Other-centered Worship Ministry

By Nicholas Zork

In the previous edition of *Best Practices for Adventist Worship*, I posed a series of questions along the lines of what worship *does*. Implicit in these questions was a central critique: at times our concern for effective *communication* in worship eclipses the importance of the worshiping *community* and true *communion* with God. In our understandable eagerness to communicate a message *about* God, we can overlook the priority the people who are gathered and the God who is present to meet us. *Meaning* starts to takes precedence over *meeting*. *Presentation* becomes privileged over *presence*. And production values begin to trump pastoral sensitivity as we lead worshipers in what should be participatory prayer.

As a church musician and liturgist, I find myself tempted at times to plan worship as if it were a presentational event. But through repeated missteps, I am slowly learning an important principle: worship is not an artistic production-centered ministry in which we utilize people; it is a God and people-centered ministry in which we utilize artistic production.

Here are three suggestions for how we might prioritize the “who” of worship -- God and worshipers -- over the “how” of communication and ritual artistry:

1) Think of ways to be physically present to one another in worship. As Marshal McLuhan famously asserted, “The medium is the message.” If a worship experience is predominantly mediated by projection screens and amplified sound, to what degree are we truly present to one another? And what does the being digitally present to one another suggest about how God is present to us and how we are present to God? Plan moments where worshipers can tangibly interact. Even a simple physical greeting can enable participants to more fully...
embody the Body of Christ in worship.

2) When planning worship, consider relationships first and the artistic production second. Before beginning any worship planning session, think through the impact of the planning process itself on the leaders involved. Efficient ministry is not always effective ministry. For example, emails and text messages can be a quick way to get things done. But without the nuances of nonverbal communication, such efficiencies are often more than offset by the time it takes for relational damage to be undone. Whenever possible, meet face to face.

3) When meeting to plan worship, we must remember that we are discussing an encounter with a Holy God who is already present. Too often, we talk about God as though God isn't there -- as though God isn't listening to the conversation. We speak differently about someone -- whether negatively or positively -- when we know they're in the room. Perhaps if we planned worship with a greater sense of God's presence, we would be less cavalier in what we said, less confident in what we intended to do, and more prayerfully expectant regarding what God might do. Perhaps if we planned worship with a greater sense of God's presence, we would worship with a greater sense of God's presence -- the presence of the One who graciously meets us when we gather in Jesus' name.

Share your thoughts in our Facebook dialogue.

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**WORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP**

**Leadership Lessons from the Levites**

By Cheryl Wilson-Bridges

“David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments; lyres, harps and cymbals.” 1 Chronicles 15:16 NIV

King David was a master musician. He was a singer, songwriter and premier harp player in Israel. He could do it all. But as a wise king and worship leader, David knew that mere talent is never enough. No one, no matter how talented, can single-handedly create an engaging worship service. David's ancient wisdom remains true for us today. True worship is participatory in all of its forms-especially its organization.

The Bible clearly illustrates that God always selects a single leader who He gives the authority to guide His people. However, once God has chosen the leader, then it is his responsibility to build a viable team. Moses learned from Jethro and passed his participative leadership model down through the ages to David (Ex. 18:17-25).

Team building and group leadership is the critical core of purposeful worship planning. Working with a team not only allows you to learn and benefit from various worship perspectives, but it enables you to create a sense of shared authority. This shared authority and cooperative vision will enhance your supreme goal of bringing people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ though music. The people you appoint to your team are the musicians who are passionate about God's vision and mission.

As a Levite (music minister), you should appoint people who are first spiritual leaders then talented and skilled musicians to serve in key worship areas critical to your congregation. For example, on my executive music committee, I have seven members who specialize in these areas: worship music scheduling, finances, sound and lighting,

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**CCLI** may not, however, cover all the music you want to sing in worship. Another excellent resource is OneLicense.net, which provides sheet music and licenses for hymns and songs not available through CCLI. OneLicense.net is especially useful for newer material outside the "contemporary worship music" stream.

In fact, if you want to use the featured hymn below, you may be utilizing OneLicense.net right away!

**Featured Hymn**

“Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race”

This text by Ruth Duck can be sung to the tune often associated with the Doxology (Tallis' Canon). Sheet music and the appropriate license can be obtained through OneLicense.net.

*Diverse in culture, nation, race,*
*we come together by your grace.*

*God, let us be a meeting ground where hope and healing love are found.*

*God, let us be a bridge of care connecting people*
instrumentalists, special events, praise teams and community outreach. Each leader has a perspective that launches a laser ministry focus in their area while receiving input, approval and constructive feedback from the team. This enables our team to use people in key ministry areas that represent a microcosm of our congregation. We lead like Levites. Now, you can too!

WORSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

Digitally Mediated Worship: Is It for Real?

By Steve Yeagley

Is it possible to “attend” church online? Can you truly participate in liturgy in its mediated form? Some religious leaders quickly say “no” for fear that believers will be drawn away from brick-and-mortar churches. Mohler (2012), in a recent online edition of Adventist Review, writes about “The Deep Limitations of the Digital Church.” While affirming the value of the Internet for biblical research and evangelization, he warns of the “dangers” it poses for church members. Citing unreferenced research, he says that “significant numbers of Christians are tempted to allow these technologies to serve as a substitute for participation in a local church.” Pew Internet’s Faith Online study, however, does not support Mohler’s claim. It found that believers’ “Internet activity supplements their ties to traditional institutions rather than moving them away from church” (Hoover, Clark, & Rainie, 2004). Thus, diminishing or demonizing the significance of online participation as a means of keeping people in the pews hardly seems necessary.

Still, when we view worship services online and sing along with our favorite praise songs or chat instantly with others during the sermon or click on a response at the closing appeal are we actually taking part in the liturgy? I would suggest that online believers may participate in ways that are just as meaningful, if not more so, than those who are physically present. Many communication theorists have noted the ritual significance of media practices -- that is, their capacity to engage people in meaning-making processes. As Woody Allen's movie The Purple Rose of Cairo playfully suggests, we inhabit media worlds just as surely as they come to inhabit ours. Along the same lines, Aden (2007) has described media experiences as “symbolic pilgrimages” in which we leave the everyday world behind and enter a liminal space where we are neither fully here nor actually there. Through this pixelated transport, we form a genuine sense of identity and belonging with characters in the media and often return with a transformed view of the real world. Does this make online worship a substitute for brick-and-mortar worship? No. But it does suggest that the ritualized, communal and transformative aspects of worship are not lost in the mediated experience.

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ev’rywhere.
Help us confront all fear and hate
and lust for power that separate.

When chasms widen, storms arise,
O Holy Spirit, make us wise.
Let our resolve, like steel,
be strong
to stand with those who suffer wrong

God, let us be a table spread
with gifts of love and broken bread,
where all find welcome,
grace attends,
and enemies arise as friends.


Worship Gatherings

The One Project in Chicago: February 11-12, 2013

The One project celebrates the supremacy of Jesus in the Adventist Church through gatherings, preaching, teaching, and resources. The upcoming One project gathering in Chicago will blend meaningful worship, thoughtful presentations, and deep conversations—all about Jesus. The material will be drawn exclusively from His biblical biographies: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Together participants will explore prayers and parables, sufferings and celebration, miracles and words of Christ. Come to celebrate
Sing to the Lord a New Song

By David Williams

Sing to the Lord a new song;  
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, bless His name;  
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.

The biblical invitation to “sing to the Lord a new song” has captured the hearts and minds of Christians for centuries. At momentous occasions marked by God’s providence, composers and patrons have sought to capture the grandeur of the event by singing a new song. Examples include: Guillaume Dufay’s monumental motet, Nuper rosarum flores (Recently Flowers of Roses), for the dedication of the cathedral in Florence, Italy in 1436; or George Frideric Handel’s Zadok the Priest for the coronation of George II of Great Britain in 1727. In modern times, many among us have adopted the “new song” fervor, seeking to sing the latest contemporary music in our churches. This stands to reason. If God calls us to sing a new song, then we should sing Him a new song.

The problem with the pursuit of singing a new song for every worship service is this: once the new song is sung, it will become an old song. Classical music stations like to say, “Remember, all old music was once new.” In this context, Matt Redman’s words from his song, “Heart of Worship”, take on a different meaning: “when the music fades,” it will no longer be new. If we take the Scripture seriously, then we will have a serious problem. The continual pursuit of new music is unsustainable.

Recognizing this challenge, Harold Best famously said, “Sing old songs newly.” His statement serves to moderate all of our extremist tendencies, either wanting only the latest contemporary music, or the old traditional hymns. Best’s words encourage us to sing newly whatever genre or style we may have in our worship service. But Best’s qualification alludes to the fact that the psalm may be referring to something beyond the music. An old song cannot be new. To sing it newly implies a new attitude to the music.

To sing songs newly is to truly get at the heart of worship, for worship is the attitude of the heart towards God. The pursuits of new compositions are endless, yet God wants the song of our heart forever, for He pursues us endlessly.

Pastors, let the music fade and allow the Lord to conduct His composition, the Church, as our Master Conductor. Let us give Him our hearts. Our worship will be revived, proclaiming the good news of His salvation from day to day. Sing to the Lord a new song!
Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote