet of the people of God.<sup>17</sup>

Does this mean that preachers should think about trading in the pulpit robe for a sequin suit? No. The elements of multisensory worship implemented by churches in traditional settings can complement any style of worship with just some fundamental changes in worship preparation and changes in thought by worship leaders and preachers. For churches in traditional settings to connect and communicate with today's world, however, there must be change, not because what churches are presently doing is inherently bad (fifty years ago in a world dominated by print culture, churches in traditional settings were right on target), but because the world has fundamentally changed. The days of newspapers, evening newscasts and vinyl has been replaced by a new age of the internet, CNN, and the iPod, and, even if the church does not change, the world is not going to go back to the former things.

Churches in traditional settings today are in a similar situation as the Church was during the throes of the Reformation in the 1500s. As fundamental change took place, churches that changed with the new age and adapted to a world of print found revival. Those who did not change found stagnation. The mass, instead of being offered in the common vernacular, was still given in Latin. The Bible, instead of being offered to everyone in a known language for widespread use, was kept for the clergy to control. The churches that moved to a worship celebration and a Bible that spoke the common vernacular quickly filled the void left by those who did not. In

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Preaching Life*. Boston: Cowley, 1993. 64-65.

much the same way, churches in traditional settings need to move into the new “language” of the digital age. Yet, the church still clings to the old “language” of print. The Bible, instead of being presented in a new medium, is kept bound in thin pages and formal language.

What is at stake? The Church will survive, no matter what may come. Yet, there are challenges that are coming in this new digital age, challenges such as consumerism that could propel the Church forward into another great awakening or backward into another dark age. The challenge for churches in traditional settings to accept is to be a place for revival, such as the one that began Methodism in England with John Wesley. Wesley in many ways used the culture of its time; the language of field preaching, small groups and tract printing. However, Wesley also was a critic of the culture, rallying against the social problems of poor working conditions, alcoholism, child abuse, and illiteracy. The church of today, in the same way as the early Methodist movement, must also be cultural and counter-cultural, for it is not enough to become a church with big screens and finely scripted preaching. In our worship, we must speak the language of today and be a prophetic witness against society’s ills and shortcomings.

What is lacking in many of the churches today that have completely capitulated to the culture is a foundation for thinking theologically about what is happening to the Church in the present time. As Sally Morgenthaler puts it:

[Worship has become] a market-driven activity, shaped and defined exclusively by the perceived desires of the progressive church-going consumer. In these churches, worship in the 90s equals whatever



works, and what works on Sunday and Wednesday night is what fills the pews.<sup>18</sup>

It takes theological thinking to distinguish between the wheat and chaff of our world today. This discernment is necessary and vital for the Church today. The Church must understand the necessity of speaking in the common language of today even as the Church rejects much of the societal changes that have placed individual liberty and convenience over the kingdom of God.

#### CASE STUDY

First United Methodist Church in Canton, Texas fits the criteria for being a church in a traditional setting. Early settlers to Texas and Van Zandt County founded First Church in 1856 in the county seat town, and First Church has slowly grown over 150 years to around 600 in membership and 190 in worship. For the past 50 years, until 2004, the worship at First Church had been “traditional,” with read liturgy and traditional hymns. In 2004, under the direction of a new pastor and the long-time music director, the Sunday early worship service changed to a more “contemporary” format. Moreover, in both worship celebrations, the church implemented multisensory elements. The church installed multi-media screens and projectors, upgraded the lighting in the sanctuary, and introduced dramas and videos to the congregation. The church also began to incorporate modern altar design, and sermons began to implement Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory to share God’s word with more than one type of learner.

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<sup>18</sup> Morgenthaler, Sally. *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999. 18.

In two years, First Church implemented rapid and intentional change to counter an eight-year dive in worship attendance. In 1995, the church had an average of 229 in worship each week. In 2003, the church had an average of 150 in worship each week. By 2005, through intentional work, the church rebounded to an average of 191 in worship each week. In 2007, the church built a new multipurpose facility to host the early worship celebration to help further implement multisensory elements in worship. Included in this new space was a new seating arrangement that used half-tables for the back of the room for people to enjoy coffee and refreshments during worship, creating a more casual, living room type atmosphere for worship. In 2006, before this change in worship space, the early worship averaged 42 each week. In 2007, the average is 85, and could be moving past 100 in worship each week by the first of 2008.

First Church, although moving in a new direction, still faces great challenges. The faithful generation that has provided the church with leadership and financial stability is dying away. The church, to attract a new generation, has had to embrace a new vision that incorporates new ways of reaching the lost with the gospel, experiences that allow for a connection with people to God, and a new way of being “the church” that promotes not programs but small groups. This new vision allows First Church to grow not only larger, but smaller and more intimate as well. These primary changes in worship have allowed the church to become bolder in all areas of the life of the church, a boldness that is necessary for First Church to be viable and effective in the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DANGER AND REALITY OF CONSUMERISM IN WORSHIP

It does not take long to realize how pervasive consumerism is in our culture today, especially when one turns on the Saturday morning cartoons and witness the commercials presented. Madison Avenue does not wait for our children's brains to develop reasoning and astute judgment before bombarding even our youngest with images of stuff – stuff that comes in plastic and cardboard packaging that might cost more to produce than the actual toy inside. One is amazed at what a young child can accumulate, including piles of G.I. Joes and Barbie dolls, Thomas trains, and Legos. The stuff is endless. One becomes especially angry about this violation of our youth when one walks around the house at night and steps on the rogue Hot Wheels car.

Adults in our society who have grown up with Saturday morning cartoons are now infected with the stealth sickness of consumerism. “Keeping up with the Joneses” is now considered a fundamental right and a part of the “pursuit of happiness.” Consumerism is touted not as a stewardship obstacle, but rather the sociological engine that “makes the world go 'round.” Computers are antiquated upon their arrival at our homes and offices from the factory, facilitating a desire to get a new one every two years. Many are patiently waiting for their tube televisions to die so that they can go to Best Buy and get one of those nice new high-definition

televisions. (Many more, in fear of being behind the curve come the fall football season actually put perfectly good televisions on the curb in the name of progress.)

Now consumerism has moved from the “acquiring” of stuff to other aspects of life. “What’s in it for me?” has become the new “golden rule.” Society feels that schools should provide the best of facilities, instruction, and activities for children, yet like Wal-Mart, should be able to do it on the cheap. Government should be able to provide not only the best roads, but also the finest military and short lines at the vehicle registration office. Singers are accompanied by pyrotechnics, and actors are augmented by special effects. In the middle of this enormous change is the traditional church on Main Street. The church in the traditional setting was at one time the very center of town. Now it has been bypassed by the new road of postmodern society.

#### WHAT DOES CONSUMERISM MEAN FOR CHURCHES?

The pressure for churches to capitulate to consumerism is enormous. Whereas a generation ago, people would never dare to call worship a “product” and worshippers “consumers,” today this has become commonplace. Pastors are sent to workshop after workshop calling for churches to better their “product,” to make the packaging more colorful, and to make the advertising more visible. Theological underpinnings of proclamation of the gospel are set aside for the “practical” matter of bringing people into the church as customers, all so they might “buy” their church.

In 1996, Rick Warren published his book *The Purpose Driven Church*. Although there might have been many other “watershed” books that brought on the era of consumer-church, Warren’s book brought into light the marriage of marketing

and mission in a way never seen before. In the book, Warren shared his story of how he started Saddleback Church in California in the 1980s using an identified target audience for his church start and an imaginary consumer named “Saddleback Sam” that reflected the target audience.<sup>19</sup> Warren designed Saddleback Church to cater to the target consumer much like a radio station would program content according to their “P-1” demographic. Saddleback Church today is one of the largest churches in the country, and many churches, upon seeing the success of Saddleback, now are following Warren’s lead and unashamedly identifying their target audiences as well. Unfortunately, when people, even church people, choose their constituency, rarely are the “least, last and the lost” identified as target audiences.

Consumerism has also promoted larger churches. Larger churches are better suited to satisfy the consumer congregant than smaller churches, because larger churches have more resources to meet the appetites of today’s churchgoer. Thirty years ago, no one would ever imagine a single place where one could buy groceries, books, gourmet coffee, and have their tires rotated. This was a four-stop trip not too long ago; first to the local grocery store, then to the book store, then to the coffee shop and then to the trusted town mechanic. Now one just goes into a Wal-Mart Supercenter, and they can drink their Starbucks, read a book and grab some milk, all while their car is being serviced. What was once was an all day affair in town to do all those things might now only last one hour. Sunday morning in many larger churches is looking more like a Supercenter all the time. Many churches now have

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<sup>19</sup> Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995. 169-172.

Starbucks, bookstores, indoor play areas for children, professional-quality music and produced “religious experiences” that can be received in 55 minutes or less.

What does this mean for churches in traditional settings? Like many “mom and pop” downtown department stores that have closed their doors, the inability of churches to answer and counter the challenge of the consumerism that pervades our culture has resulted in the decline of churches in traditional settings. Many people today “shop” for churches like one “shops” for clothes, choosing the fit of the church with the “more alive worship” and the “dynamic youth program” over the denominational dinosaurs of our parent’s generation. The inability of churches in traditional settings to engage, challenge and transform our consumer culture has left a great void. Unfortunately, this void has been filled by churches that have conformed and capitulated completely to the culture, making more consumers instead of more disciples.

#### CALLED TO BE DISCIPLES, NOT CONSUMERS

What does the bible say about consumers and disciples? In the gospel of Matthew, in the passage commonly known as the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus is preaching to the congregation about certain life issues, including the issue of possessions. The warning found in the apex of the sermon is brief and profound:

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one or love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24, NRSV)

Of anything that could have been placed as the main rival of God, the most alarming and most dangerous according to Jesus was wealth. Some translations use the word

“mammon.” Others use the word “money.” For consumers, it is the acquiring of “stuff,” man-made creations. Instead of serving the one, true Creator, consumers lift themselves up to the role of creator by acquiring things that tell them what they have accomplished. The gospel writer Luke also shares a picture of Jesus that shows Jesus being very critical of those who worship “stuff.” We find this parable of Jesus found in Luke 12:

The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:16b-20, NRSV)

Many adult children are faced with the task of dealing with the estates of parents who die, and are overwhelmed by the sheer amount of “stuff” that has to be gone through. Very few families downsize their homes and possessions after their children leave, and many of the things found in their parents homes have not been used in thirty years. The love of “stuff” keeps the consumer bringing more and more into the barn, and society has lifted up the acquiring of things as a way of false deification of themselves. In this culture, we have taken consumerism even farther by attempting to acquire and own everything else, including worship and church. The result has been a worship of us and not God.

In juxtaposition to this, the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 shares another view of worship:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, NRSV)

The oxymoron in the passage (living sacrifices) explains that discipleship and consequentially worship is not based on what one “gets,” but on what one gives. This echo of Jesus that one finds in Paul’s epistle reminds us that only by losing our lives can we ever find them.

