

## CAN WE TALK?

# Engaging Worship and Culture

#### How do you talk about worship?

You might be part of a congregation that talks about worship and that plans and evaluates what happens in worship on a regular basis. You might have a keen sense of your assembly's particular strengths and challenges.

This resource is for you, a tool to help broaden and deepen these conversations.

You might be part of a congregation that has found itself in conflict. Perhaps a line has been drawn in the sand between "contemporary" and "traditional" worship. Many might desire worship renewal, yet are struggling to find a way through labels and assumptions.

This resource is for you, a tool to frame difficult conversations.

You might be part of a congregation that faithfully worships each week but doesn't gather regularly to talk about it. You might wonder how initiating such conversations might both affirm and challenge you.

This resource is for you, a tool to open you up to new possibilities.

#### What is this resource?

This is a resource to accompany conversations about worship and culture in your context. It comes out of the realization that an important document written two decades ago still has much to contribute to worship renewal. The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture, from the Department for Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation and completed in 1996, provides for us a rich description of the dynamic relationship between worship and culture and gives us lenses to help frame our conversations.

To read the full Nairobi Statement, see pages 16-18. For more about the development of the Nairobi Statement, see page 19.

A lens alters how we perceive what is in front of us—shading when the light is too bright, magnifying what is near or too far away. In a similar way, the Nairobi Statement alters our vision by showing us four ways worship relates to culture: transcultural, counter-cultural, contextual and cross-cultural.

#### Why culture?

The church talks about worship because in worship we remember who and whose we are as God's people. But why talk about culture?

The culture(s) of which we are a part shape how we regard ourselves, one another and the world. The church cannot help but be in a relationship with culture, but that relationship can be like something you've always seen yet never noticed. You might pass the same tree every day on your way to work, but never notice the unique way its branches curl around the power line above. If you look more intentionally, you might ask new questions: How did its branches form this way? What about the tree next to it? Will it need to be cut down someday?

Since worship always sends us out, we ask not only about our cultures, but also about those cultures beyond the walls of our worship space. How is the Holy Spirit guiding you to be fully immersed in your community, opening your eyes to its needs and gifts? How does worship help us accompany one another as together we regard one another with the eyes of Christ?

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#### How to use this resource

The full Nairobi Statement is provided on pages 16-18. Throughout this resource, you will notice brief quotations from and references to the Statement (indicated as NS).

This conversation guide is organized by our senses, by how we process what we experience in worship. The late Helen Kemp, a champion of worship and song, used the phrase: "Body, mind, spirit, voice. It takes the whole person to sing and rejoice." When you talk about worship, you'll likely say things like, "Did you notice how festive the sanctuary looked on Easter?" "Did you notice how the musicians overpowered the singing this morning?" "Did you feel rushed by the way we processed to communion today?" These kinds of questions begin with our senses.

After an overview of the "lenses" of the Nairobi Statement, Part 1 will consider *What Does Worship Look Like* and will use the four lenses of the Nairobi Statement to view the physical worship space and the way art enriches worship.

Part 2 will consider What Does Worship Sound Like, taking up the hearing of the word and the gift of music.

Part 3 will consider *How Does Worship Engage Body, Mind and Spirit* through ritual practice, addressing matters of prayer, movement, sacraments and blessings.

How you use this resource will depend your context. You might want to begin on page 16 with the full text of the Nairobi Statement. You might begin with Part 1, 2 or 3, as these parts are not arranged in a particular order.

Questions and examples to spark your conversation abound.

Put on your lenses and begin.

This resource is also meant to engage your senses through online resources. Since it can be difficult to imagine how worship looks and sounds in places other than our own, online resources offer windows into worship across the church and around the globe. In this print version, links will appear as bolded and underlined text.

**To access the links** to online resources, use the online version of this document available at **ELCA.org/worship**.

#### The Lenses of the Nairobi Statement

The Nairobi Statement frames worship's relationship with culture in four ways. Understanding these ways as "lenses," let us briefly view how they can guide our conversations.

