

## Questions for a Post-Pandemic Church

### Second Conversation: What is Worship? (6/24/2021)

Building on essays in *Second Conversation: Liturgy and Longing* in [\*We Shall Be Changed: Questions for the Post-Pandemic Church\*](#), Mark Edington (Editor)

#### Five Conversations:

6/10 - First Conversation: What is Church? Notes available: [Post-Pandemic-Church-Conversation-1.pdf](#)

6/24 - Second Conversation: What is Worship?

7/8 - Third Conversation: How do we address inequities and injustices made evident during the pandemic?

7/22 - Fourth Conversation: How do we adapt to the changing world while holding to the core values of being the church?

8/5 - Fifth Conversation: How do we move from talk to action?

#### Second Conversation: What is Worship? (Liturgy and Longing)

“What have we learned about the worship we have been offering from having to create new ways of worship? Are there ideas or themes we should be careful not to lose?”

**Theme:** Is worship primarily liturgy, hymns, prayers, sermons, ritual, and communion or is it more? How do we take the holy, sacred elements of worship and bring them into more of our everyday lives?

#### Questions that came out of the essays for this conversation:

What did the past 15 months of virtual worship teach you about new ways of worship? What ideas or themes should we carry with us as we return to the sanctuary?

In what ways can we integrate these elements of worship into our everyday lives?

What is worship? Is it liturgy, ritual, hymns, prayers, sermons? Or is it a lifestyle? What would it mean to live worship as a way of life?

Communion is one of the sacraments in the Presbyterian church. Is it possible to “do this in remembrance of me” remotely or does it have to occur in community? In what ways did you unite in Christ in virtual communion?

What holy or sacred elements do you draw from worship? In what ways can you integrate those holy/sacred elements into more of your everyday life?

**For Discussion:**

**Chat Responses to “What is worship for you?”**

praise directed at God, in particular

Spending time with God

Communication with God

Focusing on God's movements around me

During pandemic, a renewed appreciation of nature as God’s creation and therefore connection to God.

An open-ness to God’s presence and God’s call

acknowledgement of God’s presence, awesome acts

Being closer with God

These days, it's listening hard in long silences. But I realize as writing I've been way too quiet, need to at least try and send a shout to my God.

Praising God

Also the human connection

**Quotes for comment/reaction (expanding the concept of worship):**

**“Worship of God is a lifestyle;** liturgy is one way to worship.... Worship in its fullness is ‘the orientation of all forms of human activity, including the liturgical or ritual, toward a particular allegiance.’ **The pandemic has, in a deep way, ‘invited’ us to remember that worship is everything we do in our lives.”**

**"Acts of social justice are worship of God.** In the light of the pandemic, this ‘worship’ has opened eyes and hearts to recognize that **‘returning to normal’ is not a Christian goal.**"

**Reactions (open discussion):**

1<sup>st</sup> quote was a reaffirmation of Grace’s help the homeless activities. Many outsiders help, but don’t come to Sunday services. This helping is their way of worshipping.

Grace is welcoming, community, home.

During [my] time at home during the pandemic, my faith grew stronger.

From conversations with adult children: Right now, they are minimally active in a church, because they've found no church like Grace, but are active in helping others (living out their faith).

Struggle with getting that personal nourishment, connection.

While we move back to the sanctuary, we also need to think about people joining by livestream.

A sense of worship planted as children may still be there as they grow older.

In Narthex, a sign on the easel: "Welcome back to church". This brought up some discussion:

- Some like the sign because they missed being in the sanctuary.
- But, when did we stop being the church? We've continued to be the church through the pandemic.
- We've been something for 15 months that matters. Perhaps, "Welcome back to the sanctuary" would be better.

There are some people who haven't felt the connection virtually and a few who say that they won't come back with masks.

Is being virtual church? Is wearing a mask not church? These are questions the pandemic has made us think about. Pre-pandemic, we would have thought differently.

Not everyone is there yet.

**On "What is worship?" (a summary from Philip Spiess):** Thoughts here from the group more or less covered the range of points covered in the readings. The general take-away I heard was that, for some, our livestream services under COVID and our extended classes and other meetings via Zoom added much to a perception of what worship could and should embrace, while, for others, the lack of an in-church worship experience (with the liturgy, music, and a live congregation meeting one another face-to-face) left them feeling deprived of a true worship experience.