#### NIEBUHR AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMERISM

When discussing issues of church and culture, and when outlining the dangers and reality of consumerism in our culture today, one way is through a typology proposed by H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture*. This typology shares five Christian responses to culture. At one end of the spectrum is “Christ against culture,” the position that affirms that Christ alone has authority over Christians; it rejects the supposed authority of culture and thus recognizes no tension, but a chasm, between them. At the other end of the spectrum is “Christ of culture,” the position that affirms that Christ is the best of culture, thus relaxing any possible tension between their demands.

Inside these bookends are three other responses described by Neibuhr. First is “Christ above culture,” the position that views Christ as standing above culture, not coming from culture, yet completing it. Second is “Christ and culture in paradox,” the view that Christ and culture both have claims and are in conflict, thus we live



lives of unavoidable paradox, if not contradiction. Finally, there is “Christ transforming culture,” the view that the conflict between the two authorities results from a pervasive human fallenness, and that Christians are to respond by seeking to transform culture to conform to Christ.<sup>20</sup>

In these typologies, we find a number of ways to respond to the culture of consumerism, from a separatist view to a full embrace of culture. Yet before we try to simply pick a typology and apply it to our current situation, we must recognize the inherent problem with such simplistic typologies. William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, in a harsh critique of *Christ and Culture*, suggested that the direction of the movement between Christ and culture proposed by Niebuhr is inherently wrong, that the church should be an alternate *polis* that demands culture to align with Christ, rather than Christ “fixing” culture.<sup>21</sup>

Willimon, therefore, is critical on those who want to substitute the “Christian” language with other language, as the way Robert Schuller substitutes “salvation” with “positive thinking” or the way Rick Warren substitutes “gospel” with “purposeful living.”<sup>22</sup> Willimon contends that it is important for the people of faith to be formed into a peculiar way of talking about faith; that theology has a specific language, much like physics has a specific language, and this language that cannot be easily substituted by another language.

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<sup>20</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York, Harper, 1951. 39-44.

<sup>21</sup> Willimon, Will and Stanley Hauerwas. *Resident Aliens*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989. 39-47.

<sup>22</sup> Willimon, Will. “PowerPoint Preaching” at Festival of Homiletics, Atlanta, GA. May 18, 2006.

Willimon also is especially critical of what he calls “PowerPoint preaching,” preaching where the preacher takes a biblical text and tries to boil it down to three principles and a joke and a poem, because the culture demands that the gospel be reduced to something that is easier “to chew.” Willimon contends that this approach feeds into the dominant cultural story of consumerism that we experience today. Instead of challenging consumers to be disciples, the church capitulates to the culture by taking the mystery out of the gospel story, turning the gospel into a set of rules and lists, making the questions of faith into answers for “dummies,” and answering the question of the consumer, “What is in it for me?” Willimon shared that by capitulating to consumers, rules for living are lifted up above a relationship with a living God, and all who believe in the consumer gospel are put in the bondage of the world order. It is a reductionism that, Willimon contends, thins Christianity down to just a set of ideas that flatters the consumer ego—that instead of people being challenged by the counter-cultural movement of the gospel message, the gospel becomes just another product to be consumed and privatized.<sup>23</sup>

Willimon understands the inherent danger of culture and consumerism that faces the church today. However, the question remains: “How are we to share the gospel of Christ to this consumer culture today?” It is easy to agree with Willimon that “positive thinking” and “purposeful living” are not the same as “salvation” and “ministry,” yet in a world where these words are unknown but sorely needed, what is

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the media by which we can teach these things? Paul Tillich in *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message* gives light to this perplexing problem:

But what is relevance? . . . “relevant” means that the Christian message answers the existential questions of humanity today. . . . Regarding [these questions], one can immediately see that the repetition of biblical, creedal, or liturgical language has no significance for those who ask them. The original power of the great Christian symbols is lost. Originally they answered questions. Now they are stumbling blocks . . .<sup>24</sup>

The Church, using its current language, has lost the ability to communicate the gospel to a culture that no longer knows the language of the Church.

Both Niebuhr and Willimon in their approaches to the culture commit a fallacy that is inherent in using typologies, the fallacy of reductionism. Although consumerism is a great danger in church and world, and although digital media is the avenue by which consumerism is promoted in today’s world, it is highly problematic to lump both consumerism and digital media together as one “culture” to either absorb, reject, or transform. Dan Andriacco puts it this way:

. . . the church should be at different places on the continuum at different times, in response to the times and the circumstances. The challenge is to discern where she is supposed to be at any particular moment. And the standard for determining that isn’t success, but faithfulness.<sup>25</sup>

Could the media by which consumerism is promoted also be the media by which the gospel is promoted? Can the Church embrace the new language of digital culture and critique the culture of consumerism? Tex Sample recognizes the fallacy

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<sup>24</sup> Tillich, Paul. *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996. 13-15.

<sup>25</sup> Andriacco, Dan. *Screen Saved: Peril and Promise of Media in Ministry*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000. 38.

inherent in the Niebuhr typology and shares another view of society and consumerism today. Instead of simply assuming that Christ is a transformer of culture, Sample reminds us that Christ is also in the culture around us. The incarnation, he suggests, is a reminder that Christ's transformation of our world is an inside-out process.

Sample contends:

Even so, it is not a Christ separated from the world but enfleshed in it. It is not a Christ who stands outside the culture of his time, but who is deeply involved in it. . . . Jesus identifies with the common and the lowliest people of his time . . . Our task is to see Christ in the faces of those where we do not expect to do so . . . <sup>26</sup>

Using the idea of incarnation, Sample shows that the transformation of our culture must be done through the vessel of our culture. God, in order to reach people, became a person. Paul, in order to reach those in Rome, became immersed in the logic and culture of Rome. Today, to reach our society, to share the transformative power of the gospel of Christ, to preach against the consumerism that is rampant in our culture today, the message must be shared in the common vernacular of today's media. Christ and culture cannot be separated through a magical theological centrifuge because Christ, through the incarnation, through coming into the world and walking with us, does not allow it.

#### EXEGESIS, EISEGESIS AND THE DANGER OF CONSUMERISM

In worship, the danger of consumerism becomes most evident in the processes of the developing of themes and sermons. The starting point for the developing of sermons and worship in many churches today is found in this question, "What

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<sup>26</sup> Sample, Tex. *U.S. Lifestyes and Mainline Churches*. Nashville, Abingdon, 1990. 153-154.

product (worship and sermon) will the congregation buy (respond to) this Sunday?” Whether it is identified as the “felt need,” as Mike Slaughter at Ginghamburg Church calls it, or whether it is identified as “exegeting the congregation,” as Adam Hamilton from the Church of the Resurrection calls it, it is what it is, a starting point that resides not in God’s ideal as found in scripture but in humanity’s brokenness found on MSNBC.<sup>27</sup> It is very difficult to begin at that starting point and not succumb to the consumerism inherent in the congregation.

Does this mean that the preacher should never begin at this point? No. There are times when these starting points are necessary, such as moments of congregational crisis or occasions for congregational celebrations. Hamilton himself does not recommend that this should ever be a steady diet for churches because of its inherent dangers. Eisegetical preaching should be done at times when it is appropriate. The problem, however, with many churches is that preachers move not from Biblical pericope to pericope, but from topic to topic, using proof-texts to make their points, and in the process lose the gospel in a series of talking points and to do lists. Success or failure of this preaching is determined not by its faithfulness to the gospel but rather if people respond by their presence and giving. Difficult topics and texts that might bring challenge and true growth are put aside for fare that is more palatable.

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<sup>27</sup> Slaughter, Mike. “Getting Ready for the Worship Celebration.” at Designing Worship Conference, Tipp City, OH, January 28, 2005 and Hamilton, Adam. “Keynote Address” at Cokesbury Worship Connection Conference, Leawood, KS, April 7, 2005.

The sure way for a preacher to defend one's self against consumeristic tendencies in preaching and worship is to begin in scripture. This starting place challenges the church to be credible to the scripture rather than scripture credible to the church. Using some form of lectionary or pattern of study helps worship leaders and preachers begin in scripture. After some exegesis, the question then can be raised, "How might this speak to us today?" The answers to this question that come from an exegetical approach to scripture then can form the elements of multisensory worship that lets the message of the gospel found in scripture speak to our churches today.

#### CASE STUDY

Consumerism is alive and well even in East Texas. In Van Zandt County, where First United Methodist Church of Canton is located, because of the vast amounts of country roads and secondary highways, a vehicle like a Chevrolet Corvette certainly is not practical. Yet, one of the largest Corvette dealers in Texas is in Van Zandt County. People buy them not because of their usefulness, but for the message that they give to the consumer: that they have achieved a status, even as they are taking the car into the shop to get the front end realigned every other week.

For many years during the decline of First Church, one of the main reasons given for the decline was the lack of ability to compete with other churches in the area, especially in the areas of children and youth ministries. First Church, in many ways, is in the same situation as the local hardware store trying to compete with Lowe's and Home Depot. One idea given in a brainstorming session to counteract

this trend was for the church to “specialize,” to develop a church that appealed to senior adults. The leadership rejected this idea. Instead, the church developed a multilateral approach that included a rejuvenated worship using multisensory elements, an aggressive capital funds and building campaign to provide the facility by which multigenerational ministries could take place, and a reorganization of leadership that allowed more people to be in actual ministry rather than on committees.

First Church responded by acknowledging that, in many ways, the church had become inadequate in worship. The reality was that unless First Church focused on facilitating quality worship and experiences, then no one would be around to hear the sermons calling for a counter-cultural movement against consumerism. Whereas, many leaders of churches, upon hearing about any modern implementation of new worship or formation levels the charge of capitulating to consumerism, the actual reality is twofold. First, many of these leaders use the consumerism charge to justify their own substandard ministry and personal prejudices. Second, they ignore that the people who are lost and in need of Christ are consumers, and must be reached where they are. Just as Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, so should the church be in the middle of culture to give witness to the gospel message, not to justify whatever cultural ills are present, but to give to all access to the kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE WORSHIP CORPUS AS THE WORD OF GOD

A definition of preaching is this: Preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God in the context of corporate worship. This definition is a very simple one compared to the many others that have been given over time, but the simplicity of it helps shape the idea that God's communication proclaimed in the context of worship can be given in many media, not only just through oratory. In a real way, the entire worship context can be a sermon if the worship shares in the message. This chapter will propose that one can see the entire worship corpus as the Word of God by understanding how proclamation can be broadened to include other areas of worship besides the sermon.

Of course, if the desire is for the entire worship corpus to proclaim the Word of God, then we must understand three things. First, what is the Word of God? Second, what constitutes a proclamation of it? Third, why is it necessary for the proclamation to be in corporate worship? Notice that the three questions address three areas in communication: message, media and audience.