#### Keeping the Holy Central: Worship is *Transcultural*

Worship connects the people of God across space and time. Certain elements of Christian worship—reading Scripture, being washed in Holy Baptism, and sharing in Holy Communion—bind us together as the body of Christ. Our transcultural lens helps us recognize what worship experiences we hold in common.

#### Being Who You Are: Worship is Contextual

Certain elements of Christian worship adapt to their contexts; you are being who God created you and your community to be for this time, for this place. The worship of a large cathedral in a metropolitan area need not look the same as the worship of a small church in rural Montana. Our contextual lens helps us recognize how to authentically be church in the place to which we are called.

#### In, but Not of the World: Worship is Counter-cultural

Worship calls us to alternative visions, questioning and critiquing culture. Praising God may be at odds with what the surrounding culture deems worthy of praise. Worship needs to challenge us to live into the freedom we receive in Christ, a freedom from all that defies God. The countercultural lens asks us to reflect upon what in worship does not look and sound like the cultures we take for granted.

#### Accompanying One Another: Worship is *Cross-cultural*

The church is gathered into one from many times and places. Throughout Scripture, we meet God as we accompany one another. As we share with other Christians across time and space, we are opened to meeting Christ in our neighbors. The cross-cultural lens notices the ways many cultures manifest the Spirit of God in Christ.

"In the mystery of [Christ's] resurrection is the source of the transcultural nature of Christian worship."
(NS 2.1)

"In the mystery of [Jesus'] incarnation is the model and the mandate for the contextualization of Christian worship." (NS 3.1)

"In the mystery of his passage from death to eternal life is the model for transformation, and thus for the counter-cultural nature of Christian worship." (NS 4.1)

"Jesus came to be the savior of all people...The sharing...across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthens the sense of the of the Church." (NS 5.1)

### What Does Worship Look Like? Worship Space and the Visual Arts

When you enter your worship space, what do you see? Do you notice the shape of the space and the seating arrangement? What about walls and windows? What artwork and furniture beautifies the space?

#### Keeping the Holy Central: Worship is Transcultural

Worship space includes shared signs and symbols. As we are united in a common baptism, share in Holy Communion, and hear the word, our spaces reveal who we are as the body of Christ. (See NS 2.1-2.3 on pg. 16.)

#### Questions

Take a walk through your worship space. What do you see that could also be seen in another church in your town and in Christian churches worldwide?

What about the placement of symbols such as font, pulpit, communion table? Are they large or small? Prominent or hidden?

#### Assembly as Primary Symbol

The assembly gathered is the primary symbol in Christian worship. "Church" first and foremost is a people, not a building. The place in which we gather, the things we do—none of these would occur if not for the gathering of God's people.

#### Question

Does your space convey the people of God as primary symbol?

#### Being Who You Are: Your People, Your Space

As you explore how your worship space resembles other spaces, you will likely discover what sets your space apart. While most cultures' visual arts include ceramics, drawing, painting, fabric art, sculpture, printmaking, photography, video and filmmaking, how these art forms are experienced depends upon your context.

Let us revisit worship space and the gathered assembly. How is the seating arranged in your space? What does it communicate? To highlight the centrality of the people gathered, <a href="Peace Lutheran">Peace Lutheran</a>, Danville, California, has experimented with flexible seating that allows members of the assembly to see one another and to have word, font and table central.

Some spaces can be especially intentional about "being who they are."

<u>"Cowboy" churches</u>, commonly found in the rural South, often contextualize their entire environment for worship, gathering in barns and sitting on bales of hay. In such contexts, the baptismal font is often a galvanized feeding trough.

"Here are symbols to remind us of our life long need of grace; here are table, font, and pulpit; here the cross has central place." ("God Is Here," Fred Pratt Green, ELW 526)

"It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel." (Augsburg Confession, Article VII)

#### Within the Space

Once we enter the worship space, artistically crafted symbols and artwork tell the story of the community. Baptism is central to our Christian identity, but what is particular about fonts and water pitchers (or the lake/river) used by your community?

