

The conduct and content of worship

Session Starter #25

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Prayer

Book of Common Worship

Taken from Opening Prayers (p. 48)

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

As the executive of the presbytery, the minister is responsible for the conduct and content of public worship...

Book of Forms section 111

Scripture

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalm 95: 1-2 NRSV

A Brief Commentary

This Psalm compellingly invites movement toward God. As the creation of God's hand, we are invited to move into a spirit of humble and joyful worship before the King above all gods.

Reflection

The Westminster Shorter Catechism cheerfully proclaims that all are called to glorify and enjoy God forever. This is a worthy foundation upon which to build congregational worship. Of course, there are situations in which solemnity is a fitting offering to God, but what a joy it is when we are moved to worship with smiles, cheerful music, heartfelt words and blissful silence.

Worship is enormously important to most of us. We want it to be faithful to the word of God and

relevant to our daily lives. We long for it to deepen our faith and challenge us to greater discipleship. So strong are these longings that we sometimes want to influence what happens during the service.

So who is responsible for how the service is conducted and what the content will be? There are a variety of answers.

Some congregations have a "hands-on" worship team or committee that meets regularly with the minister to plan services. The minister usually provides the scripture lessons and basic theme for each service and then others assist by selecting music, prayers, video illustrations, drama, interpretive dance and the like.

Other congregations have an arm's-length worship team or committee that meets with the minister to discuss worship in general terms. The team might serve as a sounding board for the minister or as a conduit of ideas to try in worship.

Very often the entire service is left to the minister with the possible exception of elements like the anthem or offertory.

Approaches like these, and others, can work well. An underlying principle to keep in mind, however, is that according to our denomination's understanding of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, it is ultimately the minister who is responsible to the presbytery for the conduct and content of worship. While it can be helpful for the minister to discuss service ideas with others, worship leadership remains a major part of the minister's calling.

Discussion

1. Discuss how worship is planned in your congregation?
2. Provide an opportunity to discuss what changes, if any, the minister would like to make regarding the way worship services are planned.