



## Transforming Worship Conference

*Ruth Duck, United Church of Christ, USA – pastor and seminary teacher*

### **Session 1 Inter-generational worship**

Inter-generational worship is essential for the spiritual formation of congregations, both on and between Sundays.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 talks about the presence of the Spirit – and freedom that results, and transformation that follows on from that, with people gradually growing in faith as well. Spiritual formation happens in community – “not just us but justice” for and with respect to the wider community beyond the church. Bible passages about the vine (John 15), the Fruits of the Spirit, and the Paraclete (John 14) all relate to this. Churches long for vital worship leading to discipleship, and for membership growth as well; but relationships have to be strong as well.

A church may decide to have some shared time and some in separate groups. A church may resolve intentionally to take young people’s concerns seriously, including through pastoral prayer.

Relationships are not just part of growth – they are essential for worship to be “real”.

#### Worship for spiritual growth

In worship, the glory of God and the pathos of the people come together.

In prayer we mark:

- Gratitude to God [ref Jesus’ prayers and the Jewish tradition]
- The truth about ourselves
- God’s actions of deliverance – in the past and now as well: God keeps promises made
- The needs of the world.

#### *Ritual and repetition*

Some prayers we can recite from memory – *Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open ...* - repetition forms us; it’s not just doing something we like – it forms us as well.

In songs and rituals, what helps us and how?

In songs, how much does the tune matter?

In what other ways do we nourish growth?

#### Intergenerational

We *do need* to be together pretty-much all the time, because all are part of the congregation. We “cannot baptise them into the community and then ‘excommunicate’ them”. Participation in worship is how we learn to be Christians. The “embodied action” of the liturgy: stand, kneel, etc, is how relationships develop. AS ALSO is engaging in serious conversation and discussion at all ages: just as Jesus went to people *as they were in their context* to talk to them.

Ideas include:

- *Twitter*-length prayers
- Let the children move about
- When a sermon includes stories/illustrations, include stories from children’s lives
- “Kids’ time” often transformed into intergenerational activity for all ages – perhaps in both “messages”
- Use all the senses – see, taste, touch [beware of allergies]
- Movement is good for all the ages
- Liturgical dance

- People have different gifts and experience worship in different ways; almost everyone will be able to respond to something – offer a wide variety of experiences
- Young people bring – creativity, fresh ideas, good questions, metaphor, drama and story  
 Children bring spontaneity, interest in everything.

## **Session 2 Working for justice**

Ruth tells the story – she did her theological education in a seminary in one of the southern states; she was a student there when Martin Luther King was assassinated. When they heard the news, some of the students burst into loud cheers and ran up a Confederate flag.

So the topic – just hospitality and worship [ie, those things with justice] in a multi-cultural setting.

Christian worship was always diverse – and always culturally based and influenced.

Now(adays) – worship may turn out to be distant from culture, especially in its language; *or alternatively* worship and culture may seem to be indistinguishable.

And then there's music.

*Diversity is a gift.*

There are new paradigms that “de-centre” white people's worship. Liturgical studies have until quite recently been limited to white Protestant. This has been seen as the norm; and so people of other cultural context find their life and culture are not found in, are excluded from, Christian liturgy. European-origin, white North American has to be seen as just one of many ways of worship. [My comment – exchange “Australasian” for “American” for the Australian context.] There are three elements to consider – not always fitting easily together.

1. Transcultural – some things cross cultural boundaries
2. Worship is always contextual
3. Counter-cultural – to challenge what there is in a particular culture that is counter to Christian values.

We can readily see where traditional Christian missionaries “got it wrong” with the first two of those; but it's much harder for us to see what we are doing that is also culturally driven, especially when we are the *dominant cultural group*.

Chelsea Brooke Yarborough – worship that lacks diversity, when taking place in a context that is diverse, is violently inhospitable to people who are already marginalised. It's a matter of justice.

Hence the notion – just hospitality.

We say we are friendly – but with whom are we friends? Really friends? All sub-groups need to be represented in the preparation and presentation of worship.

To put it in another way – *God is present in our tradition but is not bound by it.*

So how can we move towards that goal?

- Clarity of mission – commitment from *every person* to that aim
- Exploring biblical stories and actively seeking many interpretations
- Partnership – the sharing of power
- Working toward all people flourishing.

The dominant group must be prepared to open up and see what life is like for other groups. And yes – it is a challenge.

But people need to be made able to recognise the privileges they hold.

An observation from Ruth's USA social context – the most segregated time of the week in American society is Sunday morning.

## **Session 3 Vital Christian worship**

\*\* The handout *Seven principles and practices of vital Christian worship* covered all the points of the presentation.