

Engaging worship with our whole selves

Embodied Performance principles for shaping gathered worship

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A guide for reflecting on gathered worship as affirming and connecting with the wholeness of the people who gather: physical, emotional, relational. We do the cognitive pretty well, especially in traditions that emphasise the sermon. But how are we inviting the whole of ourselves into prayer and contemplation, into encounters with Holy One who so affirmed our embodiedness they came among us in the person of Jesus?

Use these questions to facilitate conversation with your ministry, worship, leadership teams. They are a beginning, point sign posts from which your conversations will take their own direction. Take a stance of curiosity, wonder, and openness to innovation. Remember small innovations are as likely to enhance worship as dramatic changes.

How are our bodies engaged in worship?

We sit, stand, speak, and sing, celebrate baptism and the eucharist, almost incidentally using our bodies.

In what ways might we draw attention to our bodies to physically worship God, pray with the Spirit, imitate Christ?

Could we share the elements of communion differently from time to time?

Have you ever used a tree branch to scatter the water from the font as an invitation to the people to remember *their* baptism, when celebrating this sacrament?

What could you do to change the people's entrance into the worship space?

In what ways might we draw our attention to the physical space in which we worship, its signs and symbols and the stories they tell?

Can the people use their voices differently with conversation, participation in dramatic tellings? Can they sit when they would normally stand or stand when they would normally sit?

How do we bring the stories and our worship to life on and in and through our bodies?

How are our emotions engaged in worship?

We move through our modes or moods of prayer from praise and thanksgiving, through confession and acceptance of forgiveness, to concern for and commitment to our neighbours and our world.

How often do we lament together in our worship? Properly, honestly, acknowledging sorrow, anger, longing, despair, with and without reaching hope?

Do those who read the Bible aloud express emotion of and in response to what they speak aloud, so as to *move* the hearers of our Sacred Story?

Do our preachers infuse their reflections and sermons with emotion, acknowledge that the characters in our stories *feel* and feel strongly, uncomfortably at times for them and for us as audience? Do our preachers express their emotion, their feeling of love for their people and their God, their longing for justice, their sorrow at grief and pain – not so as to centre themselves, but so as to be fully human with their people, and encourage us all to be so before God?

How do we bring the stories and our worship to life on and in and through our emotions?

How are our relationships engaged in worship?

We pray for others, we are commissioned to go out from our worship into the world.

We pass the peace – at the moment, in socially distanced safety.

How else are we encouraged to see – really see – the people sitting beside, before, behind us?

Whose voices do we hear in the stories that are told?

Whose voices do we hear from the pulpit, leading us in prayer and in song?

How is the language we use in our prayers and songs and stories and sermons appropriate or alienating for those who gather – or might join us – for worship?

How do we bring the stories and our worship to life with, alongside, through, the stories of our community, and our neighbours?