

What Next?

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Other Voices 2

Priorities for The Methodist Church

Other Voices challenge through reading and reflection on passages of contemporary Christian writings. They are based on the four themes of *Our Calling* : to increase awareness of God, learning and caring, to challenge injustice and mission and evangelism.

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M:Guides



The **Methodist** Church



The *M:Guides* are a series of study packs produced by the Methodist Church Training & Development Officers in the London, Nottingham & Derby and Lincoln & Grimsby Districts

## Introduction

This *M:Guide* has been prepared to enable you reflect on aspects of worship, both your own experience of it and also that of others. The material is best used in a group but could equally be used by an individual. Do not feel you have to complete every activity in all four sections. The important thing is that the material helps you deepen your understanding of worship.

If working in a group, every member should have a copy and try to read through the sections before the meeting.

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Session 1

The aim of this session is to enable you begin to explore what is meant by worship and to begin to relate this to your own experience of worshipping.

Activity 1

Compose a list: Worship isWorship is not

- What does this list tell you about your understanding of worship?
- Are any statements contradictory?
- What is to do with the mechanics of worship (i.e. how it is organised and “done”)? What is to do with its “essence”?

Read the following statements concerning worship:

“Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness, the nourishment of mind with his truth, the purifying of imagination by his beauty, the opening of the heart to his love, the surrender of the will to his purpose.”
(William Temple)

Does your experience of worship link in any way to these words?

leading prayers. If children see adults being creative they will believe the church is worth growing into rather than out of.

10) ***Tackle opposition with appropriateness and sensitivity:***

- (a) in doing this we are taking away the liturgical teddy bear from the contemplative middle aged stalwart.
 - (b) does this new practice offend the lady with her eyes on the ground because her image of God and the church has not expanded since her days in the creche?
 - (c) is my fiercest opponent really getting at me or is he/she expounding their own theological certainty that because God is changeless therefore every thing else must imitate the creator?
 - (d) are people annoyed because I’ve made them the objects of an experiment rather than participants in an experience
 - (e) am I dealing in this apoplectic soul with someone who is structural fundamentalist and would be the same were he/she in the Band of Hope or Socialist Workers Party?
(*Wild Goose Worship Group*)
- Consider how you might address some of the issues raised in this list?

Activity 4

- Reflect what you have learned about worship as it relates to:
 - (a) yourself
 - (b) your church family
 - (c) the structure and content of worship.
- What are you going to do with what you have learned?

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## Ten Ground Rules for Managing Change in Worship

- 1) **Start small:** start with other people's shared experience rather than an academically good idea. Start in a house or hall situation rather than the sanctuary. Start with something people can do rather than what they can't do.
- 2) **Work from a workshop:** the enthusiasm and ideas generated with a group of people working on something together is both more productive and representative than a cleric working on his or her own.
- 3) **Ground it in the Bible:** be it liturgical innovation or a particular type of service, it is good to have some biblical reference from which people can operate.
- 4) **Respond to and contradict expectation:** at a Festival, people are open to something different happening. That high expectation can be exploited. In the evening at a routine experience, boredom might masquerade as faith. People might be keen to have their experience changed. The last thing to "tinker" with is the "standard" or "normal" morning service.
- 5) **Plan for changes in worship over a year:** work systematically rather than randomly. People will detect a pattern and intention and it makes it easier to involve a lot of lay leadership and partnership.
- 6) **Never apologise for what is new if it has integrity in it:** but if you feel you are having to defend a gimmick or mere novelty, scrap it.
- 7) **In preaching and pastoral work deal with issue change:** a most unwelcome concept to many people in churches because it has never dawned on them as essential to faith. Suitable passages: look at Numbers chapter 14, at the door of the Promised Land, or the healing miracles or Revelation 21, all things new.
- 8) **Minimise the solo verbal:** much of worship is taken up with one person speaking. Plan from the possibility of most participating, in movement, silence, symbol and sound.
- 9) **Let children pray and adults play:** innovation in worship should not just be the kids doing a mime and the adults

*Worship is centred on God and directed to God. In a very strict sense worship is not for us, it is for God." (para.31 Let The People Worship MPH 1988)*