First, what is the Word of God? Churches use the phrase "Word of God" all the time, yet almost never consider its meaning. Karl Barth, when describing his idea of the "Word of God," suggested that the Word of God comes to us in three distinct ways. The first and primary way is in the person of Jesus Christ. The second is in the



Bible. Finally, the Word of God is the proclamation of the Word through preaching. However, Barth had a very narrow definition for what constituted a proclamation of the Word. For Barth, preaching is only the Word of God when it simply repeats what Jesus and the Bible have to say. Barth never would consider non-Biblical analogies or personal stories as part of the Word of God. Barth would contend that preaching is best done when the preacher “disappears” and the gospel and the scripture are left.<sup>28</sup>

One could critique Barth in his analysis of preaching as the “Word of God.” If the preacher disappeared altogether in preaching, as Barth suggests, and all that is left is Jesus and Bible, why then would not be necessary to claim that the sermon is the Word as well? One could argue that the sermon is not a third way in which the Word comes to us, but simply a conduit of the first two ways.

However, unlike Barth’s rejection of the humanity of the messenger, one could make an argument for preaching being the Word of God even when it includes the messenger as part of the message, since our analogies, stories, even our flaws, could be used to communicate God’s Word to the church. While a sermon as the Word of God certainly would not be equal to Jesus or the Bible, it would be limiting God to suggest that God could not use one’s own witness to share God’s message of love and grace.

#### THE WORD OF GOD AND THE DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION

The one strand that ties Jesus, the Bible, and our proclamation of the gospel together is the doctrine of incarnation. Christians who affirm this traditional doctrine

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<sup>28</sup> Lischer, Richard. *A Theology for Preaching*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. 55-62.

hold that Jesus was truly God incarnate, God's revelation to us in human form. The Bible, however, is also an incarnate form of God's word. The New Testament is the written down witnesses of the first and second-generation humans who called themselves followers of Jesus. Finally, we who dare go forward and give witness to God's message in the pulpit are certainly human as well. For God's Word to come through the preacher, it somehow must incarnate as well.

Even though one might affirm that the Word of God comes in these ways, there is an order of superiority of these revelations. Jesus, who was God on earth, gave us the perfect human translation of God. The New Testament because it was written by imperfect humans, is not a perfect translation of the Word, but because of the proximity of the writers of the New Testament to the life of Jesus, it has proven reliable when placed in the context of the place and time it was written. Finally, there is the witness of proclaimers of Christ today. These proclamations certainly are not a perfect translation of the Word, and are far removed in history from the life of Jesus. Yet through the work of the Holy Spirit, these witnesses can be redeemed and can also give testimony to God's message of grace and love. We find, in Acts 2, the story of Pentecost, where Peter gives his first sermon. The gift of "ears" was given by the Spirit to the people gathered, and the Spirit translated Peter's sermon into the Word of God for the people gathered and because of this, many were "added to their number."

Even Jesus, as he preached, used analogies and stories. Thus, it is difficult to argue that analogies and stories in preaching should be deemed worthless after Jesus' time here on earth. Unlike Barth, one can contend that instead of trying to keep one's

self out of sermons, one should rather be putting themselves into their sermons. Certainly one should not be carried away to the point where the sermon becomes just about them. However, the preacher should not be afraid of allowing who they are to come into their preaching. A personal story can be a powerful testimony to God's work, and when used carefully, can allow people to know the preacher's context as well. In liberation preaching, for instance, the personal story and perspective of minorities gives a powerful lens by which God's message can be heard in new and powerful ways. Justo and Catherine González, when they interpret the Pentecost story, suggests that one cannot know the identity of those who scoffed at the disciples unless one has been in a place of oppression.<sup>29</sup>

However, preachers must always be careful of their own biases and prejudices. They must test their words as a preacher by making sure that it aligns with the witnesses of Jesus and the Bible. If a preacher claims to give the Word of God and tells the church gathered to do something that is in contradiction to what Jesus taught and different from what the Bible says, one can safely say that the sermon given is not the Word of God. The sermon should always be aligned to the primary witness God's message of grace and love shown to us through Jesus and should also align with the whole witness of the Bible.

This is why it is so important to have the scripture of the day as the starting point for sermon writing. The preacher can begin with the scripture, and look to the scripture to determine what God is doing to bring God's message of grace and love in

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<sup>29</sup> González, Justo L. & Catherine G. González. *The Liberating Pulpit*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994. 77.

that scripture, and then take the message and share it with the congregation. If preachers simply look to themselves or to the world around them first, then try to fit the scripture and the gospel into what they want to say, then they are in danger of the sermon not being the Word of God for the people gathered in worship.

#### THE WORD OF GOD IN ALL OF WORSHIP

Now that we know what the Word of God constitutes, what does it mean to proclaim it? For many years, the sermon was simply oratory. In fact, many still consider sermons as only oratories, that the exercise is auditory and the building blocks for sermons must only be spoken words. Christians mistakenly think that the sermon has existed since the time of Jesus in basically this same format. Yet we fail to remember that the sermon has evolved and been molded into every culture, from Peter's first sermon at Pentecost, which was an oral event told within an oral culture, to the manuscript dominated time of Paul, where his letters were read to the churches in Asia Minor and Rome, to the print culture of the modern era, where in mainline Protestantism, sermons were carefully mastered and written out, to the frontier of the Americas, where oral culture again demanded that preaching be "spontaneous," to today, where digital culture is again challenging the church to define what is and is not the proper media for proclaiming the Word of God. Where traditionally, the sermon has always been considered a "speech," we now see the sermon changing again to reflect the communication style of the culture of today.

Protestant churches had always in the past considered proclamation of the Word of God only as the sermon part of the worship corpus. The parts of the worship

before the sermon were considered simply as the “warm up” before the sermon, and the communion after the sermon was treated as an afterthought. Neither the worship before or after had anything to do with the message of the sermon. Yet, if human oratory can be considered the Word of God, then why not hymns, spiritual songs, art, dramas, and décor be considered as well the Word of God? Although not preaching, these things are sermons set in another vernacular, either music or visuals, and God’s communication can take place through these things. In thematic worship, the entire worship experience is called upon to give witness to the Word of God, not just the sermon. Music, video, drama, art, digital art, décor, as well as the spoken word could be media by which the message is conveyed.<sup>30</sup>

What is the role of the sermon, then, in light of the many other media that could be employed by worship leaders today? Certainly, the sermon is still vital. For instance, we cannot replace the sermon with a drama, because a drama is much better at raising questions than providing answers. A drama might do well as a sermon starter, but a drama cannot be expected to replace the sermon and still be good drama. Yet, in the world today where people are constantly being communicated with by a multitude of media (*multi-media* is actually redundant, since media is already plural) that relate to multiple senses, the auditory only sermon is not the most effective communication to a culture that relates in mostly visual and interactive ways.

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<sup>30</sup> Miller, Craig Kennet. *NextChurch.Now: Creating New Faith Communities*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources. 2000. 152.

Many fail to remember that the Word talked about in John 1 is not the same as “words.” When John the evangelist used the word *logos*, the connotation was not on the media, but the message. Still, many look down on newer forms of communication, deeming other media as not “proper” for worship. Again, the more important part of the sermon is the message, not the media. If the medium used for proclamation is augmented by an image, a smell, or a kinesthetic activity that communicates better than just the spoken word, then the *logos* is more apt to be passed from giver to receiver, and proclamation is more apt to be achieved.

#### THE WORD OF GOD IN THE CONGREGATION GATHERED

Now that we have an understanding of what the Word of God means, and how this Word is proclaimed, one can finally turn to the last part of the definition given, that is, that preaching is done in the context of not only in a particular community, but also in a community in worship. If the Word is the message, and the proclamation is the media, then the community is the audience. Who is the audience of worship? A simple and true answer would be that the audience in worship is God. But, if this answer is accepted as the only answer to the question, the sermon then, as an act of worship, would be defined as the proclamation of the Word of God to God. If the only audience in worship is God, why would God need the Word of God proclaimed to God?

A fuller understanding of the audience in worship would be that the primary audience in worship is, of course, God, but the secondary audience in worship is the congregation gathered. Proclamation of God’s Word in worship pleases both the

primary and secondary audiences, because it proclaims God's grace and love to the people gathered. Although Barth would contend that the secondary audience does not matter because the sermon is an act of worship "to God," there is a different idea presented in Scripture. The witness in the Bible shows that the secondary audience and the communication of God's Word matters. For instance, why would Paul consider it necessary in the Corinthian church that someone translate the sermon from an unknown tongue if the audience was solely God, who could understand all tongues? Yet, it must have been necessary, because one finds in the epistle specific instructions given to the congregation to make sure that if someone in the congregation does use an unknown tongue that it is translated so that the congregation can understand what was being said. One sees, through scripture, that even though one acknowledges God as the primary audience in worship, the understanding of the Word by the congregation is required as well.

The definition of preaching given above limited preaching to the act of corporate worship, where the church gathers to give praise to God. One finds in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus tells his followers that "where two or three are gathered," Jesus, the Word, in their midst. Two things make it necessary for the proclamation to be given in the church gathered: first, it is difficult to proclaim a message if there is no recipient of the message. One has heard the saying, "If a tree falls to the ground and no one is around, does it make a sound?" Much the same could be said with proclamation, that if it is given and no one is around, the act of proclamation is not achieved.

Second, the congregation must affirm or reject the proclamation; they are the one that calls the preacher forward from their own community, and are responsible for that calling. For instance, if in a sermon a preacher proclaimed something false, without a church calling the preacher to accountability, then the preacher could continue to misrepresent the Word. A perfect example of this is the many preachers who are on television sharing false Christian doctrine. It is hard for a people to come together to hold a preacher accountable if not in a gathered community, especially if one is alone in front of a television with no way of asking anyone else if the message is true or not. In the United Methodist Church, for instance, where the denomination calls out the ordained to give the Word, the Church is called to be responsible for that word that is proclaimed. The congregation can be a witness to the preacher that a particular experience sheds a new light on the Word of God. For example, it is important for a male preacher to have the perspective of women in the community to make sure that their experiences are represented.

It is not only important that the proclamation be delivered in a community, but a community in worship, a community where the Holy Spirit has been called upon to enter into the hearts and minds of the people gathered. The work of the Holy Spirit in worship is the work of translator. Just as Jesus is a translation of God into “human,” the Spirit of God takes our incomplete, flawed, and imperfect presentation and translates it into a message for those who want to hear the Word of God in their lives. Without that work of the Holy Spirit, the words of the preacher are simply that, words. In a world today where anyone can have a pulpit and anyone can say anything



they would like to say, only when the words of worship are given life through the Spirit and are heard and seen in the context of the Church can we ever affirm that the word given is God's Word.

#### CASE STUDY

At First United Methodist Church in Canton, Texas, though the use of many different multisensory worship elements, the church shares the Word of God not only through the sermon, but also throughout the entire worship corpus. The worship team chooses elements that reflect the scripture of the day. After carefully studying the scripture, the team develops a theme and from that music, drama, art, video and décor are chosen to reflect the scripture and theme. After about four months into this new worship matrix at First Church, one person comes up to the pastor after the worship and reflects to him that it seemed that every portion of the worship spoke to her that morning. She was surprised to hear that it was intentional, commenting that the church had never thought about worship in that way before. Then she said, "I wonder why not?"