The font designed by William Pye at <u>Salisbury Cathedral</u> in England is a remarkable example of sculpture and architecture.

In this small rural congregation in <u>Pennsylvania</u>, the sun shining on the baptismal font caused another form of art, the stained glass windows, to be reflected in the water.

The Lutheran/Episcopal Campus Ministry at Georgia Tech, **Grace House**, repurposed a drum set for their baptismal font.

Likewise, the table of the Lord calls us as one body, yet they vary in shape and size. The table at <u>St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church</u> in San Francisco, California, not only connects the assembly to the saints of the past, but also sits amid the food pantry where hundreds of families are fed every week.

<u>Cathedral in the Night</u>, an ecumenical congregation under development in Northampton, Massachusetts, worships outdoors. Their altar is a folding table that can easily be moved as needed. It can also be used to serve the hot meal immediately following Sunday worship.

#### The vessels used for communion or offering reflect context

Many churches reflect the culture they identify with through fabrics and other artwork used in the environment for worship. Resurrection Lutheran in Oakland, California, displays an altar cloth that reflects the East African heritage of many Resurrection members.

The offering in the ancient church often included a gathering of food, from which bread and wine were used for the Eucharist and the rest shared with the needy. <a href="Immanuel Lutheran">Immanuel Lutheran</a>, Amherst, Massachusetts, uses bright orange reusable grocery bags to hold food donated for the local food pantry. The reusable bags remind them of their call to serve the hungry and care for the earth. What vessels hold your congregation's offerings and what do they communicate?

### As the church celebrates seasons of the church year, various art forms are employed.

Some churches choose to mark time using vestments, banners and paraments that rotate with the liturgical seasons. Others use creative materials like corrugated plastic and lights to serve as an Advent "wreath" (from <a href="Crossing Church">Crossing Church</a> of the Nazarene). How does your church artistically convey the church year?

Many congregations display a nativity set at Christmas. These sets come in many forms and often reflect God's incarnation in many cultures.

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**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church** in Lynchburg, Virginia, held an event featuring nativity sets from around the world.

This example reveals how something that at first seems contextual is also cross-cultural. These lenses are not hard and fast, but more permeable. To compare these two "lenses" in the Nairobi Statement, see 3 and 5 on pages 16-18.

#### **Questions**

Does your church's environment for worship respect and honor the cultures of those assembled?

Do you have folks in your place who have gifts in the arts of any kind? Can they be better encouraged to be a part of a worship creating/planning team?

### In, But Not of the World: What is Counter-Cultural About Worship Space and the Visual Arts?

The Nairobi Statement suggests that worship "involves the transformation of cultural patterns which idolize the self or the local group at the expense of wider humanity" (NS 4.2). Worship, then, has a transformative dimension, reframing our response to the surrounding cultures.

How do worship space and the visual arts challenge contemporary culture by offering an alternate vision?

#### Real Stuff

In worship, we use real materials: water, bread and wine. Yet we live in a culture that often wants to cover up what is real or substitute what is real for what can be preserved or fabricated.

Christians acknowledge that "real stuff" has a life cycle. Even God's most beautiful creations come to an end.

#### Questions

What real stuff does your assembly use in worship?

Do you use anything artificial such as plastic/silk flowers or greens at Christmas time? What about battery-operated candles? What values are at play when making these kinds of decisions?

#### We Share Creative Power

Truly there are those who possess specific creative talents; we are not all gifted in painting, pottery or photography. It is right for us to seek out those with specific gifts and raise them up in service of the church.

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"The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

"Come to us, Creative Spirit, in this holy house; ev'ry human talent hallow, hidden skills arouse, that within your earthly temple, wise and simple may rejoice." ("Come to Us, Creative Spirit," David Mowbray, ELW 687) At the same time, we also believe that humanity shares creative powers; we can invite the professionals among us to unearth creativity. A wonderful contextual activity for churches is to have an artist direct a collaborative art project such as a mural or tapestry.

