Worship Committee, January 24, 2020

Present: Anne Hurd, Linda Bogardus, Bernie Webb, Dre Roebuck, John Sampson, Martha Gallagher, Annie Scavo, Susie Allen, Karen Glass, Ellen DuBois

John opened the meeting with a centering meditation, remembering that we are here to explore “What is worship?” and to celebrate our relationship with God. To begin the discussion John read the email conversation that he had with Lynn and Rob concerning the music at the beginning of worship service. (The email conversation is included at the end of this document.)

Discussion: The words “prelude” and “meditation” should be reversed. Prelude happens first and welcomes people as they assemble. Meditation gets you focused and implies quiet. These words should not dictate what music is being played, nor how loud or soft the music is. Lynn is worried that changing the words would impact what he chooses to play. People talking, even talking over the music, remains a problem. There is a postlude at the end, so the prelude to begin makes sense.

John asked when worship begins: Is it with the ringing of the bell? The ringing of the bell is meant to be a sonic symbol of the call to worship to the outside community. But do the people outside understand this? Or has the bell become a ritual and lost its meaning? Could a PSA “did you know” factoid be written somewhere to remind people that the bell indicates that something is happening at the church?

Or does worship begin with the first piece of music—the audible symbol to start? At that moment John changes his behavior, saying, “that’s my cue”. The purpose of the music is to transition into the space. No decisions have been made, but John feels that reflection and discussion about this are valid, whether anything is changed or not.

Or does worship begin after the music, when John welcomes everyone and asks if there are any announcements? God is present in all aspects of our lives, so the announcements are a way to share what is important to us. How can we claim a spiritual moment in the announcements as a connection to our lives within the community?

Because of feedback from members of the congregation, a revisit of announcements seemed appropriate. There were two concerns. One was that there were too many announcements—as Rob said in his email, that impacts how long the service goes—and the number of announcements can be hard to keep track of.

John feels split and never wants to say that we have no more time: the announcements represent community members’ sharing their lives and can have sacred moments. One option considered was to encourage that announcements be printed in the bulletin. Say, two sentences sent to Liz by 7 p.m. on Tuesday, under a heading “Events of the week”. This was tabled for further discussion.

The second concern was feeling uncomfortable with personal promotions of business ventures during announcements. Announcements are easier for people to embrace when it is personal aspects of our lives that are being shared.

One Committee member talked personally about her business. She feels that her work is very spiritual and sincerely wants to share it with the church community, for she believes that many people would be interested. It was pointed out that paid admission is required for some of the events announced for EBFA: is this not commercial? The library has events, too. Who benefits? It is important to name what makes us uncomfortable. Is money making not allowed, while not making money is allowed?—that is, is the problem nonprofit versus for profit? All things can be part of the spiritual life, so why distinguish among them?

Would not some business announcements—say, telling that a local business is in trouble—be good to encourage the community to patronize the business so that the community does not lose it? A member of the committee said that she used to see the church as a safe zone away from the marketing that she felt 24/7 in the rest of life. But now she understands business announcements as a sharing of hard work. John asked those of the committee who had received feedback from some congregants to go back and ask what the root of the discomfort is and to report back.

**Next meeting: Friday, February 7, 10–12 a.m.**

Submitted by Linda Bogardus

John wrote:

As you both know, we've created a Worship Committee that is reflecting on how we worship on Sunday, and if there might be any changes/updates, etc. we might want to make to our worship. We've been meeting on Friday mornings 10 - 12 PM, which I know might not be the best time for either of you to join the discussion. But we'd love to have you be a part of the group if you can join. If that's not possible then I will periodically reach out to you with updates, and to get your input on various issues.

So far, we've been using the weekly bulletin as a guide for our discussions. We've started at the beginning and are discussing each moment in our service, how we feel about it, how could it be modified, etc. Through our discussions the group has made some suggestions about the music which opens our worship. I'd like to share them with you, and get your thoughts and ideas.

