

# Profound Worship



## PROFOUND WORSHIP

**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.'**

**Mark 14.22**

**Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

**Heb 10.23-25**

When we gather to worship we meet with our Risen Saviour and recall and give thanks for the saving work of God through Jesus Christ. We also gather to build one another up, and to encourage each other in the faith and be sent out into God's world.

Our public worship - be that on a Sunday morning in an ancient building especially built for the purpose, or a Wednesday afternoon in a school hall - is also a crucial step in the journey of people coming to faith in

Jesus and growing as a disciple. It is true to say that our public worship can be crucial to whether someone fully participates in the depths of God's grace, mercy and love for us, or else it can be difficult to understand, focused on the insiders, and be uninspiring.

It is a good idea to create opportunities to regularly review worship and services: it is especially important to consider how newcomers, who have never been to church before, might participate and feel included in the service. Another very important area for review is to ask how accessible services are to children, and to evaluate if services are as inclusive as we believe them to be. It is vital to listen to the answers that arise from such a review: the good, the challenging and the affirming.

Lots of church studies suggest that it is not a particular style of worship or church tradition that 'works' better or is more 'successful' than another. Instead, it is doing whatever style of worship you choose with integrity, with careful attention, and in a manner that invites those who are gathered to 'draw near with faith...'

## FOUR KEY VALUES UNDERPIN THE DIOCESAN VISION OF LIVING GOD'S LOVE:

- **Imagination**
- **Joy**
- **Generosity**
- **Courage**



A good service in church requires all four of these values. We have to be imaginative in how we worship our Creator and draw others into that worship. Our

worship must be full of joy – a reflection of the joy that God has in being with us. Our worship needs both generosity and courage as we seek to consider the needs of those who we have invited to church, and who we hope to come along, but who may not have come yet. Are we generous enough to lay aside our own needs and wants in order to put their needs and wants first? Do we have the courage to prioritize the outsiders as Jesus did in his ministry?

## BUILDING BLOCKS OF WORSHIP

Remembering that worship doesn't have to be in a particular style, theology or churchmanship to help your church be a flourishing church, there follows a number of building blocks of worship that apply to all styles and tradition.

### 1. Thoroughly Trinitarian Worship

Thoroughly Trinitarian worship expresses the inclusive nature of the Trinity – welcoming and drawing people into the communal life of God. As well as this, when we recall the nature of the Triune God – loving and giving – thoroughly Trinitarian worship reaches out and moves into the world in love.

### 2. Disciple-making worship

In our worship we tell the story of God's grace and how we are saved through Christ. Good worship reminds people and helps others understand what it means to be recipients of God's grace and salvation. In this way it helps people grow as disciples.

Well-chosen hymns and songs, liturgies, symbols, rituals, and good quality and engaging preaching that invites application and response can all help to communicate all that God has done for us through Christ, how we respond to that grace, as well as how we grow as disciples.

### 3. Worship that deepens relationships

We have already alluded to the fact that part of worship is to build one another up and encourage one another. This doesn't happen if we are only looking at the backs of one another's heads!

There are lots of ways that worship might deepen our relationships with one another and so allow us to build one another up; but this doesn't mean that it automatically will. For example, the act of sharing the peace is not an end in itself – it symbolizes us being at peace with one another. This act then can be continued over coffee at the end of the service. It must be acknowledged, however, that coffee at the end of a service can easily become a huddle of regular worshippers who know one another well, with others hovering around the edge with a growing sense that they don't belong.

Perhaps the one act of worship that most throws a magnifying glass on whether our worship deepens relationship or not, are our baptism services. Whether part of normal Sunday worship or not, these are a place to welcome people to church and to demonstrate a warm welcome. This opportunity is too often passed up on.

### 4. Worship that encourages the church to work for the good of the world

Worship ought to result in those who participate regularly having concern for justice, social action, community engagement and care for the environment.