In Houston, Texas, liturgical artist <u>Mary Button</u> helped a congregation create an art project for the installation of a pastor in a redeveloping church community, St. James/Santiago Apostol Lutheran Church. The project allowed each participant to decorate a small, individual cross within a larger cross.

Liturgical artist Linda Witte Henke gives guidance on such collaborative projects through the Calvin Institute for Worship.

#### Space and Inclusivity

In our society, people with varying levels of ability are often excluded from certain places and events by physical barriers. Christian worship has radical inclusivity at its core, and it should trouble us if certain members of the body of Christ are excluded intentionally or unintentionally. Worship spaces can be designed to accommodate a variety of ability levels like the churches featured in this article.

#### Accompanying One Another: Sharing Space and Symbols

One of the drawbacks of worshiping in our local time and place is that we don't get to experience worship in another space. Yet we can imagine God more fully through artistic offerings of cultures different from our own. This includes celebrating the gifts of Christians beyond your place and recognizing the many cultures within it.

In addition to locally crafted collaborative art, worship can be enriched by celebrating and supporting professional artists whose work bridges diverse cultures.

A large graphite drawing by artist <u>John Whalley</u> opens the viewer's eyes to what a Last Supper might mean for street children in an alleyway in Brazil.

#### Questions

What could cross-cultural sharing look like?

Can you hold a "worship committee exchange" by sending members of a worship committee to another congregation? Encourage participants to ask, "What did you notice?" rather than "What did you like or dislike?"

If you have multiple faith communities sharing your worship space, does the use of the space change? Why? How?

Can you exchange symbols or artwork with a companion synod in another part of the world?

"Cross cultural sharing is possible for every church, but it is especially needed in multicultural congregations." (NS 5.1)

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### What Worship Sounds Like: Music and Proclamation of the Word

In Romans, we read that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Martin Luther believed that "the church is not a pen-house but a mouth-house" (Luther's Works, Companion Volume, p. 63). We come to know God not only through written words, but also and especially through the spoken word and sung proclamation.

#### Keeping the Holy Central: Scripture and Communal Song

Two fundamentals are shared by Lutherans and other Christians in our community and throughout the world: We proclaim Scripture and we sing together. These may seem too obvious to mention, yet these transcultural values profoundly shape the faith we receive and express.

#### Questions

Outside of worship, when do people sing together? Read Scripture?

When Christians gather, they sing together as a community. How might this transcultural value influence and impact what songs we sing and how they are led?

#### Being Who You Are in Word and Music

The fact that Scripture is proclaimed transcends cultures. The language of Scripture, the version of the Bible read in worship, the particular reading style, the proclamation in sermon or other art form—these are contextual matters.

Although sacred Scripture and other texts in worship are transcultural, there is no single or preferred sacred language. (See NS 2.2 p. 17) Preaching is by its very nature a contextual act.

Likewise, there is no single musical expression that works equally well in all places.

At its best, each assembly embraces the gifts we share (transcultural) while being intentional about local identity (contextual). Choices are influenced by many factors: history of the assembly, cultures present in the congregation and surrounding community, the musical gifts of the leaders, available voices and instruments, worship space and more. (See NS 3, p. 17.)

Take for example, the basic cry to God: "Lord, have mercy," or in the Greek, "Kyrie eleison." How an assembly chooses to sing these words reflects its context.

"Music is a communal and relational activity. The assembly is the primary musical ensemble, and its song is the core of all music in worship." (Principles for Worship, Principle M-3)

Consider these examples where composers have contextualized the Kyrie or another Christian text with local musical cultures:

- "Lord, Have Mercy:" Singapore, ELW #158
- "Lamb of God:" Hong Kong, ELW #198
- "Lord, Have Mercy:" Nicaragua, Setting 7, ELW p. 175
- "At Last, Lord/Ahora, Señor:" Argentina, ELW #203

Or consider "Alleluia/Hallelujah," a word that transcends culture. These four syllables find a home in Gregorian chant, German chorales, African freedom songs, and many more expressions. You can listen to two contrasting examples below.

