

Fostering Worship Renewal in Academic Settings

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Here are five basic principles to consider when conducting a worship renewal grant in an educational setting: 1) respect institutional charism, 2) cultivate internal connections, 3) develop wider connections, 4) emphasize theological reflection, and 5) aim for long-term impact for your students.

1. Respect institutional charism

Each educational institution has a particular charism and culture, its own sense of identity and mission. This may come, for example, from the original vision of the institution's founders, or from a search today for a unique marketing niche, or even from the chemistry of who is actually there.

A worship renewal grant located in an educational setting will want to do its best to know, respect, and participate in the charism and identity of that particular place, serving and contributing to it rather than operating outside it, let alone against it. For example, the University of Dayton consistently refers to itself as "a Catholic and Marianist University," and one of its key characteristics is a strong sense of community; a good worship renewal project in that setting, accordingly, might attend to enhancing liturgical practices that foster the spirit of community among those who gather for worship. At Calvin College one hears the motto, "My heart I offer to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely"; what worship practices do you think a grant project might focus on, to be true to such a motto?

When a worship renewal grant is in sync with and serves the identity and charism of its institution, at least two things can follow. First, that project has a greater prospect of being successful and yielding a positive outcome; more specifically, the community's worship of God together will tend to develop renewed forms and a renewed spirit that are not foreign to the character and culture of the institution but rather genuinely enrich and serve the worship life of *this* place in a way that is true to *its* identity, grounded in *its* traditions, and faithfully explore *its* creative potential. Secondly, the more the grant project respects the identity and mission of its particular place, the more resonance it will find among the members of the community, the more interest it will arouse, and the more support it will get—certainly a plus when you seek the involvement or endorsement of others, whether students, faculty, staff, administration, board, alumni/ae, or donors.

2. Cultivate internal connections

Maximize the potential of your rich educational setting. This can be done in quite practical ways, for example, regarding facilities—remember the different buildings and spaces used during the Colloquium on the Calvin campus? What potential spaces does your place offer? But the principal connections to attend to are with people. Search out and network with persons on your campus who have relevant expertise. Worship, after all, is a multi-faceted reality. All worship forms have a history, use words, employ movement, and draw on potentially many art forms—music, painting, sculpture, architecture, dance,

drama, flower arranging, banner making, graphic design, book-binding, vesture, etc. Who, in your institution, has expertise in any of these areas? Would they like to work with people (namely, you) who are interested in what they do and grateful for their gifts? Would they be willing, or even honored, to contribute their gifts and talents to the renewal of your institution's worship life? Surely some would, and perhaps many, if informed of the project and invited to participate.

3. Develop wider connections

As appropriate, and to the extent possible, make connections with pastoral leaders and churches in your local area. Are there persons and places that could be served by your project, for *their* good (e.g., by receiving the pastoral services of your students and faculty?) Are there persons and places that could be involved in your project, for *your* good (e.g., allowing faculty and students to do site visits and actual field work there, and to learn from the pastoral experience and wisdom of local church leaders?). As such connections develop, consider what makes sense to do at their place, you going there to join in their worship and congregational life, and what makes sense to do at your place, bringing them in for education or worship experiences.

4. Emphasize theological reflection and academic study

Give emphasis to the project's potential for theological reflection. After all, this is an academic setting, where people intentionally gather as faculty and students to join together to study and learn. Arrange, then, as fully as possible, for in-depth study of different dimensions of your project, from a variety of relevant disciplines and sources: historical, biblical, theological, literary, artistic, pastoral, etc. Consider where, in your place, this can happen—in the formal curriculum and classroom, in the co-curriculum, in chapel or through campus ministry activities, and in informal, social settings.

5. Aim for long-term impact for students

It is good if one of the intentional goals of the project (or at least something you have an eye out for) is not only to enhance the ongoing worship life of your institution, but also to provide experiences that form students in the ways of worship and in the knowledge and skills of effective liturgical ministry/worship leadership. In this way, they can become equipped to participate in and contribute to the worship life of Christ's church, in the particular congregational or vocational settings they become part of after graduation, and throughout their lives.

If this concern is consciously built into the design and activities of the grant, then the unique purpose and potential of the academic work of educating and forming students can truly have a wide-ranging and long-lasting positive impact on the worship life of the church—to the greater glory of God, and for the sanctification and edification of God's people.