

Why Do Worship Education With Your Congregation?

Human beings naturally worship. Theologian William Dryness notes in his *A Primer on Christian Worship* that, “Even those who claim no religion at all find themselves honoring, even serving, persons or experiences that they find transformative.” (in *A Primer on Christian Worship*) However, in the life of the church the how and why of the movements of our worship are rarely discussed, taught, or considered alongside the journey of our faith. Even as we understand that we are people of God and that the Bible provides guidance to whom we should offer our prayer and praise, worship education is not among the hot topics of our Christian Education ministry areas. With worship still the largest gathering of the church body each week for most congregations, how do educators bring the details of worship alongside formation for all ages?

Colossians 3:16 connects worship and formation together: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” (NRSV) linking worship, music, and teaching together. But where do we learn the psalms, hymns, and spiritual song with which we are to admonish and teach one another? While many books have been written on what’s in worship, the theology of worship, liturgical and ritual studies, few provide curriculum suggestions or nuts and bolts steps for doing intentional worship education.

Making worship education an intentional part of our church’s educational process reinforces theological, biblical, and elements of tradition that are already a part of the faith formation curriculum. In her book, *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century*, Ruth Duck observes five theological emphases that she highlights as essential for our understanding of worship each connected to our formation as disciples:

1. Worship as Ritual– repeated ritual builds communal identity and individual identity.
2. Worship as Revelation– we understand God is revealed through liturgical practice.
3. Worship as Response to God- because God is sovereign and calls us to worship (see the Psalms!), we respond.
4. Worship as Relationship- because we believe God is *revealed* to us in worship and because we *respond* to God in worship, worship inherently has a relational component where we believe we are drawn closer to God through acts of worship.
5. Worship as Rehearsal- worship is the space in which we practice love, justice, and peace in preparation for our return to the world.

Additionally, engaging in worship education as a part of faith formation answers the Directory for Worship in the *Book of Order’s* statement that, “The session is responsible for educating the congregation about the church’s worship, in order to facilitate their full and active participation.” (W-2.0305) So how do we do that?

WORSHIP EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES

CHILDREN'S WORSHIP EDUCATION IDEAS

- Consider developing a curriculum for worship education with young children. An example of this can be found in the resources from *Worship 101: How Well is Your Congregation Doing Worship Education* presented at the 2019 APCE Annual Event in Galveston. You can access a copy of the presentation with all the resources including sample curriculum at this [link](#).
- Supplemental events to reinforce worship practices can also be developed through the year (i.e. waffles and worship, pancakes and prayer, etc.) Learn more about some of these offerings in [this article](#) from the Presbyterian News Service.

YOUTH WORSHIP EDUCATION

- Dedicate weeks of your confirmation curriculum to understand your congregation's practices in worship as well as the theology and understanding of the sacraments. See the resource list below for good sources for all ages.

ADULT WORSHIP EDUCATION

- Newcomer classes and refresher courses throughout the year that discuss the worship traditions of the local congregation.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

- Use blurbs in the bulletin, a side panel to explain the meaning of unfamiliar terms or the background history of worship elements.
- Develop icons or other graphics that help illustrate worship practices for children and visual learners.
- Make worship a regular part of your gatherings beyond the dedicated worship hour. Open camps, retreats, meetings, youth group, Sunday school and other events with brief worship services to help reinforce the practice of worship (and its meaning) throughout the life of the church.

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP EDUCATION

These are some selected books and other materials for use in planning intentional worship education offerings:

General

- *Go Make Disciples: An Invitation to Baptismal Living- Handbook to the Catechumenate* (Augsburg Fortress)
- [*Rhythms of Worship: The Planning and Purpose of Liturgy*](#) by John G. Stevens and Michael Waschevski (Westminster John Knox Press)
- [*Christian Worship: Glorifying and Enjoying God*](#) by Ronald P. Byars (Geneva Press)
- *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* by William A. Dryness (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.)
- [*How to Worship as a Presbyterian*](#) by Dean W. Chapman (Geneva Press)

- *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century* by Ruth C. Duck (Westminster John Knox Press)

Children

- *What's Worship* by Delia Halverson (Chalice Press)
- [*A Children's Guide to Worship*](#) by Ruth Boling, Lauren Muzzy and Laurie Vance (Geneva Press)
- [*Get Ready! Get Set Worship!*](#) By Sue Lou, Jean Floyd Love, Mickey Meyers, and Sylvia Washer (Geneva Press)
- *Everyday and Sunday, Too* by Gail Ramshaw and Judy Jarrett (Augsburg Press)
- *Signs of God's Love: Baptism and Communion* by Jeanne Fogle (Westminster John Knox Press)
- *Gateways to Worship: A year of Worship Experiences for Young Children* by Carolyn Brown (Abington Press)
- *Children in the Sanctuary: Involving Children Fully in the Worship Life of a Congregation* from PCUSA and other Reformed Church partnership
- *Teaching Children Worship in the Sanctuary* by Joyce MacKichan Walker and Carol Wehrheim
- *Including Children in Worship: A Planning Guide for Congregations* by Elizabeth Sandell (Augsburg Press)
- *A Child Shall Lead: Children in Worship* by John Witvliet (The Calvin Institute and Choristers Guild)

A more comprehensive list of worship education resources can be found [here](#) which was part of the APCE Annual Event 2019 Workshop presentation.

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