- Alleluia/Hosanna in a reggae style
- Muscogee Creek <u>Halleluiah</u> Hymn (Heleluyan) sung in a Choctaw congregation

Evangelical Lutheran Worship includes assembly songs from a wide array of cultures and backgrounds, but no single book can include every song. Perhaps those in your community may have more examples of songs from their homelands or cultural traditions that can be taught and sung locally.

#### Local Music Creation

While musical choices of existing music express our context, so does musical composition. Local musicians can create music "in-house" that reflects their particular culture and gifts. This could include individual improvisation at the organ or piano or a group of musicians working together on a creation.

Mercy Seat Lutheran Church in Minneapolis invites musicians to compose new liturgical settings.

St. Peter's Lutheran in Manhattan holds a "Jazz for All" workshop that brings musicians of different backgrounds and skill sets together to improvise for their monthly Jazz Vespers.

Valerie Shields, youth choir director at Phinney Ridge Lutheran in Seattle, Washington, engages youth in composing, asking them not only to sing the songs of others, but to create music for the choir, by the choir.

Sometimes the gifts created in a local community mostly remain in that community. Other times, something written for a community is used widely and affirmed, leading to it being published. Holden Evening Prayer composed by Marty Haugen for the community at Holden Village received such affirmation and has since been sung throughout the church, each place contextualizing it for their situation.

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#### Using What You've Got

Contextual music in worship requires using what you've got. In other words, know your people well enough to know what they (not the church across the street or across the globe) will sing well.

If your assembly has an amazing flute player and pianist, how can you choose or compose assembly song that will enable them to share and lead?

If you have a choir but are without an organist, how can the choir lead unaccompanied?

Just a few cantors and a high school percussionist? Consider more singing where the assembly doesn't hold a book or bulletin such as this example from <a href="Music That Makes Community">Music That Makes Community</a>.

#### Questions

How well does your music reflect your assembly's cultures?

What music and musicians in your context have been utilized and celebrated? What musical gifts might you be overlooking?

### In, But Not of the World: What is Counter-Cultural About Music and Proclamation?

#### Community Song vs. Entertainment

As mentioned above, the church shares the basic value of singing together. This could be considered a counter-cultural value, since so few opportunities exist to sing together. More often, music is packaged and presented by professionals. We have bought into the assumption that because our song is not as technologically perfected, our amateur singing has less value. We are just as content to be entertained.

#### Live Music

Ever since the invention of the microphone, technology has continually changed the landscape of music and culture. While technological advances bring gifts, they also bring challenges.

Many congregations have to make decisions about recorded music. Note the counsel from the ELCA document, *Principles for Worship*:

"The living voice of the gospel is proclaimed with integrity through music that is live; that is, music led by people present in the assembly, music that uplifts the primacy of the assembly's voice, and music that avoids the use of technology to replace human leadership and participation" (Principles for Worship, Application M-12D).

Congregations facing a shortage of trained organists or pianists find that a recorded accompaniment might be an alternative. Yet such recordings cannot breathe with a live assembly.

"The tools of the countercultural in Christian worship may also include the deliberate maintenance or recovery of patterns of action which differ intentionally from prevailing cultural models." (NS 4.2)

#### **Questions**

What are possible alternatives for congregations without an organist or pianist?

Would a congregation without a pastor (also a problem facing many small churches) consider playing a recorded sermon? Why or why not?

#### Texts that Challenge

Some of the words we say and sing are themselves an example of countering the culture. Just as we name in confession those ways in which we are "captive to sin," our songs also name injustice and challenge our response. See, for example, "The Right Hand of God" (ELW #889), a Caribbean expression of God's work to end envy, hate and greed. It combines human and divine response to the injustice of the world around us.