## CHAPTER 4

### ELEMENTS OF MULTISENSORY WORSHIP IN TRADITIONAL SETTINGS

The elements of multisensory worship work when each element speaks to a common theme for a worship service and/or a series of worship services, a theme that has been carefully chosen based in the exegesis of the scripture for the day and through team preparation. John Jewell, in *Wired for Ministry*, shares, through the lens of a smaller congregation in Wisconsin, how thematic worship is important:

In many Protestant churches, it is as though the worship is put together with Scotch tape and Post-it notes. An award is presented, the Sunday school class sings a song, someone who is visiting worship with friends happens to have a great voice and a quick solo is arranged, or the choir has worked hard on a particular anthem and wants to sing it at all the morning services. The team at Waupun spends a good deal of time working through every aspect of the service. From time to time, someone will come up with an idea, a song, or a desire to add something to the worship experience, but the criteria is that the service be woven together with thematic integrity. Nothing is added that does not fit with the theme. The resulting experience is a single coherent theme that connects with the worshipers.<sup>31</sup>

What elements make up multisensory worship? Some elements in multisensory worship are the same as in other worship expressions. Sermons and music play a vital role in multisensory worship, as in all worship. However, in multisensory worship, the various elements of worship, such as the gathering, celebration, proclamation, communion and the sending forth are all embodied through various media; through drama, video, digital art, and décor. All of these elements are

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<sup>31</sup> Jewell, John P. *Wired for Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004. 142-143.

brought forward and intentionally pieced together to create the worship for the day, in much the same way as a stonemason takes various stones and builds a wall.

#### WHEN DID IT *ALL* BECOME ABOUT MUSIC?

Certainly when the focus in the 1980s and 1990s was on “contemporary” verses “traditional” worship, the conversation centered on the music used for worship. Yet, there is certainly more to worship than just music, and any discussion on worship that solely focuses on music is short-sided. However, to avoid the discussion about music in worship altogether is to ignore a huge part of what is considered worship. In many congregations, the idea lifted up is that the music time is “the worship,” and the preaching is “the preaching.” To determine that music is not important is to ignore what many people wrongly believe to be the “end all and be all” of worship.

Music is, by nature, multisensory in nature. Gardner, in his divisions of intelligence in his Multiple Intelligence Theory, has music as a separate intelligence. Whereas many in churches cannot quote more than five or six verses out of the bible, many can sing all of Amazing Grace and many other hymns as well. Yet, even in the most versed of singing congregations, there tends to be a disconnect between the voice and brain; in many worship celebrations, people sing but do not think about the message behind the song.<sup>32</sup>

Adam Hamilton shared one example of how to overcome this disconnect. One Sunday, the church where he serves began the worship by singing “A Mighty Fortress

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<sup>32</sup> Hamilton, Cokesbury Worship Connection Conference.

is our God,” the great Luther hymn that also has a word of two that people today might not understand. One of those words is “bulwark,” which is a wall built for defense. Hamilton shared with the congregation the meaning of the word, and shared the theme of the day: that God is our protector in times of trouble. Through his introduction to the hymn, not only did the congregation learn something more about the song, but also how the meaning of the word tied with the message. He gave the congregation something to think about when they hummed the song in their head the following week.<sup>33</sup>

Simply put, worship is not all about the music. Music is one of several elements in worship, and the music in worship functions better when it is focused on the scripture and theme of the worship celebration. Otherwise, it becomes simply a filler of time before the sermon begins. Music is too powerful a medium to be wasted like that.

#### DRAMA IN WORSHIP: OPPORTUNITY AND DANGER

In many ways, the corpus of the worship liturgy can be considered drama. From the call to worship, to the offering, to the celebration of the Lord’s Table, worship is the “acting out” of the gospel story of God’s love for humanity. In this light, it seems like a natural extension of the proclamatory nature of worship to have drama take place. Yet, drama that is not well planned, well rehearsed, and well performed can end up being a huge distraction in worship. One should consider these things before deciding to implement live drama in worship.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

First, the worship team should understand what drama is good at doing in worship. Dramas are best suited for a call to worship, scripture retelling, an introduction to a sermon, or as part of the communion liturgy. Dramas are ill suited as sermon replacements because dramas are better at raising questions than answering them and better at invoking experiences to draw upon rather than manufacturing arguments to settle debates.<sup>34</sup> Skits and monologues should strive to be a part of a larger worship picture. Dramas that try to do too much usually are poorly written and not conducive for worship.

Second, attention should be paid to how worship flows into the drama and how it flows out. Without this understanding, transitions in and out of the drama can be abrupt and disruptive. Rehearsals of dramas should include the elements of worship that will be taking place before and after a drama so that timing and flow can be established.

Third, bad drama can be very bad. There will be mistakes made, and fumbling of lines happens as well. More detrimental than these, though, are dramas that are poorly cast and actors that do not understand the feel of the drama or the worship setting that it resides in. Even more than entrances and exits and the lines of dialogue or monologue, the feel of the work is more noticeable in worship than even on stage. In other words, drama with a lack of “true drama,” is no better than a monotone scripture reading or a lifeless communion liturgy, and is probably worse,

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<sup>34</sup> Gaffney, Sean. “Use of Drama in Worship” at Lillenas Music and Drama Conference, Olathe, KS, February 3, 2005.

since the unfamiliarity of drama in worship will lend it to being a distraction rather than an addition to the worship corpus.

Fourth, drama that does not fit neatly and nicely into the theme of the day can be counterproductive to the overall communication of worship. The persons involved in planning the drama need to know more than just the scripture reading to know if a drama is going to work in worship. Ideally, the preacher should be intimately involved in the choosing and timing of the drama to help determine the compatibility of the drama with worship. It is very difficult for dramas to be effective in worship unless the preacher is on board with the theme and direction of the sermon and knows well enough in advance as to give time for the drama to be chosen, rehearsed and planned.

All of this being said, however, good drama can do things that simple oratory cannot do. For instance, a tough question such as theodicy can be raised through drama in such a way that the congregation can begin before a sermon to wrestle with the complexities of good and evil, and can be brought to a place of empathy for those who have experienced the unfairness of life. Good drama can bring a congregation to a place of common experience so that the congregation can be unified in response to a sermon. Good drama can bring forth a rhythm and style to worship that can give worship true depth, breadth and authenticity. Drama, when used effectively in worship, can be eye opening, life changing and soul bending. When done poorly, it can be a total waste of five minutes, or worse, a bomb that blows up all of worship for the day.

The best thing that a worship team can do to implement drama in worship is to find someone who knows what they are doing to “direct” the drama in worship, someone who understands what it means to act and act well. If a church wants to implement drama yet has no one with this experience, one of the best things to do is to attend a worship drama workshop to learn about the medium before attempting any dramas in worship.

#### ALTAR GUILD MEETS HGTV

Whether it is a Starbucks coffee shop, a hotel lobby or even our own homes, people and companies take great care to decorate spaces to invoke particular experiences. Decorating has become important in today’s society. There are numerous shows on HGTV today like *Divine Design*, *Design on a Dime*, and *Trading Spaces* that appeal to the desire for spaces to have meaning and ambiance. Yet, churches in traditional settings are content to decorate with the same faded paraments from twenty years ago. Spaces for worship in traditional settings tend to be cold and sterile, with the obligatory red carpet and hard pews. It becomes difficult for a congregant to come close to an immanent God when the “living room” that we come to meet God is impersonal and institutional.

Moreover, the faded color cloth paraments and the arbitrary arrangement of fresh cut flowers on the altar table speak nothing of the theme of the day, except that it is the twenty-something Sunday after Pentecost. As the central focus on the sanctuary, the table should share more of the story, tying in the main metaphors and images for the theme. The color palate of the church should be expanded to more

than four colors. If the liturgical color of green symbolizes growth, it does not hurt to use some other colors of nature, such as browns and tans. There could be placed on the altar a simple large clock set at midnight to symbolize the coming of the kingdom, or even a rustic wooden cross to remind the congregation of the victory of the cross in our lives each Sunday. For churches that are emancipated from pews, the room arrangement for worship is limited only by the congregation's imagination.

Finally, when talking about the aesthetics of a worship space, lighting is key. In traditional spaces built in the last century, the goal was to have as much light as possible to allow reading of hymnals, bibles and programs. This sea of lighting, however, also washes out the worship space and fails to create an experience. With the use of screens, dramas, and dramatic readings of scripture, lights can now be used to convey a number of experiences, from meditative to celebrative. Lighting is especially useful when using spaces that might not have been designed for worship, such as gyms and cafeterias.

If possible, it is best to have at least house lights that are adjustable, coupled with another set of lights that can be adjusted for the chancel of the worship space. For most churches, this can be implemented with a simple replacement to adjustable switches on the house lights and the installation of two sets of lights with four cans in each set in front of the chancel. Coupled with a simple lighting board, this can allow simple presets to be developed for each element of worship. One person then can make the adjustments necessary during worship for a seamless experience. These lighting changes need not be startling to be effective. For instance, a simple softening



of the house lights for prayer, lights highlighting the altar table for communion, or even lights focused for a short worship drama can make a huge difference. For smaller churches in traditional settings, these additions can be rather inexpensive and they allow greater flexibility to worship areas, especially worship areas that might need some help with ambiance.

#### DIGITAL ART: TO SCREEN OR NOT TO SCREEN

The decision to use a screen in worship was decided at one time by a very pragmatic thing: price. Even ten years ago, only large churches were able to afford the high price of screens for worship. Most churches, even after spending a lot of money on screens, did not really use them in a multisensory type way; rather, they were used as replacements of bulletins and hymnals. Today, the price and technology is in reach of every church to consider using projection technology. Yet, the majority of churches who use screens never use the screen to its potential; many still use screens simply as a way of conveying information during worship, replacing one reading task for another.

It is not surprising, then, that many in churches do not see a need or benefit to having screens in worship, especially when the discussion turns to esthetics.

Churches, in an effort to save time, throw up a generic picture on the screen and project words on top of it, with little attention to the readability of the words next to the picture, or if the picture even fits the room or the theme or anything at all. Even worse are the moving backgrounds. (One service used a moving waterfall for the entire service. The white words were hard to make out, and the motion of water

actually was nauseating, almost as nauseating as the fact that there was not one thing in the worship that pertained to water.) The great misuse of screens in worship leaves many people believing that they are much more of a distraction than useful used as a communication device. Yet, when used in the right way, the screen can add a completely new dimension to worship.

What is the right way to use screens? First, the worship should concentrate on a single image. Too many images become a major distraction, and in the end, are ineffective for communication. It is much better to use one image. This central image should focus the congregation on the theme of the entire worship celebration. The image can be manipulated in different ways for various portions of the worship. For instance, when words are portrayed on the screen, the image can be reduced, or blurred, or darkened. This allows for adjustment of the image to allow words to be seen better on the screen. The image is vitally important, because the image likely will be the most remembered thing from worship, and if it reinforces the sermon, there is a better chance that the sermon itself will be remembered.