As we gather as the Body of Christ, our intercessions remind us of the needs of others in the Church, and those not in the Church. For this reason intercessions should be thoughtful and creative – involving people of all ages who are in the worship service. The intercessions should also recognize that we may be part of the answer to those prayers: we have to both pray for and live the kingdom of God in the world.

### 5. Worshipping as a Sacramental community

The Sacraments of the Church are both the beginning point of our journey of discipleship, and the things that nourish us spiritually on that journey. As well as the 'dominical' Sacraments – baptism and Holy Communion commanded by Jesus – the other Sacraments can sustain us as part of our worship: confession, healing, confirmation, etc.

Thought must be taken with regard to how inclusive the sacraments are. There are different theologies around this, but those who hold a theology where the sacraments are not as open, must be careful in how they communicate this: rather than saying, 'No, you can't come to Holy Communion', say, 'Yes, you can come for Confirmation' and be ready to teach those who want to deepen their faith through receiving the sacraments.

### 6. Pioneering worship in the places that people already are

There is nowhere we can go where God is not. That means that we can worship and 'do church' where people are. In our current cultural climate people are as spiritual, or more so, but less inclined to come to church. Perhaps our churches need to think about how we can take church to where people are.

### 7. Worship that expresses generosity

The traditional understanding of what we call 'services' is our service to the God who serves us. The traditional understanding of what we call liturgy is 'the work of the people': a public work performed by the people for the benefit of others. Thus, in our worship we serve God and others and this should be generous. It is a joy and a privilege to which we are called. It is not a chore, or something to get out of the way before we can do something else instead.

## AN EXERCISE FOR PCCS AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

There follows a 'tick-box exercise'. A church with rich and diverse worship has achieved that worship through more than a tick box exercise, but this tool is designed to be something of a conversation starter.

There are two ways you might use this tool – we suggest trying both! The first is to ask either an occasional visitor to your services, or someone who has only recently started to come along, if they would be willing to help you with this. Fix a time to chat with them over a coffee and ask them how they found the services. Use the suggested areas in the exercise below, but also explore digressions that may come up. It is likely they will have insight in how others feel coming to the services.

Secondly, you can use this exercise in a PCC meeting. If you spend 15 minutes going through this list and coming to an agreement, you will be able to identify some needs in your church. Why not take the pressing needs first, and create a 'working group' to tackle them one at a time?

I wonder if the insights of the PCC will be very different or similar to those of the occasional visitor or new member of the congregation?

Don't forget to be in touch with the Flourishing Churches team – we may have some advice and resources available that will make your mission and ministry a bit easier.

AN URGENT  
NEED

REQUIRES  
IMPROVEMENT

GOOD

EXCELLENT

## BUILDING

Bring the 'action' closer to the people				
Tackle access issues: ramps, hearing loops, etc.				
Do you have provision for young children in the building? Either a space where they can move around, that is comfortable and clean and where they can see and hear the service, or else pew bags to give them things to touch and do?				
Tidy and de-clutter the building				
Provide decent, clean, accessible toilets with changing space				
Use better lighting				
Are there visual signals that children are present and welcome in your building? For example, is there space for prams, children's art on display, photos from your Messy Church, etc?				
Make the space more comfortable				

## SUNG WORSHIP

Regularly review and develop your music				
Do some intensive work with church musicians				
Improve the sound system				
Make sure you have a way to play recorded music				
Encourage your congregation's participation				

## PREACHING AND LEADING

Dress appropriately				
Develop the use of visuals				
Smile and vary the tone of your voice				
Use fewer and better words				
Are there opportunities to make your worship more multi-sensory: things to touch, smell, taste? This is important for all, but especially for children.				
Improve the quality of your sermons				
Make receiving Communion a more meaningful experience				
Be creative with Bible readings – consider the number and length of readings				
Use times of silence				

## GATHERING AND WELCOME

Consider the length of your service				
Review the start time of your services				
Find and commission church welcomers/hospitality				
Serve appropriate refreshments before/after the service				

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Ensure that children and young people have a more vital role in services				
Gather children and young people to help in the planning of worship				
Improve the provision of worship specific to children and young people				