#### Silence

In the hurried, sound-infused culture that many of us swim in, another counter-cultural value the church nourishes is the cultivation of silence. While we rightly care about the words sung and said, worship conversations consider also the role of silence.

#### Question

Does worship in your place regularly include times for silence? Is this time intentional? Is it enough?

### Accompanying One Another: Cross-Cultural Sharing of Song and Scripture

In the Pentecost story from the book of Acts, the people hear in their native languages. This is often a day when various languages are read and sung in worship, thereby showing that the Spirit calls in many and various ways.

The Bible itself is a cross-cultural collection of books. When we read from Scripture, we have a lens into ancient cultures, each with distinctive worldviews and traditions.

A hymnal is another tangible cross-cultural resource. We receive texts from many cultures, either in translation or in the original language (Think "Children of the Heavenly Father" (ELW #781) from Sweden or "O Living Breath of God" (ELW #407) which has an original Argentine text paired with a Scandinavian tune). The majority of hymns come to us from some kind of sharing between cultures.

Musical expression is often the most cross-cultural experience. Including music of another culture is best done in an intentional and sensitive manner, taking the time to learn how the music is best led and sung. (See Musician's Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship in the bibliography, p. 20).

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

"Care should be taken that music, art, architecture, gestures and postures, and other elements of different cultures are understood and respected when they are used by churches elsewhere in the world." (NS 5.2)

See this example of <u>First-Plymouth Church</u> in Lincoln, Nebraska, singing a hymn by I-to Loh, thus sharing a tune from Asia in a predominately Anglo community.

#### **Questions**

Take a few moments with a hymnal. What hymns and songs of another culture does your congregation know? (Hint: It is perhaps many more than you think.)

Some congregations have chosen to print all music in bulletins rather than purchase hymnals. Could not seeing the songs of many cultures bound in one resource limit our appreciation for cross-cultural sharing?

Can you have a musical exchange with another local worshiping community? Would using the internet (Skype, perhaps) allow you to experience another's worship, perhaps from the other side of the world?

### How Does Worship Engage Mind, Body and Spirit? Culture and Ritual Practice

#### **Keeping the Holy Central: Celebrating As One**

In worship we celebrate that we are one church gathered together in one baptism, one faith, one Lord. When we are considering the vibrancy of our local worship, we begin by recognizing a shared foundation. Together as a body of Christ, we pray. We are baptized into the triune God. We are fed at the Lord's table. We offer blessing.

How we do these things will differ, but these holy signs unite us as Christ's body.

#### Being Who You Are: Ritual Practice in Your Context

While many of the actions of Christian worship are shared, how we practice these rituals distinguishes us as a particular incarnation of Christ's body in the world.

#### Prayer

Christians around the world pray for healing, courage and strength. We all give thanks and rejoice. Yet how, for whom, and for what we pray is contextual.

Consider the Lord's Prayer. We share this scriptural prayer, yet express it in different languages and versions. See this <u>video</u> of the prayer signed and sung.

Churches pray for the world through intercessory prayer. This form of prayer is perhaps the most contextual, written not only for a specific place but also for a specific time. Day by day and hour by hour, these prayers arise from current needs. (See *Praying for the Whole World* in bibliography on p. 20.)

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"The resurrected Christ whom we worship, and through whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we know the grace of the Triune God, transcends and is indeed beyond all cultures." (NS 2.1)

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<u>Grace Lutheran Church</u> prepares their prayers locally and prays using the particularities of their local culture.

An example of intercessory prayer following the format outlined in Evangelical Lutheran Worship is practiced at <u>St. John's Lutheran</u> in Summit, New Jersey.

Consider also these other examples of prayer:

- Church on the Green
- Ethiopian Orthodox
- African-American

#### **Questions**

Who writes your prayers of intercession? Do you pray for local people, places and events? Do you pray for other cultures and churches? How might your local intercessions be composed in a more communal manner?

