

Praise Worship: A New Opportunity Begins at Asbury

People were created to worship! Yet, we are not all created to worship in the same way. A wide range of worship opportunities supports the needs of a diverse group of people at Asbury.

Recognizing a growing need, your Administrative Council voted Jan. 7 to begin a pilot Praise Worship during the 11 a.m. worship services. The first full Praise Worship service will be Sunday, April 22. Thereafter, Praise Worship will be the 11 a.m. theme every second and fourth Sunday, according to the vote.

Administrative Council members include the chairs of Asbury's committees, elected lay leaders of the congregation, and four at-large members. To see the entire list of members, pick up a Charge Conference report booklet from the office or on the table on the east wall of the Hospitality Room at the back of the sanctuary.

The Praise Worship proposal was brought to Ad Council by the Worship Task Force, which was created last year by Pastor Dar. The group included several people interested in exploring forms of worship, in addition to worship committee members, choir leaders, and church staff.

A recent survey conducted among regular worshipers at Asbury pointed to a distinct need for a Praise Worship Service, even without a specific question about or reference to Praise Worship. Other comments point to soul-nurturing sermons, which are a hallmark of classic Praise Worship services.

Nearly every local church in the Sioux Falls area offers some form of Praise Worship in various time slots during the week. The Asbury Praise Worship proposal was not intended to create a worship experience that appeals only to the tastes of a particular age group. Evidence makes it clear that worship style is not determined by age.

A worship team consisting of the senior pastor and two current Asbury worship leaders, Jason Bowker and Kathy Green, has agreed to coordinate the efforts for creating this new experience. Worship will be planned to last 60 minutes and feature traditional Praise Worship components.

While the team prepares to begin the Praise Worship format, the Asbury youth band, Edom's Fall, will continue to host the 11 a.m. worship on the third Sundays in February and March.

Asbury Survey Points to Need for Praise Worship

People were created to worship! Christian author and professor Arthur Paul Boers of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary puts it this way:

Worship is the venue where we bring and lift up our most important longings and yearnings. Here we name what matters most to us. Here we uncover, recover, and discover our true identity in God. Here we are swept up into God's salvation story.

And, John D. Witvliet, an editor at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, says:

Worship is the locus of what several Christian traditions identify as the nourishing center of congregational life: preaching, common prayer, and the

celebration of ordinances or sacraments. ... Worship is central, most significantly, for theological reasons. Worship both reflects and shapes a community's faith. It expresses a congregation's view of God and enacts a congregations' relationship with God and each other.

Charles Wesley writes about our calling in many instances, but this hymn in particular highlights our human need to worship:

*Maker, in whom we live, in whom we are and move,
the glory, power, and praise receive for thy creating love.
Let all the angel throng give thanks to God on high,
while earth repeats the joyful song and echoes to the sky.*

Yet, we are not all created to worship in the same way. Asbury members and friends prove that every week as they enjoy a wide range of worship opportunities: two traditional/blended services Sunday mornings, informal open worship Sunday evenings, weekly communion Wednesday evenings and a monthly Taize format. We also experience a variety of worship outpourings in our small group sessions, Sunday school classes, choirs and fellowship opportunities.

A recent survey conducted among regular worshipers at Asbury pointed to a distinct need, which was previously a perception or a "gut feeling" on the part of some members of the congregation. Without a specific question about or reference to Praise Worship, responders clearly outlined this need when asked about new aspects of worship that might enable their spiritual growth:

"Multiple Scriptures, music, visual displays, sermons that speak to me"
"More singing, special music, drama, dance, prayer, timely topics along with Scripture."
"Truly worshipful songs, more than just hymns"
"More connection to today's environment"
"Praise band, more singing and songs"
"Praise and worship"
"More interactive and modernized"
"I enjoy contemporary worship songs and expository preaching"

Other comments point to soul-nurturing sermons, which are a hallmark of classic Praise Worship services:

"Relating Bible/Scriptures to our time, stories that relate"
"A solid message of hope, the Good News and how I should live my life"
"Questions posed which challenge life's walk with the challenge of daily application presented"
"Bible-based sermons, spiritual growth, understanding Scripture lessons"
"Would like to hear more on evangelism and more on challenging us to live our faith:"
"Sermons on topic/relevant issues that provoke through, enlighten and educate"
"Relating Scripture to today's home, community and world"
(Source: *Worship Survey Questions and Responses*, compiled by Duane Smalley, Nov. 30, 2006)

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What is Praise Worship?

Asbury's Worship Task Force recognizes and understands that Praise Worship can mean different things to different people.

However, the group also expects Asbury's Praise Worship to reflect the natural inclinations for worship in the Asbury community. For guidance, the group turned to the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) of the United Methodist Church, which outlines Praise Worship in this way:

Assumptions

1. Music takes on sacramental significance. Music is the major vehicle for receiving the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Worship is experiential. The charismatic influence allows for the participation of the worshipers with hands (orans or praying position of the early church) and for responding to the music through physical participation (clapping, swaying, etc.).
3. Worship is personal. While in community, it is important that each person present feel the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Worship is inclusive. Praise and Worship celebrations tend to include wider ranges of ages, race, socioeconomic levels, and ecumenical perspectives than Seeker Worship or Protestant manifestations of worship derived from liturgical renewal.
5. The sung and spoken word receives equal emphasis.