**From Donna Lucas (6/24 email):** "Regarding the 2nd conversation - my thoughts were: On the first essay - Integrating worship in our lives regardless of circumstances requires intention intention intention. The second essay was a bit esoterically written for me however I appreciated the Paul reference and his overall point about personal and communal worship. And I've always valued communion at any time or place even when the norms are different 'whenever two or more of you are gathered in his name ...' so the third essay was on point for me. I understand how others may experience it differently. I've weathered Covid worship well

for some reason. I missed the physical hugs but never really felt disconnected from the whole body of Grace - a powerful connection. And I wish all members and attendees could feel that connection. FYI - Last Sunday in the sanctuary was very hard for me seeing so few people in the pews - I wish we could huddle together. Maybe that was just me coming back to the pre-pandemic reality. More to consider moving forward. Sorry to miss the discussion."

**Discussion on the Conversation Question:** "What have we learned about the worship we have been offering from having to create new ways of worship? Are there ideas or themes we should be careful not to lose?"

How do we blend the virtual and in-person?

- Can we blend both?
- What about offering a class in person to share experiences?
- Can we find a balance between virtual and live?

I've spent more time 'in church' than before (online experience)

Our presence here, now, is worship.

Grieved when I couldn't go out to help others, couldn't go to Honduras, so I signed up for all of the summer groups last year. While I wasn't getting the revival for that one week (in Honduras), the Zoom groups helped me get through that.

The time provided a chance to do adult stuff (Sunday School), nourishing for me because I can't usually participate in adult classes because I teach youth/children's Sunday School.

Groups offered throughout the week provided multiple opportunities to participate.

What about parents with young children? What has the impact been on young families with children on being connected? How do we reach out to those families?

We haven't seen many young families/parents participating in this.

The Children's Discipleship committee have talked about ways to move forward.

- Turning small groups into date nights
- Connection with other parents, community, kids
- Sunday school pod?

In the past, Grace had something like WINGS (Wednesday Night Grace Study) that provided connection and community.

We should try different things to build those connections.

How do we enable people to worship, recognizing it may be different?

Can we learn from how school teachers adapted to both virtual and live?

We need to learn how to approach people who want to be on virtual and merge them with those who sit in church – to make for a more meaningful experience for those online; also an evangelical connection.

Can we put zoom on one of the screens in the sanctuary?

More than one video perspective during worship for the livestream.

**On how to expand the worship experience in light of what we've learned (summary from Philip Spiess):**

1. Sunday Classes versus Classes on Zoom: The future effort should be to try to blend these two; Have some classes on Sunday at church and offer some classes on Zoom during the week – this spreads worship throughout the week and does not limit it to only Sundays. One current summer study group has been meeting via Zoom in the early morning; such varied class times are worth investigating for other Zoom groups/classes in the future.
2. Livestream Wherever Possible: Can those not attending worship in the sanctuary on Sundays still participate directly through Zoom being projected on one of the sanctuary screens? How can we “capture” the identity of those (whether members or not) attending services via livestreaming?
3. The Parental Connection: How do we address the realities of parents (church members or otherwise) who have logistical and/or scheduling problems attending church with their children or participating with them in other church activities? Likewise, how do we engage them if they have technological problems connecting with church programs? Should we reinvigorate and/or rethink our mid-week family dinner programs?
4. Utilize the Experiences of Real Teachers Who Have Taught Using Zoom: A number of us in the Grace congregation have now had some experience teaching via Zoom, so that is not the question here, *per se*; the question is one of simultaneously teaching participants who are present in the room with said teacher and participants who are at a distance via Zoom, livestreaming, or other such distance-learning program. How do you maintain a viable balance between questioning/responding to in-class students and questioning/responding to distanced students? How do you ensure that you're keeping the attention of the distanced students – or that they're even in actual attendance? How do you deal with audio-visual materials, “handouts,” student input, etc., in this bifurcated situation? Public school and other professional teachers have had to address these problems; let them help us solve them also.
5. In Summation: Not just classes and study groups, but all of the other activities we have had to experience at a distance during the COVID pandemic have, for most of us, enriched and broadened our concept of “worship.” Thus we desire to continue to practice and/or explore such engaging opportunities in the future. The challenge here is to meld in-church and more

distanced activities into unified programs, so that the “gathered” church is truly “gathered” – whether participants are present in person, present on screen, or, of course, present in spirit.

**One Last Thought (Stated Before) [from Philip]:**

As we return to in-church and other forms of worship (and focus on adding technologies such as live streaming and possible further uses of Zoom), we need to consider those folks in our congregation and beyond (and it may be more than a few) who do not have, do not choose to use, or simply do not know how to use what we often consider to be such “standard” technologies of the present: computer connections (such as e-mail), YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, and the like. Embracing all the latest opportunities to communicate with our congregation (i.e., audience) by means of the latest technology, let us not forget also to consider how to connect with those technologically left behind (for whatever reason).