*"At heart, worship is a statement of faith. We worship because we believe in a certain kind of God. Worship is our way of saying that this God is both source and end of everything which we count as worthwhile." (para.14, Let the People Worship)*

*"Worship is our response of thanks and praise."*

*"Worship should set us at ease and enable us to relax. We must create an atmosphere which helps people feel at home with one another and God. In worship we must convey the feeling that God understands and accepts us. We need to feel that we belong. We need to know that no matter how neglectful or wrong we have been, God loves us and wants us." (Howard Mellor, Ways To Worship, M.A.Y.C. 1984)*

- Do you agree or disagree with any of these statements? If so, why?
- What do statements like these tell us about how we worship?

Refer back to the list of "Worship is...is not..." Do these statements in any way link to what you wrote? Do they amplify or explain? Are they in any way relevant?

A Church of England publication *Patterns for Worship* (1995) describes worship in these words:

Worship is a door to heaven....

Worship is a door open to the inner depths of life....

Worship is a door open to the rhythms of life....

Worship is a door our hearts open in obedience to God....

Do any of these sentences or phrases get near to your experience of worship? If so, how? If not, what phrases would you use?

## Activity 2.

In a publication *The Coracle* (Winter 1980) David Graham wrote :

*“Public worship is not dying because it has been replaced by something better. Where else do folk get a chance to gather and ask what it’s all about, to hear the greatest of story answers, to be judged honestly and forgiven fully, to remember the needs of others, to give without counting the cost, to listen for the heartbeat of goodness, to see the signs of God’s living presence in the world he loves?”*

*“The answer is, nowhere else. Regularly, publicly and in good numbers, nowhere else. Public worship may be dying. It is not dying of unknown causes. The causes are plain. One of them is boredom....the call to worship is too often an invitation to a “non-event”. The people of God are asked to listen too regularly, too long and to the same things. They are benevolent spectators of a one man/person band. The unmoveable pew is in non-pursuit of the uninteresting pulpit...”*

*“A verbal mountain lies at the door of the Lord’s house. It is too high for too many people to climb. It is prose, not poetry, quantity, not quality. Public worship may be dying, its death is not due to hard work. A sort of laziness and ease besets worship. It is easy to make it just words and silences. It is easy to follow the same format week in, week out...”*

- Do you agree or disagree with any of these statements? Is this your experience of worship?

## Activity 3

Here are some headings (without the details) taken from:  
*A Church For All Ages*, P.Graystone & E. Turner (S.U.)

Worship is work...Worship is staying in my seat!...Worship is getting out of my seat!...Worship is belonging to a tradition...Worship is using all our senses...Worship is my sort of church...Worship is about using symbols...Worship is about becoming less dependent...Worship is joining in.

- Does your group which meets to consider worship within the Church? If it does, ask if you can become a member. If it does not, discuss with others how one might be established.
- Do you feel you might want to become involved in leading some aspects of worship? If so, are there who are similarly interested who could form a “worship team”?
- If you wanted to consider pursuing this in a more formal way, there is a training course for Worship Leaders. Worship leaders are not local preachers but, through training, are equipped to assist in leading worship.
- It may be that you feel you have a calling to become a Local Preacher. This entails a longer period of training.

*If you want to know more about any of these, your minister will be able to advise you and to help you decide what is most appropriate.*

## Activity 2

One practical thing which you and others might want to consider is to prepare an act of worship so you can begin to put into practice some of the outcomes of your discussions. Again, discuss this with your minister. Is there a Local Preacher who would be willing to work alongside your group to advise and guide?

## Activity 3

Change within the worship of a local congregation can be threatening to some and therefore difficult to effect. What follows comes from notes of a workshop on worship given by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community.

- Consider how you might address some of the issues raised in your own church

### **Evaluation**

- What worked best in your observation?
- What were the significant moments for the congregation?
- Judged by their response, what did they find most meaningful?
- Any other comments?

(Based on *People of God at Work – a quality audit of worship and mission for your congregation*, 1994, Don Pickard, Luton).

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Session 4

Previous sessions have encouraged reflection on the nature of worship, how worship is structured and some of the elements which make up worship. In this session you will reflect on the evaluation of a service and discuss how you might put into practice some of the things you have considered.

