

Author: Paul F. Bosch [paulbosch31@gmail.com]
Series: Worship Workbench
Issue: Essay 190 + May, 2014
Copyright: © 2014 Paul F. Bosch.
This document may be freely reproduced for non-commercial purposes with credit to the author and mention of < www.worship.ca > as the source.



A WORSHIP AUDIT

1 *A few years ago, the Liturgy Education Committee of the Toronto Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church prepared a document -- with a title similar to mine above -- for use in parishes that are eager to test their present worship against the best and fullest in the post-Vatican II catholic Christian tradition. My colleague, retired Lutheran pastor and musician Dr. Don Nevile, brought it to my attention.*

2 *Together with Don and with still another colleague, Lutheran Pastor Michael Hackbusch, I have adapted that Roman Catholic document for use in Lutheran settings. Indeed, the three of us believe the process would work well in any parish interested in vital yet faithful catholic Christian worship.*

3 *Don notes that a congregation's Worship Committee might conduct such an audit, perhaps over the course of several weeks. In smaller congregations, the audit could be conducted by members of the Church Council. Its purpose is not to praise nor to condemn, but simply to identify areas of strength and need, with the goal of encouraging "full, conscious, and active participation" in weekly worship.*

THE PLACE FOR WORSHIP

4 The worship space is a unity. The layout of Font, Table, Ambo and Sedilia (Seating of worship leaders) suggests a collective identity, clergy and laity together on the same level. At its best, architectural arrangements feature a one-room space, not a two-room space (nave here, chancel there).

5 The space invites contemplation; it is pervaded by a sense of the holy, an intimation of mystery. The worship space is clearly not a storeroom, nor a lecture hall, nor a theatre.

6 The worship space and its furnishings are made and maintained with care. There is evidence that those who use this space love it. Its materials are genuine and natural.

7 The worship space is accessible to the handicapped.

- 8 The community's concern for the world is apparent on bulletin boards and in space set aside for collecting food, money, and other goods.
- 9 The layout and lighting allow members of the assembly to see each other and the Four Chief Architectural Signs: Font, Table, Ambo, and Sedilia.
- 10 The natural acoustics of the worship space allow all to hear. Worship leaders will have been trained to project their voices. A PA system assists where necessary.
- 12 The Presider and other worship leaders are clearly part of the assembly, yet situated for the effective exercise of their ministries.
- 13 There is one Table, one Ambo, and one Font. All three are beautiful, nobly designed, and approachable from all sides.
- 14 There is only one place of the Word. In the best circumstances, a single Ambo is used for the public proclamation of scripture and for preaching. Announcements and song leading are from another location.
- 15 The Font is large and copious, approachable from all sides. Its generosity allows for the immersion of at least infants.
- 16 Ideally, the church building provides both a sacristy for an Altar Guild's ministries, and a (separate) vestry for vesting clergy and other worship leaders.
- 17 All vessels, vestments, paraments, banners, and books are worthy, testifying to the importance of their sacred function as signs. They are not disposable or throw-away. Furnishings and artifacts are in harmony with each other and with the architecture and scale of the worship space.
- 18 Audio-visuals, when used, do not call attention away from the Four Chief Architectural Signs (9 above), and do not impede ritual action.
- 19 Paintings, sculpture, banners, and other decor add to the liturgical action. National flags, if any, do not belong in the chancel, but in the narthex.
- 20 The Day's print-piece (bulletin, guide to worship), if any, is handsomely and thoughtfully designed so as to assist newcomers in finding their way, and so as to provide a useful archive for future worship planners. Any print piece will use only and exclusively the terminologies found in the congregation's worship book. For example, in *Lutheran Book of Worship* and in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the term is "Holy Communion", and not "Eucharist".
- 21 When renovating or purchasing, major liturgical symbols (Font, Table, Ambo, etc.) deserve priority attention.

THOSE WHO LEAD WORSHIP

22 Vestments are in the colour of the Day or Season, and should not speak of opulence or ostentation. Vestments are themselves symbols. If fabric, colour, and texture are chosen with care, vestments need no additional appliquéd symbols.

23 Ministers of hospitality (ushers and greeters) exercise their ministries with grace, assisting newcomers to find a seat and pointing out the first pages of the Day's liturgy in the worship book to newcomers.

24 Presiding Minister and all leaders of worship take an active part throughout the entire celebration, singing hymns, joining in acclamations, etc.

GATHERING

25 Ministers of hospitality (ushers and greeters) greet people warmly and graciously as they enter. The Presiding Minister, as "host of the party", might profitably be among those who greet worshippers at the door before worship begins.

26 Following apostolic tradition, the congregation's chief worship each week will be the Holy Communion / Mass / Eucharist / Lord's Supper. In larger congregations, other forms of Christian worship – such as Matins / Morning Prayer, Service of the Word, or even Revival Meeting – may supplement and enrich weekly worship opportunities. Worship begins on time, never early. And never more than a few minutes late.

27 Lay leaders from the congregation, not the Presiding Minister, make pre-service announcements, if any. This allows the first public words from the Presiding Minister to be the liturgy's – the Bible's! -- own gracious Greeting: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

28 The liturgy's own gracious Biblical welcome is the only invitation necessary to sacramental worship. Hence there will be no need for any announcement, verbal or in the Day's print piece, that "All are welcome to commune..." Communion is the family meal of the Baptized. If unbaptized persons hear the liturgy's own invitation as a specific welcome to them to the Table, who will dare refuse them? Conversely, there will be no need for any announcement, verbal or printed, to the effect that "Only those baptized are welcome..."

