



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

WORSHIP CARE:

A guide for reflection
and connection

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one
another in love. –Ephesians 4:1-2

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. To care for, pray for, and support one another as worship leaders;
2. To provide tools, in a spirit of mutuality-not-competition, to reflect on our worship lives; and
3. To connect our contextual liturgical lives with outreach and mission.

Worship Care is an opportunity for pastors, musicians and anyone who leads worship to check-in with one another about the worship lives of their congregations. It's that simple. The material may be easily adapted for use in a congregational setting with all lay leaders of worship (ushers, musicians, assisting ministers, altar guild, and so forth).

The underlying purpose of this workshop is for worship leaders to begin and/or continue to cultivate an ongoing, caring and interested spirit in one another's worship lives. Worship Care supports not only the individual worship leader, but also the congregation and even the whole church. Indeed, one does not need a structured workshop, such as this, to ask the simple question, "How's worship going?" But sometimes an intentional and organized session can get the ball rolling. In time and with continued intention, "worship care" becomes a recurring activity, a way of being church.

Part 1 Offer care, prayer and support to one another.
In other words, "How's worship going?"

Part 2 Share and celebrate some positive and perhaps helpful aspects of their worship lives.
In other words, "What's working well, that (first) needs to be prayerfully celebrated, and (second) might be beneficial to others?"

Part 3 Engage one another critically, but in that same spirit of care-giving, on how worship in their specific context is or is not connecting God's people to the rest of the world in mission.
In other words, "How are we being evangelical? How are we 'going in peace and serving the Lord,' 'sharing the good news,' and 'remembering the poor?'"

BACKGROUND

Leader Note: *Some of this text, adapted, may be helpful in advertising the workshop.*

Many of us hear it. We see it. We fret about it: "The people are leaving! The youth aren't attending! The church is dying!" In many of our congregations, there is a void of energy about ministry and mission, and sometimes it can almost be too overwhelming to bear. It is as if we are in a season of wandering in the wilderness – dried up budgets, cracked youth programs, mounds of anger and blame. Parched and afraid. How can we possibly continue? What has happened to the church, the body of Christ? Where shall we go from here?

Where shall we go from here? This question almost suggests that there must be some new, utopian, uncharted land to discover in order to escape this drought, this hot sun of despair and decline.

But what if we were to travel – not off to some untouched locale, but rather – back to our tradition, back our native land, back to the place from whence we've come?

Just as the promised land of the wilderness-wandering Hebrews was not an uncharted territory (it was in fact their ancestral birthplace), our promised land is worship. As Lutheran Christians, we are born in the holy waters of baptism, we are gathered together, formed for faithful living, fed by the Word and the Meal, and at last, forgiven and freed, we go in peace to serve in Christ's name. Worship is both where we begin and where we end up. Like Canaan for the ancient Hebrews, worship is both our birthplace and our destination.

Perhaps we've moved away (or have been taken away) from our promised land – from worship. With so many pressures and distractions in institutional church life, perhaps we find ourselves in the wilderness: charts of accounts, youth rooms, salaries, new buildings, missing members, landscapes and maintenance. So many activities in church life can draw our devotion away from the center, away from worship – and cause us great anxiety.

This workshop invites you as a group of leaders to take a deep breath and re-center. The Meal, the Word, the Bath: these are the things that both ground us and send us in peace.

So how's worship really going? We'll explore this loaded question in this session.

As mutual care and attention is given to one another in a small group setting, the whole church gives praise to God.

SESSION LEADER'S PRAYER

(prayed privately before the workshop)

God of grace and compassion, give me peace as I facilitate this workshop.
Calm my fears and anxieties, as you stilled the waves of the sea.
Help me to love these participants, to listen to them,
and to serve them through my leadership.
Let our time together be a prayer of hope and care. Amen.

LEADER INFORMATION

The session takes about 90 minutes, but workshop leaders are encouraged to adapt it to their particular situation. A longer time might allow for more in-depth conversation. A shorter time might allow more to participate. Some appropriate venues might be a synod assembly workshop, a monthly pastors' or musicians' colleague group, a bishop's convocation, or a local worship planning committee meeting. If used in a congregation, it might be used at a retreat or any venue where a diversity of worship leaders (ushers, musicians, assisting ministers, altar guild, and so forth) gather. Anyone can lead it. The facilitator simply has to be willing to speak up in order to steward along the time.

