

Notes from the Dialogue for Direction of the Worship Task Force
May 4, 2014

Introduction:

We convened in the Kimmel room, after we had brought in about 20 more chairs than originally planned – the room was filled. Among those attending was the confirmation class membership.

Agenda Elements:

Step #1:

After leading an opening prayer, Christopher began by introducing the guiding principles/ground rules for the session and for the Task Force (see Appendix #1).

Step #2:

We asked those assembled, “What has been your most significant worship experience at Fairlawn over the past year, and why?” They spoke among themselves and then we heard the following points. They replied, “I like...

- The All Saints Sunday we had a while ago, in which each of us was invited to light a candle in memory of someone who is ‘a saint to us’ – this was both intimate and participatory
- The dialogue of the kind we did this Sunday) with a congregant – this is a personal touch
- Hearing about each other’s lives – it makes us all feel valued
- Easter Sunday, the choir singing beside us and people being invited to come up and sing with the choir (participation)
- The thing about this church is that people bring a diversity of concerns but we are all together each Sunday, and the music carries us all through
- The Community Christmas pageant, especially because there are lots of new people (I didn’t know a large majority of those attending)
- Good Friday Service – I cried, all the music representing all the various people in the story
- Good Friday Service – I felt I was there in the crowd yelling ‘crucify him’
- Good Friday Service – unforgettable!
- The whole Easter and Special Music Sequence of services – I was tingling all the time!
- The Remembrance Service we did a couple of year’s back, based on real stories – I felt it deeply
- The service when Jane Rounthwaite talked to us about her life experience as a lesbian – it was personal, from the heart

- Our Prayer Day Services – an opportunity to light a candle and the healing service that went with it
- The series of sermons Christopher did on the Lord's Prayers – very meaningful, from week to week
- As a new member of the Finance Committee, I voted for a deficit budget for the first time in my life – if we like all these services so much, we have to get our givings iup to support this church!

Step #3:

Julie, Morrey and Christopher walked the group through a set of initiatives and experiments that we in the Worship Task Force are undertaking to address our mandate from the Fairlawn Call. Julie spoke to initiatives that are already underway, Morrey to those we are soon to attempt, and Christopher to those that are in our longer-term dreams. (See Appendix #2.)

Step #4:

Next, we asked what people would like us to do to make the services (taking each in turn) more relevant, more reverent, and more participatory. These could be things we modify, build upon or start afresh. The following input emerged under each heading:

More Relevant:

- We need to find a way to acknowledge what is happening in the world (beyond the two lines of mention in the prayers of the people) without being too depressing. We need to connect what we do here with our relationships with the world
- We could bring speakers in to hear what is happening in that wider world
- I am so glad that you dropped the lectionary, which helps you design and conduct services that help us understand what is most important in our world
- We need to think hard about the language in our hymns and elsewhere in the service, for example about our sinfulness and other things that we do not believe – we are a lot more progressive than the language we use
- I am so glad that you are considering changing the children's hour – by putting them on stage in an unstructured way, we are setting them up to look bad

More Reverent:

- Our Communion Service needs to change – right now it seems to be ‘grab and run’! (several put up their hands in agreement)
- We need to think more about how to do the Passing of the Peace – The Catholics have done it for years and know how to do the one-on-one contact (there are lots of ways we can be welcoming without overdoing this)
- I would like to know about the scriptures we will be building off, much further in advance that just in the Greetings two days before, so that I could tell Christopher about why that passage is so meaningful to me and my story
- I would like more interpretation of the scripture readings, because so many of them need help if we are to understand them
- We need more music, more types of rhythm outside of just Voices United. We need less Latin, which no one speaks anymore
- I would like us to move from saying the Lord’s Prayer in a rote sort of way to singing it – so much more reverent and meaningful when sung

More Participatory:

- We need more educational sessions to advise us on how to sing our music
- Equally, we can teach people how to provide various forms of lay leadership (as we now do with teach people how to read scripture), that might even extend to lay preaching
- We need to have greater diversity in who takes up the collection, not just the older members
- We need to use language that is not exclusive to “believers” or the “saved”
- We need more personal stories by and with congregants
- Opportunities for people to stand up and say who they are praying for
- We need to mingle more, by spreading around where we sit from one Sunday to the next

Other ideas, not falling under any one of those three headings:

- We need our sanctuary to be much more physically accessible to people in wheelchairs, so that they could, e.g., read scripture or sing in the choir
- It would be so great if everyone would wear their nametags – so much easier to be welcoming

Step #5:

We asked for early feedback on the service model we tried today. Among the handful of initial comments:

- Appreciation for the dialogue with the member about his faith
- Appreciation for the dramatic reading of the biblical story
- One spoke positively about the centering prayer concept, while seeing this as something to come from the minister
- One preferred the offering more at the end in a low energy moment, following the sermon!
- (Christopher noted the strong demand versus the limited time for the question and answer following the sermon.)

Step #6:

Christopher invited those attending to send him an email with any further comments or ideas (right away), especially those who may not have felt positively about speaking up in front of so many.

Appendix #1 – Guiding Principles and Ground Rules

- We are seeking to align our worship with the overall direction provided us under the Fairlawn Call. We have already learned from the congregation through this process that they want their Worship to be *Relevant, Reverent and Participatory*. At the same time, we want to appeal strongly to both existing members of our church family and potential newcomers whose perspectives may differ from ours
- Note that Worship is also one of the primary vehicles for fulfilling one of the three Fairlawn purposes defined under the Call: “Explore Spirituality”. (Adult Education and Children’s & Youth Education would be two other vehicles)
- In discussing this initial phase of our work, we are focussing on ‘designated worship services as a gathered people’. We do recognize that worship can take place outside our designated formal services, or outside our designated worship space, or when people connect to God as individuals (for example, in solitary prayer). We will address these further dimensions of Worship later
- Such designated, collective services go beyond Sunday at 10:30 a.m. to include:
 - Messy Church
 - Our special prayer service events
 - Any special services on, e.g., Shrove Tuesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Christmas Eve, Service of Lessons and Carols...
- We take as a given that our Sunday worship services must stay within the 60 minute window
- We are seeking ideas that help us avoid a ‘zero sum game’, i.e., where an increase in emphasis on one aspect of worship for some people comes at the expense of others who may prefer the opposite, or some other aspect of worship – we might provide some examples of how we might succeed at that...

Appendix #2 – Description of Initiatives already underway or being considered

Initiatives we have tried already (introduced by Julie):

- Tying announcements into the mission of the church
- Experimenting with the order of service
- Changed the bulletin for visual appeal, easier to read, tied in to the service them, removed the announcement material – which is made available through Greetings instead
- Dropped the lectionary – more relevant but more challenging for Christopher
- Spreading the passion narrative over many Sundays leading up to Easter
- Silent moments are longer
- We have added the Healing Prayer Days, twice a year
- Identifying which of the music we sing is contemporary (composed by living composers)
- Choir surrounding the congregation at the benediction

Initiatives we are considering for the near term (introduced by Morrey):

- Further ways to deepen lay participation
- Children's Time Re-invented
- Meditation in the Chapel before and after
- Increased integration between our Worship and Our Adult Education, or with other elements of our three purposes
- Making the most of our Strong Special Services
- Including some moment of explanation in each service of why we do what we do

Initiatives for the long term: (introduced by Christopher)

- The evolution of our sanctuary – ‘architecture determines worship’; our need to configure our space to who we are, with capacity for variation, each Sunday
- Different art forms utilized in Worship
- Re-imagining Summer Worship – a comfortable sanctuary, more summer programming, more for kids
- Finding ways to make digital messages accessible for your Morning or Weekly Idea from Fairlawn