29 The entrance hymn or gathering hymn is festive and familiar.

30 Processions, if any, move in a dignified manner and pace. And in the following order: Incense (if any), processional cross or crucifix, processional torches (candles), lectionary- or Bible-bearer, choir (if any), worship leaders, with Presider last. Processional banners and processional icons (if any) may precede the choir or worship leaders, or separate the various voices of the choir (SATB).

31 Pauses and meaningful silences for meditation are observed throughout the service where indicated in the rubrics.

32 Variety in forms of Confession is desirable. A rite of Confession is specially appropriate during the seasons of Advent and Lent. The rite of Thanksgiving for Baptism is used occasionally during the “green” seasons (after Epiphany and after Pentecost). Sprinkling the assembly with water is appropriate at the conclusion of this rite.

33 The *Kyrie*, when used, is understood as an acclamation of praise, not as a confession of sin.

34 “Glory to God” may be sung during the Christmas season; “This is the Feast” during the Easter season.

35 The Presiding Minister's invitation “Let us pray” is followed by a suitable period of silent prayer by everyone.

36 The Prayer of the Day (Collect) is proclaimed by the Presiding Minister to summarize and conclude the Gathering rite. The Prayer of the Day (Collect) is prayed by Presiding Minister alone; the people do not join in reading this prayer.

WORD

37 The assembly is allowed adequate time to settle before the liturgy of the Word begins.

38 The Day's readings are proclaimed by readers trained to project their voices. They are proclaimed as nothing less than a Word from God to us.

39 During the Day's readings, worshippers will have been trained to attend to the Lector (Reader), not to read along silently themselves from a print piece or pew Bible. Worshippers who are hearing impaired will have been trained to read the Day's lections before worship begins as part of their own personal preparation for worship.

40 The Day's Psalm is always sung. In the best circumstances, a choir or soloists sing the verses, and the people sing simply a brief, easily appropriated Response or Antiphon.

41 Gospel acclamations are true exclamations of praise. A procession into the assembly's midst may accompany the Gospel reading, in this order: Processional cross or crucifix, torches, Bible- or Lectionary-bearer, and Gospeler (Gospel reader). Alternatively, the procession may be led by the Bible- or Lectionary-bearer, in which case the book is held aloft and the processional cross is not needed. The people stand and turn in place toward the location of the Gospel's reading.

42 There is always a sermon, usually on the Gospel text. Mystagogic sermons -- instructing worshippers / newcomers in how to worship -- are especially appropriate during the Easter season.

43 The sermon at Holy Communion will always assume and point to the Eucharist that is to follow.

44 Intercessions always include the needs of the wider church and of the whole world, including the well being of creation.

45 The greeting of peace is a sign of Christian love and a ritual recapitulation of the events in *John 20*, not an opportunity to chat.

MEAL

46 Choral or instrumental music is appropriate at the collection of money offerings.

47 Sufficient wine and bread are brought forward for the communion of the entire assembly. The Assisting Minister sets the Table.

48 Real bread and real alcoholic wine are served. In the best circumstances, the bread is a common loaf of real pita-style bread; the wine is pleasant tasting and in a common cup.

49 Bread and wine and money are brought directly to the Presiding Minister at the Table. There is no need for an acolyte or other intermediary.

50 Congregational song is appropriate during the collection of money offerings and may continue to cover the action of the Presiding Minister's hand washing.

51 The Offertory Prayer over the gifts is supremely the laypersons', not the clergy's. The positions of Presiding Minister and Assisting Minister at the Table at the time of this Prayer illustrate this clearly.

52 The Thanksgiving at the Table (Eucharistic Prayer) is prayed by the Presiding Minister as true corporate praise and as a summary of the Gospel. It is prayer addressed to God, not to the people. The people participate by listening attentively.

53 The people's responses or acclamations during this Prayer are sung boldly.

54 A variety of Eucharistic Prayers is used throughout the year.

55 The bread is broken (the Fraction) after the Thanksgiving at the Table (the Eucharistic Prayer), not during it. "The Presiding Minister's actions during the Words of Institution are designative, not imitative." The *Agnus Dei* has historically been sung to accompany the Fraction.

56 Additional vessels, if needed, are brought to the Table at the Fraction, not before.

57 Normally, the people share in the cup at every Eucharist. For medical reasons, individual worshippers may choose to receive only the bread or only the cup at Communion. In either case, individual consciences may be assured that they have participated in a fully valid communion.

58 Ministers distributing bread and cup at communion strive to make each individual's communion a genuine encounter with their Lord.

59 Ushers and ministers of hospitality strive only to facilitate the communion procession, rather than to give any appearance of marshaling it.

60 Hymns may be sung by the assembly during the communion procession.

61 Purifications and clean up take place after the service has ended.

62 There is no Blessing after communion. One Blessing, at the sending rite, is sufficient. The Prayer after Communion is part of communion, and is prayed by the Assisting Minister.

SENDING

63 Announcements pertaining to the congregation's mission, if any, are made after the post-communion Prayer and before the final Blessing.

64 A final Blessing is pronounced over the people by the Presiding Minister, who will have committed its wording to memory.

65 A hymn may be sung to conclude the whole rite and perhaps to accompany an exit procession of worship leaders to the entrance door, where they may greet departing worshippers. On festive occasions, the procession's order of exit will be the same as noted in 30 above.

66 The Dismissal may precede or follow a final hymn. The Dismissal is crisp and strong: a true sending out to mission.

+ + +