Second, avoid using business-like Powerpoint templates and bullet points for worship. The idea is for the congregation to have an experience of the holy, not to have an experience of a board meeting, dictated to with facts and talking points. There should be something different about worship. The presentation should avoid using cheesy transitions and animated web graphics. A slow fade works best as a transition between elements. It is a very polished transition that works well when using a single image in different forms. For words in the middle of songs, however,

no transition should be used, since the transition takes too long for the words to change before the congregation sings the next phrase of the song. In all things that deal with the screen, it is better to think “production” than “presentation.”

Third, words should be able to be read clearly. The font size should be adequately large for the room and screen, and the color of the words should contrast the background image. Most stock photos and digital camera shots have too many colors for words to simply be overlaid on top. There needs to be some adjustment to the picture for words to show up clearly. For words that are white, the adjustment needs to be a darker blur or contrast and for words that are black, the adjustment needs to be a much lighter blur or contrast. White is most commonly used for words, with black used less often, mostly for pictures that have an enormous amount of white in them. Other colors are much harder to work with and should be generally avoided.

Finally, the team should choose images carefully, especially when using a single image for worship. Any negative images should be used very carefully as they tend to overpower a worship service. Advanced notice and viewing should be given to people in the congregation who are depicted in pictures. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words. One good image that depicts the central theme and that supports the message of the day can burn in the retinas for weeks. Bad images and poor presentations can give heartburn for years.

## THE USE AND MISUSE OF VIDEO IN WORSHIP

One of the most exciting uses of multimedia technology is the ability to use video in worship. Video can come in many forms, from digital video clips shot and

edited by various people on the worship team or the church, to pre-packaged video clips, to clips from movies or television shows. Video can be a powerful way to create emotions and can convey a lot of information in a short period of time. Yet, as with drama and digital art, there is always a danger of overextending the use of video, or trying with video to do too much. Russell Dalton in *Video, Kids, and Christian Education* concurs:

Brief video clips cannot say it all. . . . Video clips are better at raising questions, evoking feelings, or making connections than they are at presenting core content. The “live and in-person” teacher is usually best able to bring the learnings home to learners.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, video that does not fit nice and neatly into the theme for the worship can be distracting and confusing.

With the proliferation of technology today, it is now much easier to make a digital video that can truly enhance worship. One exciting way of using digital video is by sharing congregational testimonials through video. Whether it is for a stewardship campaign or for a revival series, testimonials on video can be quite powerful. Video testimonials, moreover, can be edited so that the maximum impact can be made in minimal time. (We all have heard live testimonials that have gone five minutes too long.) Another way of using digital video is by shooting the church in action in mission and activities, and sharing these during worship as moments of offering and response. It is easy with today’s technology to combine video footage

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<sup>35</sup> Dalton, Russel W. *Video, Kids, and Christian Education*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2001. 42.

with digital photography and music to make a complete presentation that can move the congregation in a way that no other media can.

Another use of video is to use “stock” video footage, pre-edited by a company for use in worship. Many web-based companies offer worship-ready videos. The good thing about these videos is that the quality is usually professional grade and they take minimal time to set up for worship. The down side is that it is harder to customize these videos for a particular worship theme, and the copyright on the videos might not allow for any editing at all. In the end, whether to use a stock video or one’s own footage depends on the situation. For instance, it is much more powerful to have a less quality video showing the congregation at work in missions than to have a stock video footage showing strangers in missions. However, it might be better to have a stock video of a short skit with professional actors than a skit performed by amateurs and shot on video with less quality.

Many churches use clips from movies in worship. A great clip from a movie can be a powerful moment in worship. It can also be a complete flop. Here are some things to consider when using a movie clip in worship. First, since the congregation cannot see the whole movie in worship, the clip must serve as a viable communication on its own. It should never be assumed that everyone has seen a particular movie, for very few movies have been seen by even a majority of a congregation. Moreover, many movies are generational; that is, many people under 35 have never seen *Casablanca*, and many over 35 have never seen *High School Musical*. To assume that an entire congregation has seen a movie is unrealistic.

Almost all movie clips need a well-written lead into the clip and a well-written transition after the clip to help overcome this shortfall, but one should avoid trying to summarize the entire movie since this gets too wordy.

Second, consider the general scope and nature of the movie. Someone in the congregation will see a clip from a movie and decide to rent the movie to see “the rest of the story.” According to the congregation’s tolerance for content, a movie that has an uplifting and memorable clip for worship might also be a movie that offends someone in the congregation at a later viewing. If there is any doubt, a disclaimer should be given about the content of a movie, or it might be better not to use the clip at all. Consider also the general taste of the congregation. A clip that the worship team finds moving might be considered “sappy” to everyone else. A clip that the worship team considers funny might be considered by the congregation to be in poor taste for worship.

Finally, all movies are copyrighted. For a church legally to view a movie clip in worship, the church must have permission to show the clip. A church can purchase a yearly license from CVLI that grants permission to show unedited portions of most movies in general release. This license, however, does not cover a church’s audio or video broadcast on the web, television or radio.

#### SERMONS THAT HAVE “LEGS”

On the golf course, among the many things that a spectator will hear being said by a golfer is a little phrase used when a shot seems to be falling short of the specified target: “Come on, get legs!” This phrase is used hoping that the golf ball

will somehow finish what was left undone by the golfer; the ball will hit a hard patch and bounce toward the hole, or find a hill and roll. Most of the time, however, talking to the golf ball is futile, and the ball dies short of the specified target.

Preachers also hope that their sermons will “get legs,” that sermons will be formative to the congregation for the week ahead and for years to come. There is no better feeling for a preacher than for someone in the congregation to come back to them a week later or a year later and share something that was profound to them from a sermon. However, for a sermon to “get legs,” it has to make it past the door of the church through the hearts and minds of the congregation.

There are certain tools that a pastor can use to help sermons “get legs.” One great tool is for the preacher to facilitate interaction with the congregation during the sermon. Even something as simple as having the congregation repeat a key phrase two or three times during a sermon helps the congregation remember an important point during the following week. In the African-American tradition, responses are used often and are very effective in transferring the hearing of the Word from the ear to the brain. Henry Mitchell in *Black Preaching* states:

In truly Black preaching, repetition occurs not only in the call and response, but also in the normal course of the sermon. Texts, aphorisms, and other significant statements are restated for emphasis, memory, impact and effect. The Black audience takes the gospel seriously and does not feel “talked down to” when words or sentences are repeated. Not uncommonly, the repetition is so vivid that it may be heard again in later conversation, days after it was given life in the

pulpit. If the gospel is indeed the word of life, then ought it not include nuggets worth repeating the next day or the next year?<sup>36</sup>

All churches would benefit by having congregational interaction in sermons.

Another helpful tool is using “tactiles,” things that are handed out to the congregation to carry with them in the following weeks to help remember the message for the day. For instance, after a sermon using the story about the woman at the well, the congregation could be given a re-labeled bottle of water with the scripture on the bottle, sharing the message that Jesus is the water that gives eternal life. Using tactiles takes some time and forethought, but they can help make the point of a sermon memorable for weeks, even years to come.

#### COMMUNION AND BAPTISM: “OLD SCHOOL” MULTISENSORY WORSHIP

One of the greatest joys that a pastor has in a church is administering the sacraments. Communion and baptism are the foundation for the church community and are the primal acts of worship instituted by the example of Jesus Christ. They are also primal examples of what it means to do multisensory worship. In baptism, there is the touching and hearing of the water, the visual of seeing dry hair becoming wet, the analogy of change and newness. In communion, there is the smell and taste of the bread and wine, the feel of the altar rail against one’s chest, the metaphor of sacrifice, of fellowship, and of family.

During the dark ages, these were the acts that kept the Church alive. When the masses gathered in worship, the words were foreign, but the imagery was rich and

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<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, Henry H. *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990. 93.



alive. The host was lifted up and people could see the act of sacrifice being played out again. In baptism, the people gathered to “re-clothe” and “rename” the newest church member. As the water poured, those who heard the water knew that the water was the connecting bond between them, a symbol of the Spirit that moved even in the broken and disconnected Church.

Today, in much the same way, the sacraments still speak even when words fail us. Churches in traditional settings should truly celebrate these gifts from God and emphasize the way in which the sacraments use all the senses to experience God’s grace. Serious questions should be asked concerning the celebration of the sacraments, questions such as: Why is the communion liturgy read in a monotone? Why are the wafers so bland? Why is baptism rushed through at the beginning of worship so that the “real” worship can begin? For years, the Church has seemed to be too ashamed of the experiential nature of the acts, even to the point of killing them with paragraphs of words. It is much better to let the water pour, and the piece of bread to be a good chunk that people can actually taste. If these are the outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual graces, then they should be gracious, celebratory and multisensory, events that people not only want to participate in, but experience as well.

#### CASE STUDY

First United Methodist Church in Canton, Texas uses all of the aforementioned multisensory elements in worship; not all each Sunday, but at various times when these elements help speak to the theme of the day. The cornerstone of the

life of First Church is the music ministry, and music plays a vital role in the worship of the church. The current music director has been at First Church for over 25 years and helps shape the musical context of worship using the shared vision of the worship team.

Drama has been implemented in worship at First Church for the last three years, usually once a month to once every six weeks. Dramas are kept short, usually three to four minutes, and are usually before the sermon to highlight the theme for the worship. Dramas are carefully chosen and read by the team and preacher, and are usually rehearsed three weeks prior to the worship celebration. To help facilitate dramas in worship, the team uses monologues and reader's theatre often.

First Church uses digital art every Sunday. Each week an image is created to match the theme of worship, and this image is carried through the entire worship. The use of other images is limited to help center the entire worship onto the central theme. The words to congregational music and responses are given on the screen as well.

Video is used often in worship. Many people from the church have been featured giving testimonials, and many others in mission and service. The use of "stock" videos is minimal, since the church responds better to the authenticity of videos that have people from the church featured. Movie clips are used often, once every three to four weeks, mainly because of the availability of the media. The presentation software used by the church facilitates the uploading of clips directly

onto the computer so that the transition from presentation to video is seamless and instantaneous.

Interaction is encouraged in sermons at First Church, as the pastor asks for congregants to repeat key phrases and words that are important, as well as at times ask people to help repeat familiar lines to phrases and sayings aloud and to each other, all to help encourage an active participation in the sermon. The church has also given “tactiles” during and after worship, including rocks, seeds, buttons, keys, peppermints, and cards, all to help the sermon move from the sanctuary out to the lives of the congregants during the week.

The sacraments are celebrated in various ways at First Church. In communion, the church uses the liturgy at one of the worship services, and at both services incorporates various table settings, bread choices, and musical settings during the receiving of communion. Baptism, as well, has been celebrated in many ways in various portions of worship. On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary worship celebration, the church celebrated several youth immersions using a portable swimming pool. In the Methodist tradition, all forms of baptism are valid, and celebrating all forms allows for many different symbols of baptism to come forth.

