

Worship Symposium

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Talking About Worship: How to Start and Sustain Faithful Conversations

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Introduction

Congregations don't talk about worship because . . .

- . . . **People are too busy.**
- . . . **Worship Belongs to the Pastor (and Maybe the Musicians).**
- . . . **Worship is too Controversial.**
- . . . **We aren't narrow minded so we have to accept everything.**
- . . . **We must hide our doubts and theological struggles.**
- . . . **The church has too many other concerns.**
- . . . **There are not a lot of venues for talking about worship.**

What reasons for not talking about worship would you add to my list?

Most of the time we talk about worship from the inside out -- from our own experience and response to what happens in worship. I want to invite us to begin talking about worship from the OUTSIDE IN -- Carefully describing what happens in worship and exploring what it might mean.

Gilbert Ost diek, *Catechesis for Liturgy*: Ost diek recommends a three-step process for entering into conversation about worship:

First, **careful observation** -- noticing the details of the assembly's worship practice.

Second, **reflection** with a group on what one notices,

Third, using what you have learned as you **plan and prepare** for the next occasion for worship.

He offers a broad range of categories within which to describe, reflect on and evaluate Christian worship.

Space and Environment

Time: festivals and seasons

Gesture and Actions

Liturgical Objects

Liturgical Speech

Liturgical song

Ostdiek calls these categories the "languages" of worship.

Exercise

Let us return to the process of participation and reflection sketched out earlier. Description, Reflection, Preparation. Instead of beginning with the question of our knee jerk response to worship, let's practice:

Describing worship in all the uniqueness of a particular occasion, entering into;
Reflecting on worship that focuses on what we know about God, ourselves, and the world through this occasion, and
Planning for a coming worship occasion that uses worship's "languages" to speak even for clearly about God and ourselves.

With the "languages" of space, environment, time, gesture, objects, speech, and song in mind:

- Write two questions that begin with the word **DESCRIBE . . .**
- Write two questions that begin with the words **WHAT IMAGES OF GOD, HUMANKIND, AND THE WORLD ARE PRESENT IN . . .**
- Write two questions that begin with the words **WHEN WE CELEBRATE AGAIN . .**

EXAMPLE: The use of gesture in the congregation where I worship.

1. Describe the ways gesture is used by members of the congregation during worship.
Describe the ways gesture is used by worship leaders.
2. What do we know about God, ourselves, and the world through the language of gesture?
 - a. How do these gestures correspond or clash with what we say we believe?
3. When we celebrate again we could incorporate gesture by . . .

Conclusion

The process for faithful conversations about worship begins with **participation in and careful observation of worship**. Be there. Watch, listen, touch. It continues with questions that let people **describe** what they have seen, heard, touched. The process reaches its fulfillment in **imagining** what a more faithful kind of enactment might be possible. Without these steps, worship is just one thing after another.