1) We open worship with an instrumental piece performed by Lynn, which is called "Meditation" in the bulletin. The group has discussed the reality of the gathering of the congregation as being anything but meditative. This isn't a bad thing. It's actually in many ways very joyful. But there was a feeling that to call the opening musical piece "Meditation" is a bit misleading in its actual function.

Suggestion: No change to the opening instrumental musical offering. Simply rename this in the bulletin from "Meditation" to "Welcoming Music".

2) At the end of the Welcome and Announcements I call the congregation to worship. This moment is followed in the bulletin by an instrumental piece, performed by Lynn, and called "Prelude". The group felt that it is this moment that can be more truly described as a moment of musical meditation.

Suggestion: No change to this musical offering. But rename it in the bulletin from "Prelude" to "Meditation".

3) If these two changes are adopted then the opening of worship in the bulletin will read:

Welcoming Music

Welcome and Announcements

Meditation

Introit

Hymn

The group likes how the music builds after the announcements. We move from an instrumental solo, to the choir offering a introductory piece that names the intention of the gathering, to the singing of a hymn which incorporates the voices of all present. This was thought to be a wonderful way to invite everyone to move more deeply into being present in worship. However, members of the committee thought that sometimes the transition between what we are now calling Meditation, Introit and Hymn can be too rushed.

Suggestion: Add a moment of silence, and lack of movement, between the Meditation, Introit and Hymn as a way for each of the pieces to resonate with the congregation before transitioning to the next piece.

I'm interested in hearing back from you on these suggestions, and any thoughts you might have in general as to how the musical portion of worship might be strengthened, or considered anew.

From: **Lynn DeWalt** <ldewalt@keenecentralschool.org>
I have often tried to make the Meditation more meditative, but the congregation is seldom quiet enough to be contemplative. So it has become, now and then, more and more a piece that builds in volume, if not tempo. I would be fine with changing this term to Welcoming Music. However, I am always torn about having people talking at the top of the voices while I'm playing music. I don't feel the need for absolute silence as people are coming into the sanctuary, but neither do I see the need to greet someone so loudly that everyone turns and looks. It's just a little distracting as a performer (after rereading this I started to feel as if I'm sounding like an old codger!).

As for renaming the Prelude to Meditation, I'd prefer not to do that. I would guess that 95% of the music I've chosen for that slot is in fact labeled as Prelude music - which is not necessarily meditative in nature. If we labeled it Meditation, I would feel obligated to make the piece more contemplative in nature. However, there are some Sundays that I don't feel it's the nature of the season to be contemplative -rather, it calls for exuberance (Easter comes immediately to mind). Also, if I have related the prelude to the other pieces I'm playing during the service (the other 5% of the time), I might not want it to be calmer in nature. As such, a moment of silence may, or may not, be warranted before moving onto the choral introit. I personally don't like having the quiet time at any point during the service - the three minutes for prayer is difficult enough for me to get through (bah humbug!).

Having stated all this, I begin to realize that, while it may seem haphazard to others how I've structured the music choices, I actually do put more thought into this process. By definition, the service music should be music to move progressively throughout the service. However, I don't want to always be limited to the labels - I'd like to reserve the right to change the music - and its purpose - as the spirit moves me.

Thanks for including me in the discussion.

L. DeWalt

From: **Robert Hastings** <rivermede1@aol.com>

John, I have no problem with the changes to the wording of #1&2. I do, however, want to stress that the service is planned for one hour and that adding on any further delay time needs to be taken into account with the rest of the service. Something needs to be shortened if you want that pause, if even brief. It seems the service has been getting longer each week and I have had complaints from my choir that they have been there since 9 and the service is not ending as planned. They block out a generous amount of time to sing in the choir and when a service goes an extra half hour it becomes an issue with their lives. I can give you the amount of time it will take for the current week's anthem and other music if that will help', but mostly we are under 5 minutes per song.

ROB