## CHAPTER 5

### MULTISENSORY WORSHIP PREPARATION

#### WHY TRADITIONAL WORSHIP PREPARATION DOESN'T WORK

In seminary, preachers are taught a certain way to prepare for the week of worship. First, on Monday morning, the preacher sits down with a cup of coffee and looks at the lectionary passages for the week, a glance over which (or any) of the passages might “preach” for the next Sunday. When one jumps out over the others, then the preacher is to look at the passage more carefully, reading in two or three translations, finding differences and nuances in the translations. If the preacher is skilled in the Biblical languages, then the preacher might spend some time in the original language with the passage. After this, the preacher is to carefully exegete the passage, understanding the historical, textual and theological fabric of the passage.

Sometime later in the week, the preacher is to form an idea of what the passage is saying to the congregation, and formulate the sermon based on this idea. If the preacher is especially free from other matters (which never happens), then the preacher might be able to find two or three good illustrations to help the congregation understand the passage. In some congregations, with the cooperation of the director of music, the hymns and anthem are chosen to correlate with the scripture. The title is selected before the sermon is started, because the order of worship has to be printed by Thursday.

Then on Friday, the preacher sits down and carefully forms the manuscript of the sermon, bringing in all that the preacher has understood and found in the week. If everything goes right, the hymns and sermon title actually fit what the manuscript turns out to be, and after two to four hours of writing, a manuscript is finished and typed for the pulpit for Sunday. At this point, the sermon is rehearsed two or three times before Sunday morning and any corrections and additions are made at this point. When Sunday morning comes around, the sermon is a well crafted masterpiece and the preacher is comfortable with the manuscript and the message.

This approach was fine when the sermon was basically a print-manuscript (or even oral) communication between preacher and congregation. However, this approach to sermon preparation does not translate well to doing multisensory and digital culture worship. In one seminary class at Brite Divinity School on electronic culture, the facilitator gave an assignment to plan a Sunday morning worship service using multisensory elements. Each person who completed the assignment had one complaint: the time it took to complete the elements for one worship service. Most admitted that it took anywhere from 10 to 25 hours to complete the assignment, and some made the assumption that only large churches with a team of people could ever implement this type of worship. Quite simply, the new “wine” of multisensory worship tore the old “wineskin” of current worship and sermon preparation practices.

#### THE TEAM APPROACH AND A NEW WAY TO PLAN FOR WORSHIP

The people in the class were right. For the most part, only large churches are doing multisensory worship because large churches have the extensive staff necessary

to plan and implement the many elements for multisensory worship. Ginghamburg Church, a pioneer of using multisensory elements in worship, has used a team approach for years. On Wednesday, the staff at Ginghamburg gathers to plan worship for the following Saturday and Sunday worship gatherings. First, the team hears from the preacher for the week the general idea and focus of the sermon. Then the team plans the music, room decoration, video, art, drama and prayer focus for worship. The team also shares with the preacher any ideas they have to include in the sermon and worship focus. Then the team of six to eight people work full-time until Sunday afternoon “making worship happen” for the people of the church.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately, in small and mid size congregations in traditional settings, there is no team of staff available for planning and implementing worship. At best, there is a full-time preacher who is also the primary pastoral care provider and chief administrator of the church. There are certainly people in the congregation who wish to help with worship, people who could do video, drama, and digital art, yet are not simply free to be available to fit into the old matrix of weekly worship preparation. A video or drama could be prepared in a couple of weeks by volunteers. However, if the crux of the sermon is not known until a few days before worship, these extensive and time-consuming aspects of multisensory worship cannot be accomplished by volunteers in churches in traditional settings.

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<sup>37</sup> Slaughter, Designing Worship Conference.

How, then, can churches in traditional settings accomplish multisensory worship. It does take a team approach.<sup>38</sup> One person cannot do it all, and honestly, if it is a true liturgy, a work of the people, then it should not be one person doing it all. As Len Wilson and Jason Moore, former member of the Ginghamburg team, state “Planning worship with the intent of reaching [the digital] culture is much too hard to do alone.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in traditional settings when working with people who are doing aspects of worship on a part-time or volunteer basis, the vision of the team has to be larger than one week. It is very helpful to those who are working on music, drama and video to have more than one week to prepare and work on items, since the extra time allows for more flexibility.

#### THE WORSHIP PLANNING TEAM

Who should be on a worship planning team? It does not need to be too small, because the major purpose of the team is for a variety of opinions to come forward. Yet, it does not need to be too big, because there is such a thing as “too many cooks in the kitchen.” The final number may not be as important as who is involved. Each church must develop a group dynamic and comfort level. For some, seven people are too many, for others, seven might be too few, depending on the people and personalities that are a part of the worship team.

Essentially, the group must include the preacher and the music leader for the worship service. In churches in traditional settings, the preacher is the majority of the

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<sup>38</sup> Sample, *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World*. 120.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, Len & Jason Moore. *Digital Storytellers: The Art of Communicating the Gospel in Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002. 47.

time the pastor of the church, and the music director for the worship service is the majority of the time the music director of the entire church. However, this is not always the case, especially in today's churches that are running concurrent worship services at the same time, using two preachers and two music leaders. Still, the preacher and music leader are the principal pieces of the worship experience, and both are necessary for worship planning.

The problem comes when there is a pastor (more common) or a music leader (less common) that does not want to be involved in the planning process. Many music leaders at worship conferences stand and ask the same question, stating "All of these new things and ways of planning are wonderful, but how can we get our pastor on board with worship planning?" Hearing this plea repeatedly in workshop after workshop confirms the old "lone wolf" way that preachers have dealt with worship, thinking that as long as there is a sermon title by Friday for the order of worship then everyone else can rally to make something happen around that.

This might sound harsh, but for all the reasons given for the downturn of churches in traditional settings, the absence of pastors in worship planning and implementation might be the number one reason for this downturn. The question heard at many worship conferences: "How can we get our pastor on board with worship planning?" is alarming. Churches in traditional settings have lost the idea that the pastor is the worship leader and chief worshipper of the congregation. When the question is raised, "How can we get our pastor on board with worship planning?" the church that raises that question is already defeated. The answers given to this



question in these workshops are all the time the same, “Worship always begins with the pastor.”

Yet, for the many pastors who struggle to serve in traditional settings, the idea of a weekly worship meeting seems impossible. The administrative, pastoral care, and teaching roles of the pastor have encompassed so much of the time of the pastor that there is very little left to give for preparing a sermon, much less participating in the planning of worship. The issue that comes forward is the stewardship of the time of the pastor. Just as we should set aside the “first fruits” of our giving to God’s work, pastors should give the first of their time to worship. Yet too often pastors act as though the Westminster confession states that the chief end of humanity is to administrate a church budget or visit all the shut-ins each week, not to glorify God and enjoy God forever. In the end, life is about worship, and in the life of the church, especially knowing that the weekly corporate gathering for worship is the most public, highest attended, and most prioritized part of the week for those who are a part of the church, it is, frankly, absurd to treat worship as just an afterthought. Pastors should not just be a part of the worship team; they should be the catalyst for the team, helping the team make the changes necessary to make worship authentic and relevant for today’s churches in traditional settings.

Although music directors are given a bad rap by pastors as people unwilling to conform to a team approach, the reality is that most music directors have been dreaming of the day when the pastor of the church would actually begin to dialogue with the music director about worship. Most music directors have been “doing their

own thing” not because they are unwilling to work with the pastors, but because there has been no direction given to them by the pastor. Without any clear direction, the music director resorts to the lectionary planner and the seasonal calendar (and the tea leaves) to try to guess what might be some sort of generic theme for the day, and select a few innocuous hymns that might work.

There are times, however, when a music director might indeed be a “lone wolf” who does not want to cooperate with a worship team and/or a pastor. This happens for many reasons. First, this happens when music becomes the end of worship rather than the means for worship. A Bach chorale might be highly appreciated in a church in a university setting or in a church that is steeped in traditional church culture. However, for the majority of churches in traditional settings, this music is lost on the average pew sitter. It might be tolerated if it is done well. Woe to the church that tries and does not do it well. Moreover, any music that is not in the common vernacular should be avoided, or at least, there should be provided with a translation in some form. When the music performance becomes the focus of the music director instead of worship, being held accountable by a worship team might prove to be difficult for the music director.

Second, there is many times a “custodial” approach to worship by music directors, especially in highly liturgical and traditional settings. Input from those who are not “trained” or from the “outside” might be seen as a threat to “proper” worship. The use of digital art and video in worship are an affront to all that they deem as holy.

Moreover, praise choruses and new hymns are viewed as an attempt to “push out” what they believe to be “real church music.”

Whatever the reason or reasons that a music director might not conform to a team approach to worship, those reasons must be addressed. However, the “lone wolf” music director is the exception rather than the rule; most music directors want to bring meaningful worship into the life of the church.

Along with the preacher and worship leader, on the “must invite” list to the worship team are the people responsible for the media, video, drama and aesthetics, mainly because these are the people who need to converse with the preacher on theme, design, look and feel of the worship celebration. This is not only needed for those who are doing these things, but also for the preacher to make a connection with what is going on around her or him in worship. It is very easy to know during Sunday worship whether the preacher was a contributing party to the atmosphere of worship. For instance, what if the worship team comes forward with a theme of the "ups and downs" of life as being a roller coaster, and went with the entire amusement park theme, but the pastor, who did not like roller coasters, went in a more somber direction with the sermon, sharing at one point that he or she “hated roller coasters?” The congregation would know instantly that there was a disconnect between what they were hearing and what they were seeing, and this disconnection would become an obvious distraction. This happens when there is not a dialogue between the preacher and the others on the worship team.

Who else should be on the planning team? This depends on who those four to six people are who provide the “essentials.” There should be great care given to the diversity of the team. If there are no women in the “essentials,” then the team should invite two or three women to act as a counterbalance on the team. Otherwise, every illustration will be from the world of sports and all the movie clips would be from action movies. If the “essentials” are older, then the team should invite younger people to the table, especially if there is an emphasis on reaching younger people. Never assume that younger people just want flashier, faster and louder versions of whatever older people want. When younger people, especially youth, are brought onto the team, the input given by them is as surprising as it is enlightening. If the team is planning for two different worship celebrations each week, then people on the team should be attending both worship celebrations regularly. There should be at least one person who is not implementing the worship on the team to give an unbiased and outside view. It is hard for worship leaders and worship technicians who are vested in worship not to have a skewed view of what happens during worship. Again, the size of the team is very important, but the makeup of the team is much more important. A team of six to eight people is probably ideal. More than eight people can become a mob, and less than six probably cannot be a very diverse group.

One tool that can help in team communication is the implementation of a “worship blog.” The advantage of blogging is that worship ideas that are thought about at times other than the weekly worship meeting can be shared easily with the

entire worship team. The conversation from the meeting can be continued easily with the total team involved, thus eliminating the problem of people being on “separate pages” because part of the team went a different direction at the last minute. Moreover, a blog can be very helpful in case a meeting has to be skipped due to holidays or vacations.

#### A FOUR WEEK PLAN

The basic format for the team meeting each week is to implement a four week plan. This includes the evaluation of the previous week’s worship and the planning for the upcoming three weeks in worship. The meeting should be divided into four 15-minute segments to talk about the four weeks; the weekly meeting should only last for about one hour. After a short word of prayer, the group then begins the evaluation process of the previous week’s worship, which includes any content related successes and failures, and discussion of any technical successes and failures.

