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Worship Leader

Session 4 – Solo Course

*Material adapted from 'Living and Learning: Pastoral Visiting'
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Session 4: Worship as mission

Introductory Reading

Worship is at the very heart of the church's life and mission. Through worship we witness to the God who creates, redeems and sanctifies our world. In worship we hear the story of salvation and proclaim through our prayers and our praise, that we are called into fellowship with Christ, that we are nourished by God in word and sacrament, and sent out to serve him in our world.

Anglicans have always seen regular Eucharistic worship as vital for their spiritual health and nourishment, although across the centuries 'regular' has varied from meaning at the great festivals through to every week. The standard pattern since the earliest times has been for the Christian community to gather for worship on Sunday (the day of the resurrection), although there has always been more flexibility and variety than this might imply.

Our Christian sisters and brothers in mainly Muslim countries tend to meet for worship on a Friday, to fit in with the work-patterns of the wider community. Many Roman Catholic churches in the UK today find that Saturday evening mass is the best attended! Recent years have seen the emergence of Anglican orders of service and patterns of worship which maintain some continuity with our traditions, but give more freedom for more imaginative and flexible worship.

The early Church felt that the Eucharist, that central act by which the church is nourished by the body and blood of Christ, could only be experienced by those who were full members of the Christian community. Therefore, visitors and people who were preparing to be baptised, were asked to leave the service at the offertory. Now we are happy for seekers to stay for the whole service, encouraging them to come to the altar to receive a blessing when communion is distributed and most churches welcome members of other denominations to receive communion.

Indeed, we are keen to welcome visitors to our worship because we believe that a good experience of worship may help them to come to faith in Jesus Christ and to seek membership of the church. However, experience suggests that the worship that many actually have on a Sunday morning in our churches may not initially inspire them to join us, or might indeed on occasion have the opposite effect.



Therefore, with declining numbers in mind, the Church has begun to recognise that it might need to make changes to its traditional style and patterns of worship if it is going to engage effectively with those who have no church experience. One way of doing this is to offer a range of different styles of worship that attract different groups of people.

These different types of services include:

- **Pram services**, simple and short acts of worship for parents with young children using song, story and prayer.
- **Taize-style worship**, reflecting the meditative nature of the Taize Community. Taize music emphasises simple phrases, often lines from psalms or other pieces of scripture, repeated to aid meditation.
- **Iona-style worship**, which is based on the experimental worship developed by the Iona community through the 'Wild Goose Resource Group' shaping new forms of participative worship.
- **All Age Worship**, designed for the whole church family (i.e. people of all ages, single and married, parents and non-parents). These services include material that is meaningful to adults and young people as well as children.
- **Services of Praise**, ranging from traditional 'Songs of Praise' to worship focussing on contemporary Christian songs.

These acts of worship may happen on a Sunday and may take the place of regular, more traditional worship, though some may be better delivered during the week. Because not every small rural church has the resources to undertake new forms of worship some of these may be better undertaken in the broader context provided by ministry areas.

Most people are attracted to worship that is authentic, whatever its outward style. However, evidence suggests that young people, as well as many adults, respond well to services that are lively, understandable, utilise all the senses, and are fun, relaxed, simple and clear.



Services that are designed to engage with all ages and with people who may be new to church life should generally:

- Involve the wider family of the church and be open to all;
- Cater for the needs of regular worshippers as well as the needs of strangers;
- Be happy and lively;
- Provide opportunities for creativity in worship;
- Use modern language;
- Be informal in approach, but there still have an underlying structure;
- Encourage the use of the senses in worship;
- Provide spiritual nourishment for all.

All approaches to worship have an intrinsic value and an integrity that should be respected whatever form the worship takes. All worship should evoke a sense of holiness and otherness. Worship should move people from the everyday experience of the material to a fulfilling communion with God.

There is therefore a balance to be struck between making new people feel at home and challenging them with a new experience. And there is also a balance to be struck between the informal and the formal. In an increasingly informal society, there is an expectation that a worship leader will be relaxed and at ease taking worship, being warm in delivery and avoiding unnecessary jargon. However, elements of formality, delivered through structured liturgical form, also help to provide moments of encounter with God.

Worship leaders cannot of course create attractive mission-centred acts of worship without the active, prayerful support of the congregation. However, the role of the worship leader is critical and prayerful preparation is important. Just as a priest has a representative role, representing the Bishop, and so due to the universal, catholic nature of the church, the worship leader has a representative role, focussing the worship of the local church and representing its local membership. Being a worship leader means acting both with and on behalf of the congregation and it is good to remember at all times that you represent God, the people and the Church.

There are different opinions as to whether this representative role means that worship leaders should robe or not. Some will feel that their role involves being set apart and that a form of 'uniform' is therefore appropriate. Robes direct attention away from the individual and towards the role that they fulfil in worship. Others may feel that robing places an inappropriate division between the worship leader and the congregation of which they are a part, and is in danger of making an important lay ministry appear clericalised, confusing people about the roles of worship leader and



priest. Local customs, such as whether servers and choir robe, or only the vicar does, will be important in reaching a local decision on the message that this sends out about worship and worship leaders.

If churches want to encourage new people to join in their worship then it will be necessary to try to imagine what the church might feel like to somebody who has rarely attended an act of worship. It is then possible to imagine what they might need and how the church can best help them. Or indeed, you can go out and ask them – if you are genuinely open to hear the answers!

Important factors in making church worship mission-orientated will include:

- Making the place of worship inviting and welcoming;
- Making it warm and comfortable;
- Helping worshippers to engage with each other;
- Making sure there are not too many books and papers to be used by the congregation;
- Making sure that worshippers are guided helpfully through the liturgy;
- Making sure the service is well prepared, coherent and relevant to those present;
- Making sure the sermon, prayers and music speak into their experience.



Solo Reflection Questions

1. Beginning

Spend a few minutes in silence, offering any worries or concerns from everyday life to God, and acknowledging God's presence alongside you and within you as you prepare to reflect more deeply.

**Almighty God,
whose only Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence:
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.**

2. Reflecting

Bring to mind an experience of being 'the new person' in an unfamiliar place or situation, such as starting a new job, joining a club, being in a situation where you don't know what to do.

How did you feel?



What information did you need?

How could others have helped you?



3. Exploring

Think about the experience of coming to church for the first time:
How might they feel? What information might they need?

List the ways that you, in your ministry area, can help them.

There are many challenges in attempting to lead worship that is engaging for all ages.

- How can we ensure all age worship is easy to understand and follow?
- How can we cater to people of different age groups and from different backgrounds?
- How can we enable as many people as possible to actively participate?



4. Responding and Concluding

Describe one particular thing you have learned from this lesson, either from the reading or your own reflections.