Open the space

- Create a welcoming, warm environment. If participants feel comfortable, they are more likely to participate fully and openly.
- Have the gathering room at a comfortable temperature.
- Consider providing refreshments. Food always helps to get people involved.
- Have name tags available.
- Participants will be moving around the room, from the large group to groups of 2-4 and back.
- Invite everyone to be seated and pass out handouts [pages 9 and 10]. You may choose to adapt the handouts for local use, depending on time considerations and/or specific contextual concerns.

INTRODUCTORY WORDS

[5 MINUTES]

Welcome and thank everyone for coming.

Share the objectives of Worship Care:

1. To care for, pray for and support one another as worship leaders;
2. To provide tools, in a spirit of mutuality (not competition or condescension), to reflect on the worship life of our congregation; and
3. To connect our contextual liturgical lives with outreach and mission.

Finally, emphasize that you, as the leader, do not plan to talk much, but rather you will be inviting participation. Before conversations begin, however, here are three brief thoughts:

1. There is a difference between asking “How’s it going?” (with a polite but passing manner) and asking “How’s it going?” (in a genuinely interested and caring voice). Many of us have stories and can identify with each of these very different tones. In this session, we are seeking to be with one another in the tone of the latter. This is the heart of the Worship Care workshop.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection.
(Romans 12:9-10)

2. The impulse to compete, measure up and judge is a strong one, namely when it comes to talking about worship (most glorious choirs, best preacher, most people in the pews, for example). It is important to simply name our innate competitiveness, and then ask God to help us to resist that impulse in this session. In other words, let us pray: “God, help us to listen and love, not instruct and judge.”

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. (2 Corinthians 10:12)

3. In order to keep this workshop moving, I will be watching the clock, giving a quick “wrap it up” warning and then interrupting.

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (1 Peter 4:10)

PART 1 POPPING THE BIG QUESTION: “HOW’S WORSHIP REALLY GOING?”

[20 MINUTES]

Take a few minutes of silence to have everyone think about and write down their response to the question “How’s worship going in your congregation?”

Leader Note: *Encourage participants not to respond to this question in terms of attendance numbers or financial contributions. Perhaps try rephrasing the question a few different ways, such as, “What are you noticing about worship in your congregation these days?” “Are the people in your worshiping community being fed by Christ?” or “How would you describe the sacramental life of your congregation?”*

After a few minutes of reflection and writing, have participants pair off and share their responses to the original question “How’s worship going in your congregation?” and a follow-up question “How can I pray for you and your congregation?”

Leader Note: *As people are pairing off and getting settled, reiterate the importance of working in a spirit of mutuality, not competition and judgment. In other words, we are not fixing each other's worship problems; we're asking and listening with intention and care.*

After about seven minutes, give a “wrap it up in three minutes” announcement.

Three minutes later, invite participants – if they haven't done so already – to offer a prayer of intercession for one another.

Then, invite participants to write down how they will pray for their conversation partner; perhaps they may want to share contact info (as they feel comfortable) in order to check-in with one another in a few weeks.

Reconvene to the larger group. Ask if there are any insights or thoughts from this experience.

PART 2 “HERE'S WHAT I'VE FOUND HELPFUL...” [35 MINUTES]

Get into groups of 3 or 4, preferably not with your previous partner. (Reason: we're not fixing each other's worship problems; we're now celebrating what is “working” in our own contexts.)

Reiterate the importance of continuing in a spirit of mutuality, not competition or judgment.

Conversation:

- What “works” about worship in your congregation?
- (Take turns saying a prayer of thanksgiving for one another.)
- Share a favorite resource (book or website) on worship preparation.
- Tell about someone who has influenced the way you lead worship.
- What is it about her/his style or method that you admire?
- What does “authentic worship” look like to you?

Leader Note: With any of these conversation times, you may choose to give participants one question at a time, dividing the available time appropriately and directing them as to when to proceed to the next question.