Principles

1. Charismatic use of a series of praise songs (usually shorter in form) that guide the emotional level of the presentation to a higher and more energetic level of participation followed by more intimate and quiet singing when the worshiper experiences the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Moves people from singing about God to singing to God. The section about God may involve the use of stanzas from traditional hymns followed by personal hymns in the to God section.
3. Uses a single passage of scripture and prayer to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit to transform the life of the individual.
4. The sermon is practical and relates scripture to the life situation of the worshiper.
5. The service is guided by a musical pastor and praise team/band as much as it is facilitated by the preaching pastor.

This chart from GBOD simplifies the parts of worship, comparing Traditional forms with Praise Worship forms:

PHASE	FUNCTION	DESCRIPTION
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Invitation	Call to Worship	Usually celebratory, upbeat and praise-oriented
Engagement	Drawing people to God; words are about God	Stresses God's majesty; may use a Theocentric hymn
Exaltation	Singing to the Lord in a spirit of transcendence; words are about God	Songs use words like great, majestic, worthy, reigns, Lord, mountains, etc.; wider range of expression than Engagement
Adoration	More Christocentric focus; words are addressed to God and Christ	People are usually seated; melody revolves around a few notes (five-six); key words are you and Jesus
Intimacy	Personal focus; stresses relationship between individual and God or Christ	The quietest phase; God is addressed as Abba; use of more acoustic guitar and little use of percussion
Closeout	Transition to next part of service	Simple, familiar song e.g., "My Tribute"; may pick up on the theme of the sermon to follow

(Source: http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=13093&loc_id=1062,1063)

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A Vision for Praise Worship at Asbury

The Worship Task Force spent several weeks visiting and participating in Praise Worship services in our sister United Methodist churches and in congregations of other denominations around the area. Some research suggests and anecdotal evidence supports the idea that Praise Worship appeals to a younger demographic in the 15-30 age range. It has been suggested that offering Praise Worship can increase church attendance by people in that age bracket. In response, nearly every local church in the Sioux Falls area is offering some form of Praise Worship in various time slots during the week.

It is not the intention of this proposal to create a worship experience that appeals only to the tastes of a particular age group. The evidence in our own congregation makes it clear that worship style is not determined by age, but by spiritual personality or what one author calls "Sacred Pathways." A group of our members recently participated in the Sacred

Pathways study, clearly outlining how each of us is created differently by God, but with the same key goal: to worship God and praise God's Holy Name.

The editor, Witvliet, writes in "Stilling the Storm: Worship and Congregational Leadership in Difficult Times":

As alert pastors know so well, when worshipers assemble they bring with them remarkable differences in aptitude, temperament, and preferences. For leaders who eagerly desire that their congregations participate in worship in knowing and engaged ways, coming to terms with this diversity is essential. It is otherwise too tempting for preachers to prepare sermons and musicians to prepare music for people who are just like themselves.

In her book, "A Royal Waste of Time" (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), Marva Dawn writes that taste should not determine worship and music style. If it does, the result is the loss of a sense of community through the fostering of the independence and isolation of the local congregation.

Taste-generated worship, Dawn says, especially when it results from the traditional versus contemporary divisions, leads to the view of religion and worship as a marketing tool, designed to attract a specific consumer. It fractures a congregation, not only from the larger body of faith, but from some of its own local members.

And, so, this proposal rests on the foundation of our own Vision and Mission Statements as we offer this new worship format.

Asbury's Vision

Affirming our United Methodist heritage based on Scripture, reason, tradition and experience, Asbury United Methodist Church led by the Holy Spirit is a community of faith in Jesus Christ, committed to spiritual growth, social justice, outreach, lay involvement and leadership.

Dawn calls the church to ground its decisions about worship in criteria other than taste: in revelation, in tradition and community, and in faithfully judging new movements of the Spirit; but most of all in humility and obedience before God. The fight over minor matters of taste is idolatrous and divisive and leads us away from God, she says.

Further, we look to author Michael Hamilton to help us clarify a proposal for true change that has the potential for creating or magnifying disputes in the congregation. Hamilton suggested in *Christianity Today* in 1999 that despite divisions in the Western Church, it is rich, vital and highly successful in spreading the Christian faith. Hamilton sees our divisions and differences as strengths rather than weaknesses, because they help us offer a welcome and faithful expression to all rather than a few.

Dean McIntyre, director of music resources for GBOD, elaborates:

The church is a living entity, growing, changing, adapting, embracing new ways of reaching the world and letting go of some old ways that have lost their effectiveness. It is surely impossible to agree upon a single musical style for the church... But I am persuaded that the church should be about the business of making disciples, and I welcome any music that will leads in that direction.

(Source:

http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=1765&loc_id=929,932,933)

Consequently, this proposal must not ignore our congregation's clearly-stated mission:

Asbury's Mission

Asbury United Methodist Church, as a community of faith, seeks to be spiritually alive and to encourage one another to be in Christ-centered ministry.

Each and every activity in and through our congregation must reflect back to our Vision and Mission. This proposal is no different.