Activity 1

Share together the results of the service evaluation. Note any particular comments which were positive or negative. Think how:

- those which were positive enriched the worship. Are there any lessons which can be learned from these?
- of the negative ones, are there things which could be readily addressed? If so, how? If not, what would need to be done to begin to raise them as issues?
- what insights have you gained through this exercise.

It may be that from what has come out of this exercise and the discussion in previous sessions, you want to become more involved in the planning, arranging and leadership of worship within your church. *If this is the case, what can be done?*

- What do you think is meant by each heading? Choose two or three of them.
- If you were to write a paragraph on each, what kind of things would you include?

In concluding this session, try and complete, in your own words, the following sentences. *We come to worship because.....We worship God in order to...*

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### **Session 2**

**This session is designed to enable you to consider what you mean and understand by worship.**

#### **Activity 1**

- Think of one thing which has inspired you in a service recently.
- Think of one thing which has annoyed you in a service recently.

Were these things to do with:

- (a) the content of worship
- (b) how the service was constructed
- (c) how the service was led
- (d) the place where the service was held
- (e) any other?

This might make you begin to realise that there is more to an act of worship than meets the eye! There are so many factors which have to be taken into consideration, not least of which is that us the congregation have our diverse needs, attitudes and experiences.

#### **Activity 2**

- Read 1 Corinthians 14. It speaks of ways in which worship should be given back to the people of God – “leitourgia” – “liturgy”.

Liturgy is derived from two Greek words, “people” and “work”, so “work people do”. Its roots are within any ceremonialised human gathering, secular or religious. Liturgy might be understood as “the work people do in the presence of God to honour and serve God”. As God is everywhere, then all we do is this. Liturgy is about what people do in settings where they are gathered together.

- Consider then what are the elements of liturgy within an act of worship?

The *Methodist Worship Book* pg. 51 gives the following order for a service.

The preparation...The ministry of the word...The response...The dismissal.

Do you encounter this structure in the services you attend? There is no “right” order but it is important that every service includes key aspects. What are they?

### Activity 3

*The Worship Leaders Training Pack* (MPH 1996) suggests there are “the ingredients of worship”. What do you think these are? There may be some obvious things, such as hymns, prayers, reading, message etc. Try to think more widely of other things which take place in a service.

Look at the following Order of Service.

Drawing near  
Adoration  
Confession  
Assurance  
Thanksgiving  
Praise  
The word  
Response: Thanksgiving...Intercession...Dedication...Offering  
Blessing

- Do you agree with this? How can a congregation listen and respond?
- How effective is the ministry of the word when it is always spoken? After three days we remember ten per cent of what we hear, ninety per cent is forgotten.
- In what other ways might the ministry of the word be exercised? What is the experience in your church?

### Activity 4

Before the next session use the check list and complete it for a service you attend. Bring your comments to the next session.

### Evaluating a Service

- (a) What *kind* of service is it, i.e. time of year, significance in the lives of individuals, congregation etc.?
- (b) Which *elements*, i.e. what things and which people are essential for this kind of service?
- (c) What was the *size* of congregation? Any observations of the group?
- (d) Describe the *physical* setting
- (e) What sort of *mood and noise* level?
- (f) How did people relate to each other?
- (g) Movement – how much movement was there? Which was the most important single movement in the service? What were the characteristic movements of the worship leaders and of the people? Were there any processions, entries and exits? How did the worship leaders enter or leave? How did people come or go?
- (h) Visual elements – what could people see during the service?
- (i) Aural elements – what did people hear? Was there any silence?
- (j) Did the service have order? Note any structure, drama, spontaneity?
- (k) Did the service have unity? Note the unifying factors: theme, style of music, repetition?
- (l) Did the service have variety?
- (m) Who was involved?

- Are they present in each service? Do they need to be?
- How are the majority of prayers constructed...written, extempore, related to the theme of the service?
- What picture of God is evoked by the prayers you hear within worship?

### Music

*“The music used in worship should always be capable of serving and enhancing that worship. Its function may be to stimulate and express religious imagination and help the worshippers express themselves to God.”* (para.41)

- Do you agree with this?
- Is this your experience of what happens in worship at your church?
- Apart from hymns and organ voluntaries, how is music made use of in worship?
- Are there ways in which music could be used in different ways in the worship of your church?