PART 3 WORSHIP INSIDE OUT [20 MINUTES]

The Spirit both comforts us and challenges us. Parts 1 and 2 are really opportunities to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit, as we check-in with one another, pray and celebrate. Part 3 is where we invite the Spirit to challenge or nudge us.

Find a new partner if possible (not your original partner), and pair up again.

Reiterate one last time the importance of a spirit of mutuality, not competition and judgment. At the same time, don't be afraid to ask one another difficult questions.

Conversation:

- Describe the context of your worshiping community.
- What are the ways in which what happens inside the sanctuary is connecting to what happens outside of the sanctuary?
- Do you think your congregation is “going in peace and serving the Lord, sharing the good news, and remembering the poor”? If so, share the ways this is happening. What are some additional ways that you could be engaged in mission and outreach? If not, share your hopes for your congregation.

An *epiclesis* is a prayer that calls down the Holy Spirit, to fill us and move us. Say an epiclesis for one another and for your congregations, that the Spirit would “drive [you] out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12), to be the body of Christ for your respective communities, “sharing good news, remembering the poor, serving in peace and love.”

Reconvene to the larger group. Ask if there are any insights or thoughts from this experience.

GO IN PEACE **[5 MINUTES]**

Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit,
that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world
and continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship Post-communion Prayer

Sing a hymn such as:

- ELW #543 “Go, My Children, with My Blessing
- ELW #632 “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”
- ELW #656 “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

Offer a sending prayer, or invite one of the participants to do so.

“Go in peace, to share the good news, remember the poor, love and serve in Christ’s name.”

Leader Note: *Depending on the nature of the gathering where this workshop is being led, you may choose to conclude with a full service of worship.*

WORSHIP CARE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Leaders may want a copy of the last two pages for each participant.

OBJECTIVES

1. To care for, pray for and support one another as worship leaders;
2. To share ideas, resources and tools, in a spirit of mutuality (not competition or condescension) to enhance worship; and
3. To help one another connect our contextual worship lives with outreach and mission.

PART 1 POPPING THE BIG QUESTION: “HOW’S WORSHIP REALLY GOING?”

“How’s worship going in your congregation?”

Try not to respond to this question in terms of attendance numbers or financial contributions. Try rephrasing: “What are you noticing about worship in your congregation these days?” “Are the people in your worshipping community being fed by Christ?” or “How would you describe the sacramental life of your congregation?”

Conversation Ask a partner: How’s worship going in your congregation? How can I pray for you and your congregation?

How I will pray for my worship leader partner:

Contact info: _____

PART 2 “HERE’S WHAT I’VE FOUND HELPFUL...”

Conversation Get into groups of 3 or 4 (preferably not with your previous partner):

What “works” about worship in your congregation?

Say a short prayer of thanksgiving together, as the group is able and comfortable.

Share a favorite resource (book or website) on worship preparation.

Tell about someone who has influenced the way you lead worship.

What is it about her/his style that you admire?

What does “authentic worship” look like to you?

PART 3 WORSHIP INSIDE OUT

The Spirit comforts us and challenges us. We long for the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Parts 1 and 2).

Part 3 is where we invite the Spirit to challenge or nudge us.

Find a new partner if possible (not your original partner), and pair up again.

Conversation Describe the context of your worshiping community.

What are the ways in which what happens inside the sanctuary is connecting to what happens outside of the sanctuary?

Do you think your congregation is “going in peace and serving the Lord, sharing the good news, and remembering the poor”? If so, share the ways. What are some additional ways that they could be engaged in mission and outreach? If not, share your hopes for your congregation.

An *epiclesis* is a prayer that calls down the Holy Spirit, to fill us and move us. Say an epiclesis for one another and for your congregations, that the Spirit would “drive you out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12), to be the body of Christ for your respective communities, “sharing good news, remembering the poor, serving in peace and love.”

Reconvene to the larger group. Ask if there are any insights or thoughts from this experience.

GO IN PEACE

Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit,
that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world
and continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship Post-communion Prayer

“Go in peace, to share the good news, remember the poor, love and serve in Christ’s name.”

This text has been prepared by the Rev. Daniel E. Roschke.

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