Examples of content related successes and failures can be determined by this question: Did the worship come together into one single thematic expression of the message, the “Word of God?” Derivative of this question come questions like these: Could the worshipper articulate the basic idea of the message presented in worship? Did the message come from the passage of scripture shared? If analogies and metaphors were used, were they consistent, or if they broke down, was this acknowledged at some point in the sermon, and moreover, were there any “mixed” metaphors? Did all the elements of worship contribute to or reinforce the message?

Examples of technical related successes and failures can be determined by this question: Did the media get in the way of the message? Derivative of this question comes questions and statements like these: Was the space for worship well prepared? Did the projector and presentations function as they should? Should the praise band have practiced for another week or two before attempting a particular song? That transition from the drama to the sermon was very effective! Who forgot to turn the air conditioning down before worship? (Everything that people experience from the moment they arrive in the parking lot until they leave is a part of the presentation of the message. Even the air conditioning is a medium that can enhance or distract from worship.)

One note about evaluation: This is not a time for discouragement, but rather to share honestly what went right and what did not. The result must be separated from the team members offering. A drama for instance that flops must be evaluated and improved, yet the persons involved must also have their gift celebrated and must be encouraged to try again. Worship participants should be akin to bull riders and relief pitchers; all must have very short-term memory of past failures, dwelling just long enough to learn from mistakes, yet not dwelling too long on those mistakes to develop an unhealthy fear.

After the evaluation of the worship experience of the previous week, then the team should turn to the worship celebration that is coming the following weekend. Ideally, this should be a time to finalize what has already been worked on for this worship celebration. Dramas should be confirmed, videos finalized, songs laid out,

the sermon should be outlined with a main idea and tight thesis, and any special events, circumstances and changes should be carefully discussed and planned. Any last-minute changes that are implemented to the worship plan should be mapped out and assignments given. The evaluation of the previous worship and the finalizing of the plans for the coming worship should take the first half-hour of the meeting.

The second half-hour should be devoted to the following two weeks and possibly on other future worship endeavors. (For instance, the Christmas Eve worship should be discussed beginning in August, not two weeks before Christmas.) The concentration for this part of the meeting is to look at the future worship and begin to plan the various elements needed for worship. If a drama is desired for one of these weeks, then the drama needs to be chosen and the casting discussed. If a new song is desired for a new series, it is given to the praise team for instrumentation and practice. This allows churches even with limited resources to find ways and people to implement new ways in which to communicate in worship.

Pastors can especially benefit from this input time from the worship team. The team can suggest analogies and illustrations by which the pastor can begin to build a sermon. The pastor has an audience before the worship celebration to share the message and ask for input and criticism. If the pastor is at an impasse in the sermon preparation, the team can be an avenue to help the pastor walk through a passage of scripture and find a way in which to bring the Word to the people gathered.

## A FOUR MONTH, FOUR QUARTER AND FOUR YEAR PLAN

Once a month for a few minutes, time needs to be set aside during the team meeting to discuss what is taking place in worship for the next four months. This includes discussing sermon series that are coming forward, special events such as Christmas and Easter that might be on the horizon. The four month plan should have a starting scripture, working title and main idea for each week of sermons. If the weekly worship planning could be compared to a city street map, the four month plan can be compared to a full city map, showing the outlying suburbs in some detail.

Once every four months, time needs to be set aside during the team meeting to discuss the general direction of the church in the next twelve months. The four quarter plan should include dates for special events as well as an outline of upcoming sermon series suggestions or, if using the lectionary, searching for ways in which the congregation will approach the coming texts. There should be some evaluation as well, of the last few months, and care should be taken to avoid repetition of sermon themes and scripture, unless the church situation warrants such repetition. In the map analogy, this plan is comparable to a full state map, where the large paths are marked, but the side roads are not outlined.

Once a year, time needs to be set aside, preferably in a yearly worship team retreat format, to look at a four-year period, including the previous year and up to three years into the future. This perspective is needed to outline the general path of the church worship life. Looking from series to series or from lectionary season to



season, the team should look at the overall diet of the church and see if there is any malnourishment. Theologically, questions might include these: Are there any doctrines that have been not addressed that we need to address in the next year or two? Has each person of the Trinity been given adequate time, including focusing thematically on providence, Christology, and Pneumatology, and if not, how might this be addressed in the next three years? Biblically, questions come from the division of focus of each area of the bible. Questions might include: Is there a good balance of the whole Bible? How can we introduce more of the Old Testament narrative in the coming couple of years? Should we try to preach more from the Psalms, or non-Pauline Epistles, or the Minor Prophets, or not? Practically, questions come from the application of the themes, such as relationships with family and marriage, work, mission, service, evangelism, money. Questions might include these: Are we addressing women's or men's issues in balance, or is every other illustration and metaphor sports related? How can we connect more with youth? Is there a justice issue that our church needs to step forward and provide leadership in the community? Using the analogy of the map, the four year look is comparable to the United States map, where the interstates are marked and the goal destinations are circled in red.

Moving from a weekly to a quadrennial perspective helps worship remain fresh and alive, as well as true and authentic. Although this seems like much more work, in reality, planning always pays off in the preparation and the execution of worship. One of the great resources of any plan or lectionary is that the first question that must always be answered in worship preparation, "Where are we going this week

in worship?” is already answered. Preachers and worship teams waste a lot of time when this question has to be discussed and answered week after week.

#### WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS BEFORE SUNDAY

One of the great complaints (mostly by pastors) about advanced planning is the question concerning contingencies: “What if something happens before Sunday that requires the worship service to move in a different direction?” The reality of planning and working on worship as a team is that the team becomes vested in the plan for worship the coming Sunday, yet the team must understand that whatever plan might be developed is always subject to change. When a community crisis or a national crisis happens, like September 11, 2001, or even an international crisis, like the tsunami of Christmas 2004—when the congregation comes and expects a word of comfort and hope, it is a mistake not to respond in worship. However, not every sniffle or sneeze requires such change. A bad month of offering might not necessarily mean that the church needs a stewardship series. A high-profile celebrity break-up does not dictate that the sermon be completely changed to address the issue. In other words, the worship team should not necessarily take their cues from CNN or the Weather Channel, as they engage in hyperbole and over-reaction for ratings. Instead, develop a plan for action with the worship team for contingencies before something happens.

Moreover, when something takes place, pastors should take their cues from their team and the congregation. If more than one of two people contacts the team wondering if an event is going to be addressed, then a discussion might need to take

place. Everyone on the worship planning team should understand that advanced planning is a endeavor that involves a future that is undetermined. Therefore, even if the drama team has been working on a script for worship for three weeks, there is always a chance that it might have to be scrapped. Those who are on the worship team must understand that this is the nature of worship.

For pastors who use this as an excuse for not planning, understand that a change of plan might happen once a year at most. The benefit of planning outweighs any deterrent that might come from having to scrap a plan. For preachers who use the excuse, “Planning does not allow the Holy Spirit to work freely in sermon planning,” it is obvious that their theology of the Holy Spirit might need some work as well. The Spirit might not be as much of a person of whims as the Spirit is sometimes portrayed by pastors. In other words, the Spirit can move just as well, if not better, all month as it can on Saturday evening before Sunday worship.

#### USING THE LECTIONARY IN MULTISENSORY WORSHIP

The lectionary is a great tool to provide a consistent, varied diet of scripture for exegetical sermons. Based on the Christian year, the lectionary provides readings from the Old Testament, Psalter, Gospels and Epistles each Sunday. During the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, the Gospel Lesson is lifted up and the other readings are connected with the Gospel Lesson. During “ordinary time” after Epiphany and Pentecost, the readings are independent from each other. Churches are encouraged to read all readings in worship so that in the three-year cycle the congregation will hear a wide variety and representative majority of the

Bible. However, for thematic, multisensory worship, it is somewhat difficult even in the seasonal readings to draw a single theme from all the passages. Moreover, in many churches in traditional settings, only one reading is used, limiting the exposure to much of the Bible.

Pastors who preach from the lectionary usually choose one of the readings for the week and develop an expository and exegetical theme from the passage. From this, illustrations, metaphors and analogies are developed by the preacher to support the exegetical work. Multisensory worship elements work well in this matrix, since the theme is developed from the scripture. Planning for worship is also easy with the lectionary, since scripture is already chosen for the weeks ahead.

One of the problems, however, with the lectionary and thematic worship is the difficulty at times to develop themes over several weeks in sermon series. From one week to the next, the tenor and subject of the readings can change dramatically, even in seasons. The lectionary is designed to be a separate canvas each week for creating worship. For churches using multisensory elements in worship, following the lectionary each week can be quite fun with a surprise each week, looking at the following weeks' for the metaphor and theme for the worship. However, it is hard to create a feeling of a congregational faith journey when from week to week the themes and lessons change. However, using the lectionary is better than not using any plan at all.

One way in which to use the lectionary is to consider the "spirit" of the lectionary and use it in a more fluid way rather than to treat the lectionary as the

“law.” For instance, during Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, with more common themes from week to week to tie together, and in some way, it probably is more beneficial to use the lectionary “as planned.” However, during “ordinary time,” more creativity might be employed. One might take the group of lessons from ordinary time and rearrange them to work out several formative series of sermons based on the books of the bible highlighted during the cycle, or rearranging the gospel lessons that have common themes together. Since it is “ordinary time,” it is not as much of a crime to rearrange readings to better suit a theme or emphasis, and since one is still using the books as they are found in the cycle, and a representative portion of scripture is still being read.

Finally, whether the Revised Common Lectionary is used, or some other lectionary, or even if one does not use any lectionary, the reality is that every preacher has a lectionary. Unfortunately, preachers that do not take the time to plan readings are doomed to develop a “canon within a canon,” and rotate from favorite reading to favorite reading based on whim and whatever caught their eye the week before.

#### USING SERMON SERIES IN MULTISENSORY WORSHIP

For churches in traditional settings, preaching in series can be a very effective way in which to develop and sustain multisensory elements in worship. One of the benefits of working in a series is that many of the multisensory elements that are designed for worship can be used for several weeks. A central digital art image can be used, with only slight modifications each week to conform to the week’s theme.

Altar design can be implemented for a whole series, with colors and objects that fit the general theme. A particular song or chorus that conforms to the series theme can be used to center the congregation before the scripture reading each week in a series.

The general rule given on series preaching has been that it is good to have series that are three to four weeks in length. Yet, there is a current trend today to have series last more than three to four Sundays. In fact, in many larger congregations, we are finding series lasting six to twelve weeks and even longer. Many of the natural calendar barriers that come from preaching a longer series are being overcome by larger churches in novel ways. For instance, at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, in the spring of 2007, the church embarked on a series based on the twelve disciples of Jesus. However, Easter Sunday fell in the middle of the series, whereas usually series start at Easter. The church worked through the calendar barrier by strategically placed the story of Judas for Passion Sunday and the story of Thomas for Easter Sunday, thereby giving witness to the passion and resurrection stories even in the midst of a longer series. At Ginghamburg Church (United Methodist) in Tipp City, Ohio, the church completed a eight-month series on the book of Nehemiah. The church, recognizing the necessity to celebrate Easter, simply paused the series for two weeks for Palm Sunday and Easter, and then resumed it after Easter.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Information gathered from the internet from sermons at Peachtree Presbyterian Church (<http://podcast.peachtreepres.org/rss/sermoncast.xml>) and Ginghamburg Church (<http://www.inghamburg.org/sermonpodcast>). Accessed May 4, 2007.

