

Worship Task Group Report to the Elders

In the conversations of the Worship Task Group, two themes came up again and again: hospitality to Vine Street's guests and how to address the broad sense of being "overworked and underworshiped" among our members. This explains why we didn't limit our discussions to worship services only, but looked at all of Sunday morning as a gathering time for members, friends, and guests.

God's hospitality to all at the Table implies that we show hospitality to all, and not only after they have crossed the threshold to the sanctuary. On Sunday morning at Vine Street, worship is the center that gives focus to a host of encounters and experiences: greeting guests, meeting friends, strengthening relationships, reflecting on our lives and current issues in the light of our faith, studying scripture, talking about what's going on at school, at work, in our families, etc., communicating needs and opportunities for ministry, teaching, chatting...

Our first recommendation, at first glance, has little to do with worship, but we believe it is crucial for meaningful, inspiring worship to happen.

This task group is the direct result of *The Journey* process and the future story that emerged from it, a story that talks about the future God envisions for Vine Street.

In it, we say,

We've also had for years now an extended gathering time in the welcome area before each of our services. You can have a cup of coffee, chat with friends and guests, and occasionally you get to hear a three minute pep-talk about a new ministry. Many of us watch and comment on ministry updates that we run on tv's in the welcome area. We have clips about our small groups, short videos from mission

trips, new-member profiles with interviews - the quality of those visuals is amazing, and the gathering time has done more to improve internal communication than any other initiative!

We consider it crucial that the congregation move ahead with plans for transforming the fellowship hall into this kind of welcome area where guests can be greeted, information can be shared in a variety of ways, friends can hang out, and good coffee is available all morning. This includes clearly marking the current entrance to the fellowship hall from the parking lot as the main point of entry on Sunday morning.

In addition, we encourage the board to explore the possibility of hiring coffee bar attendants (a.k.a. baristas) to free our members, friends, and guests to spend time together.

We also recommend that the Elders engage the congregation in a conversation about the Sunday morning schedule; the task group received good feedback when we posted notes mentioning new service and class times (8, 9, and 10 am instead of 8:30, 9:30, and 10:45). Some comments were very positive, others opposed the idea quite strongly. We believe this conversation goes beyond the scope of our group's current task, but we think it's one worth having.

Now to concrete proposals for changes in our Sunday morning worship services. At Vine Street, with regard to worship, we have a wide spectrum of expectations among our members and friends. We may not be able to meet all expectations in every service, but we can make the two Sunday morning services distinct in character. Our proposals reflect comments made during The Journey process and the gatherings of the Worship Forum, and while they are creative, they are in no way radical or new.

We recommend that we continue to have two services on Sunday morning. A service in the chapel and a service in the sanctuary. For both services, worship planners and leaders need to keep in mind the comments made at the third gathering of the Worship Forum.

In the chapel service, we suggest that the pews be removed to allow worshipers to see each other face to face, and encourage a more conversational style “in the round” or, quite literally, around the table. The chapel service should not be the Junior version of the sanctuary service, but one that is intentional about exploring new and different ways of preaching, praying, and sharing the meal.

The service in the sanctuary should follow the proposal outlined at the end of this report, a proposal based on maintaining the current overall structure (gathering, listening, giving thanks, and being sent), while improving flow and disrupting patterns of “too much predictability.”

As part of that proposal we recommend that

- the Passing of the Peace be replaced with an informal greeting at the very beginning of the service;
- service leaders introduce elements of the service in a way similar to the invitation to the table (“this is why we do this, this is what we are doing here” without becoming overly didactic);
- the Scripture reading that informs the Children’s Conversation actually take place while the children are in the sanctuary (when appropriate, a very accessible translation can be used or storytelling can take the place of the reading);

- Ministerial Interns from Vanderbilt Divinity School participate in all aspects of worship leadership;
- in planning worship, leaders always think of including opportunities for worshipers being touched deeply by images, clips, stories, etc. , i.e. creative and memorable elements that break the mold of predictability;
- diverse musical styles are included in every worship service, and “special music” like harp, flute, guitar, violin, viola, trumpet, etc. should continue to move from “only occasionally” to “just about every Sunday”;
- selection of music, songs, and hymns, as well as their place in the service always follow the overall theme or design of the service rather than random patterns;
- the Elders encourage the formation of a diverse group of lectors, i.e. people who lead prayers and responses, read scripture, etc. The members of this open group love participating in worship leadership, they are willing to develop their skills, and they understand the importance of practice. We believe that a web page with simple instructions, e.g. for how to introduce a scripture reading or how long to pause between two readings, would also be helpful.

Beyond these changes, which we recommend be implemented this summer, we wish to remind all members that we must all continue to greet our guests on Sunday morning and help them find their way around our complicated campus.

It is our common duty as disciples of Jesus Christ to extend the hospitality of the Table deeply into the pews and hallways, and outside the church doors.

Order of Worship – A Proposal

THE CALL – THE PEOPLE GATHER

One of the worship leaders greets the people and encourages the people to greet one another. Following the greeting, one ministry of the week is highlighted, primarily to allow guests to get a taste of what we do. Information about the worship service may follow as well as specific instructions.

The purpose of this chapter in the unfolding story of our worship is for the many to become one congregation in the presence of God. Informal conversation and the greeting at the beginning have started the process; the people continue by

Praying together

- Call to Worship and Opening Prayer; or
- Psalm (with Gloria Patri, changing seasonally); or
- Confession and Assurance (with Gloria Patri, changing seasonally)

Singing together

- A hymn (with an organ intro to set the tone); or
- A song (with a song leader to set the tone); or
- Several songs (with Welcome etc. woven in)

Singing and praying together (some combination of the above)

THE WORD – THE PEOPLE LISTEN

The purpose of this chapter in the unfolding story of our worship is for the congregation to encounter the living Christ in the reading of Scripture and the proclamation of the good news.

Invitation and Song; the children come to the chancel

[First Reading, possibly in a very accessible translation or through storytelling]

Children's Conversation

[Children's Choir]

Children's Blessing ("As we continue our worship in different rooms of God's house, we ask for God's blessing...") The children and their leaders leave.

[First and] Second Reading

Anthem/Hymn/Song (choir, soloist, group, all)

Sermon or other form of proclamation (interview, conversation, etc.)

Call to Discipleship/Invitation to church membership

THE TABLE – THE PEOPLE GIVE THANKS

The purpose of this chapter in the unfolding story of our worship is for the congregation to respond to the proclamation of the good news and to encounter the living Christ at the Table. We commit ourselves to a life of discipleship, we pray for the church and the world, and we dedicate ourselves and our gifts to the purposes of God.

Hymn/Song

Welcome New Members

Minute for Mission/Ministry Story/Stewardship Moment

Prayers of the People

Offering

Gift of Music (choir, soloist, group)

Doxology (changing seasonally)

Prayer of Dedication

Invitation to the Lord's Supper

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord's Prayer

Words of Institution

The people eat and drink (we practice a variety of ways of sharing the bread and cup)

Music during the Supper (choir, soloist, group, all)

THE WORLD – THE PEOPLE ARE SENT TO SERVE

The purpose of this chapter in the unfolding story of our worship is for the congregation to turn from the table to the world, and to continue our worship in our daily life and work as followers of Jesus Christ.

Hymn/Anthem/Song (choir, soloist, group, all)

Benediction, Charge and Affirmation

Postlude