### Readings

*“The use of the Lectionary has enriched our worship and helped the church to rediscover the value of observing the Christian year as a pattern for our worship”.* (para.35)

- Is this statement true in your experience?
- What readings other than from the Bible are used in worship?
- In what ways might other readings be used?
- Are there different ways in which readings could be presented in your church?

### The Ministry of the Word

*“Preaching is God’s gift to his people. It is an oral exercise which turns the written works of Scripture back into speech... It has a corporate aspect. The congregation listens, participates and responds.”* (paras. 20-21)

Write down a possible ingredient for each part. Discuss the results. There will be factors to take into account which might have a bearing on the make up of a service. What would these be, e.g. size of congregation, type of service, building etc.

As a final activity, for a few moments think about what you have learned concerning worship in these activities. How will you use this to reflect on the next service you attend?

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Session 3

Previous sessions have considered what is meant and understood by worship and how we worship. In this session you will look in more detail at particular aspects of worship.

Signs & Symbols

There are many things other than what is actually planned by the person leading worship which help or hinder us in our worship. An important factor is the place, the building, how it is decorated, furnished, and how warm or cold it is. However, of importance too are things that help us attune ourselves to God and to worship itself; signs and symbols.

Signs tend to be representational. They signify something which can be verified. Whilst driving you may come across a sign which, to all intents, looks like a person putting up an umbrella but because it is effective, you know it is a warning of possible danger ahead through road works. Once you have interpreted and understood the sign it becomes redundant.

However, symbols are different. The word comes from the Greek meaning (two) thrown (or brought) together. It probably comes from the market place when two people made a contract for the supply of goods. They would take a stick and break it in half. Each half was a

symbol of the deal. When the deal was completed it could only be done so when the two parts of the broken stick were brought together.

Whereas a sign points to one thing, a symbol is open. What is seen is half the stick. It has a relationship to something which is not seen and the meaning of the symbol is only found in the joining of what is seen and unseen.

(Based on notes written by Don Pickard as part of the MTh in Applied Theology, Westminster College, Oxford)

Activity 1

In your mind, picture your church.

- List the signs and symbols within it. What does each one say to you? Are any of these relevant to worship? If so, how? Are any of them formally used or referred to in worship? If so, how?

Consider what other signs or symbols might be used within the church which would enrich the worship? What aspects of worship would they relate to? Read Hymns & Psalms 654 v.2.

Activity 2

In the previous session we thought about the word liturgy and found it meant “the work of the people”. To take seriously how people engage in anything corporately, and particularly in worship, we have to allow for different people feeling most fulfilled when participating in different ways. Some are most fulfilled when:

- listening.....making a soundsitting in silence.....looking at an object or performance.....moving (as in dance).....directly interacting with neighbours.....being involved with symbols or symbolic action.

To take seriously how worship works we have to see within it the interweaving of opposites.

- ⇒ The word of God v the word of human
- ⇒ The will of God v the need of human
- ⇒ Giving v receiving

- ⇒ Bible v experience
 - ⇒ Leaders v participants
 - ⇒ Individuals v community
 - ⇒ Structure v informality
- (Wild Goose Worship Group)*

- Think of services you have attended recently. of services you have attended recently. Have these balances been maintained? If so, how has it enriched the worship? How has it affected the worship negatively?

Worship which is just a collection of good ideas and favourite songs tagged on to each other is as aesthetic as a washing line and as enriching as a go-as-you-please concert. Because worship is for God, it has to have a shape and an order as well as freedom and diversity.” (Wild Goose Worship Group)

- Do you agree with this? Have you experienced worship which could be described in this way?

Activity 3

We are going to look at four aspects which are a part of most services. Although only four have been chosen, the types of questions asked could be used for other aspects of worship. Each of the quotations is taken from the Methodist Conference Report *Let The People Worship* (1988).

Prayer

“Public prayer is not necessarily an occasion when one person is listened to exclusively. It can be a context in which the congregation prays together and an opportunity for everyone to offer their prayer.” (para.73)

- Is this statement true? What is the purpose of prayer within worship?
- How are the elements of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession and petition included in the worship of your church?