Another barrier to longer series preaching is the difficulty for one preacher to alone complete a long series. For churches in traditional settings that generally only have one preaching pastor on staff, this barrier proves to be very difficult to overcome. One preacher can easily preach a three or four week series alone, but a twelve week series is exhaustive for one preacher, and a year-long series is impossible. At Peachtree, Ginghamburg and larger churches, they use team preaching to complete longer series. For instance, at Peachtree, four different preachers took part in the series on the disciples, and at Ginghamburg, the church used three different preachers during the series on Nehemiah. For churches in traditional settings that only have one preacher on staff, longer series preaching might not be possible.

#### CASE STUDY

At First United Methodist Church, Canton, Texas, the leadership knew that it would take several people to implement multisensory worship. The formation of the team came in pieces, with the original team being the pastor, music director, digital artist, and two people from the church leadership, one a representative from the education committee, and the other a representative to the administrative board. Each time that the group wanted to implement a new element of multisensory worship, the church prayed for a person to come forward from the congregation to help implement the element. When the drama element was introduced to the congregation, the drama teacher from one of the local schools stepped forward to help implement the element. When the team expanded to include altar design and décor, another person came

forward and received training to learn about the art. When the team became much more serious about lighting, especially after building the new facility for the early worship, the husband of the altar design person, a former technical director for a television station in Dallas, designed the lighting for both worship facilities, and implements a lighting plan each Sunday. In addition to the planning team, many more people help with sound, media, and music to help implement worship each week.

First Church has implemented the four-week, four month and four-quarter plan for over three years with great success. As the group meets each week, the group follows closely the four-week plan, outlining the needs for coming Sundays as well as gives constructive criticism for the previous weeks. These conversations help guide the team to making improvements as well as provide future ideas for the coming weeks and months. About once a quarter, the group meets to share the coming month's series and special events. The pastor shares a list of the coming scriptures and sermon themes and titles for the coming four months, as well as a list of upcoming series for the coming year. Discussion takes place on ideas and suggestions to help confirm and fill out the four-month plan as well as give preliminary thoughts about the series that are coming up.

The church has a developed plan for worship each week and for many weeks to come, yet the plan is always subject to change, and is subject to change according to the events that are taking place in the community and the world. The church learned the hard way that people do expect a response when a community crisis takes



place. In Canton, Texas, in 2005, a high-school football coach was critically injured when a dissatisfied parent of a football player on the team shot the coach in his office. Due to the incident being in the latter part of the week, the worship team did not meet again to plan an alternate worship service, instead opting to have a special prayer time during worship. It became obvious to the worship team on the Sunday morning of the worship in question that the congregation expected a more comprehensive response to the incident. The following meeting, in analyzing the worship, the team developed a new axiom, that no matter what, even if the team has to meet late Saturday night, if a service needs to be changed to address a pastoral issue in response to an event, then the team will meet to come up with a new plan.

The church in planning worship begins with the scripture and general direction brought forward by the preacher, usually being the pastor. Since the church also has other preachers on staff, those preachers, when called upon to serve in worship, are also required to work with the worship team to prepare worship. Throughout much of the seasonal year, the pastor follows the lectionary, but at other times, the pastor will create sermon series from other scriptures. For example, in 2007 for the Lenten season, the pastor felt led to share a series on the last 24 hours of Jesus' life, since the only time the passion narrative from the lectionary has been shared in the past is on Good Friday. The pastor took the Good Friday lectionary reading and divided the passage into lessons over the six weeks of Lent, and then to conclude the series, the pastor reread the entire passage on Good Friday. The church

still used the lectionary, but used it in a different way to address a particular need of the congregation.

Early on in the implementation of multisensory worship at First Church, the church relied more heavily on the lectionary, with each Sunday having a different theme and message. This placed a huge burden on the digital artist, since each week the artist had to start from scratch to develop a new image on the chosen theme. Moreover, the team felt that the worship did not have a feeling of being connected from week to week. Therefore, for the last three years, the worship team has implemented sermon series, which has lightened the workload on the digital artist as well as brought to the congregation a more connected worship from week to week.

Sermon series are usually three to four weeks in length, although some series have been up to six weeks in length, such as the Lenten series and the series to promote the capital funds campaign. Longer sermon series preaching has not been pursued by the team at First Church. However, due to the congregation being stable and the length of the pastor's tenure, a two to three month series might be possible in the coming year. The major hurdle in preaching a longer series is the finding of other preachers to lighten the load of the pastor.

## CONCLUSION

Churches in traditional settings have much to offer today. With the use of these multisensory elements of worship along with a new planning matrix, even the smallest of churches can produce meaningful worship experiences that speak to all generations. However, as with all things that are meaningful in life, meaningful worship takes work. The tools and guidance given in these chapters help multisensory worship come into reach for most churches, but churches must be willing to see the culture in a different light, and be willing to adopt changes that will help these great churches be relevant to the new world of digital culture.

As mentioned in the beginning of the first chapter, though, churches in traditional settings have found change, in general, to be difficult. An optimistic view of these churches believes that these churches can generate the necessary desire to change apart from congregational crises like quickly changing demographics or sharply declining worship attendances; but this can only happen through solid pastoral and lay leadership committed to sharing God's love and grace through a new language. Whether it is change that comes from a proactive or reactive approach to the changes in culture, change is upon churches in traditional settings. However, these churches are not alone, for God's Spirit is present and is in the business of giving new languages to those who remain open to God doing new things.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF WEEKLY WORSHIP WORKSHEET

Worship Date:	<b>November 18, 2007</b>	Sermon Title:	Joy and Peace Through True Thanksgiving
Scripture:	Philippians 4:4-9		
Description:	After talking about thanksgiving for two weeks, the final question is, "Why give thanks?" and the simple answer is that through thanksgiving we receive joy and peace. The path to thanksgiving is by counting our blessings, naming those things in prayer that we are thankful for.		
Metaphor:	"Thank You!"	Image:	Man with arms outstretched to heaven.
Altar:	Cornucopia	Multi-Sensory:	Thank you cards to give out at end of sermon to list things that we are thankful for.
Drama:	None.	Movie Clip:	None.
Special Events:	Children's Choir Manna Food Drive	Other:	Lunch after worship.
<b>Service Specific Elements</b>			
Early Service:		Late Service:	
Opening:	Forever	Prelude:	Fanfare (Bells)
2 <sup>nd</sup> :	How Great is Our God	Call & First Lesson:	Psalm 100 Deut. 26:1-11
3 <sup>rd</sup> :	Here I Am to Worship	Hymn:	Come, Ye Thankful People, Come (694)
4 <sup>th</sup> :	We Gather Together	Offertory:	Quiet Praise (Bells)
5 <sup>th</sup> :	Give Thanks	Hymn:	For the Beauty of the Earth (92)
Children's Sermon:	None (Will have Children's Choir)	Anthem:	Sing Praise We Gather Together
Closing :	The Spirit Song	Hymn:	Now Thank We All Our God
Postlude:	CD Music	Postlude:	Nun Danket (Organ)

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE OF FOUR MONTH PLAN

September 9, 2007            15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Ephesians 2:1-10 (Non-Lectionary)  
Amazing Grace: How Sweet the Sound!

September 16, 2007            16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
I John 4:7-10, 16b-19 (Non-Lectionary)  
Amazing Grace: My Chains Are Gone!

September 23, 2007            17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Philippians 1:3-11 (Non-Lectionary)  
Amazing Grace: More than a Moment!

September 30, 2007            18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
II Timothy 4:6-9, 16-18 (Non-Lectionary)  
Amazing Grace: The Eternal Promise!

October 7, 2007 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 17:1-10  
Faithfulness: Quantity or Quality?

October 14, 2007 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 17:11-19  
Faithfulness: Conditional or Unconditional?

October 21, 2007 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 18:1-8  
Faithfulness: Inconsistent or Unwavering?

October 28, 2007 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 18:9-14  
Faithfulness: Exalted or Humbled?

November 4, 2007 All Saints Sunday  
Luke 6:20-31  
True Thanksgiving in All Things

November 11, 2007 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 19:1-10  
True Thanksgiving for God's Grace

November 18, 2007 Thanksgiving Sunday  
Philippians 4:4-9  
Joy and Peace Through True Thanksgiving

November 25, 2007 Christ the King Sunday  
Genesis 32:22-31 (Non-Lectionary)  
Brothers, Brawls and Blessings

December 2, 2007 First Sunday of Advent  
Isaiah 2:1-5  
God's Peace and God's Light

December 9, 2007 Second Sunday of Advent  
Isaiah 11:1-10  
God's Peace and God's Justice

December 16, 2007 Third Sunday of Advent  
Isaiah 35:1-10  
God's Peace and God's Healing

December 23, 2007 Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Matthew 1:18-25  
God's Peace and God's Presence

December 24, 2007 Christmas Eve  
Isaiah 52:7-10, John 1:1-14  
God's Peace and God's Salvation

December 30, 2007 The First Sunday after Christmas  
Matthew 2:13-23  
The Dangerous Baby Jesus

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#### LECTURES

- Willimon, Will. "PowerPoint Preaching" at Festival of Homiletics, Atlanta, GA. May 18, 2006.
- Hamilton, Adam. "Keynote Address" at Cokesbury Worship Connection Conference, Leawood, KS, April 7, 2005.
- Gaffney, Sean. "Use of Drama in Worship" at Lillenas Music and Drama Conference, Olathe, KS, February 3, 2005.
- Sample, Tex. "The Future Is Here but We Can't See It From There" at Lumicon Digital Culture Seminar, Dallas, TX, September 18, 2003.
- Slaughter, Mike. "Getting Ready for the Worship Celebration." at Designing Worship Conference, Tipp City, OH, January 28, 2005.



## VITA

J. Nathan Hodge was born in Center, Texas, on May 25, 1973, the son of Buddy and Betty Hodge. After completing his work at Shelbyville High School, Shelbyville, Texas, in 1991, he entered Panola Junior College, Carthage, Texas. In 1993, he entered Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, receiving a degree of Bachelor of Arts in May 1997. In August 1997, he entered Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, receiving the degree Master of Divinity in December 2000. In June 2003, he was ordained as Elder in the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. In August 2004, he entered the Doctor of Ministry Program, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University.

Rev. Hodge has served as student local pastor, Liberty Springs United Methodist Church, Milam, Texas; as student local pastor, Bascom United Methodist Church, Tyler, Texas; and as associate pastor, First United Methodist Church, Humble, Texas. Currently he is senior pastor of First United Methodist Church, Canton, Texas.

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