If you looked at the above online clips, what do they have in common? What distinguishes them from one another?

#### Sacraments

We share in communion as one body in Christ, but how your church practices communion is a contextual matter.

Many congregations, like <u>Our Saviour's</u>, Minneapolis, bake their own communion bread.

Some congregations like <u>Hosanna Lutheran</u> in Liberty, Missouri, grow their own grapes and partner with a local winemaker to produce their own communion wine.

#### Questions

In addition to the bread and wine, what other contextual choices might you make regarding Holy Communion? For example: movement to and from the table, formation for receiving, or the inclusion of children.

#### Blessings and Local Traditions

In worship, we give blessing. What elements of local culture and life together can be incorporated into your worship? (For more on cultural assimilation and contextual worship, see NS 3.4, 3.5 p. 17.)

In every community, the people of God live out their baptismal vocations through a variety of callings. Many rural congregations, like <a href="Christ\_Lutheran">Christ\_Lutheran</a>, Le Mars, Iowa, affirm the baptismal vocation of farmers by blessing seeds and tractors in the spring on Rogation Sunday.

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"The assembly for worship, at its best, can be a truly local group, with an intense symbolic center but with a wide open door. The linkages between assemblies together with their liturgical remembrance of the needs of the world can mean that a community may be concretely here, in one place, while strongly bound also to many others in other places, away from here." (Lathrop, Holy People, p. 12)

"In contextualization the fundamental values and meanings of both Christianity and local cultures must be respected." (NS 3.5)

House for All Sinners and Saints in urban Denver offers an annual bicycle blessing in worship.

#### **Questions**

What vocations are prominent in your local context that might suggest a rite of blessing or affirmation in your community's Sunday worship?

#### Movement

We use our bodies in worship when we process or move, either as worship leaders or as the whole assembly. These kinds of gestures and movement vary greatly across cultures. Note the two examples below from Africa and Great Britain.

- Offering procession in the Central African Republic
- Candlelight procession

#### Question

Jesus was "on the move," living a very bodily existence. Do you think your congregation is at home with bodily expression in worship? How are these attitudes shaped by your local culture?

### In, But Not of the World: What is Counter-cultural in Your Ritual Practice?

#### The same for all

In communion, all people receive the same amount. This is indeed a counter-cultural action. The value of the world might be to achieve and receive what you are due by your work, but at the communion table, we receive not by merit, but by grace.

#### And it was good

So often the surrounding culture treats with irreverence the creation and the human body. Both human bodies and the body called earth are regularly exploited. For an example of a liturgy that confesses our lack of care for the earth, see "For the Healing of Creation" by Susan Briehl and Tom Witt in "Singing our Prayer."

When the church offers blessings of human bodies (healing services are one example), blessings over animals (on St. Francis of Assisi), and blessings for the earth itself, we affirm the goodness of God's world.

#### Question

Can you think of other ways the church's rituals are counter-cultural, transforming rather than conforming to the world?

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### Accompanying One Another: Welcoming Gifts of Other Cultures in Worship

Many congregations find ways to encounter one another by incorporating the gifts of other cultures. <u>Pueblo de Dios</u> in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, incorporates traditions from the local Latino community in worship throughout the year.

Sometimes cross-cultural sharing can be very simple kinds of things:

- Using a prayer response or posture from another language or culture
- Incorporating dance and movement from other cultures

Other times sharing might be more involved, including traditions important to a community such as Neuestra Señora de Guadalupe for the Latino community or Native American traditions for Christian congregations rooted in that culture. (See words of guidance on dynamic equivalence, NS 3.2, 3.3 p. 17.)

#### Question

What other examples of cross-cultural sharing can you highlight? Have you experienced such sharing in your worship?

Keeping the holy central. Being who you are. In, but not of the world. Accompanying one another.

Transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, cross cultural.

Whichever language is most helpful, both describe four ways, four lenses with which to view the church's worship and its relationship with culture.

Whether through visual art, music, ritual or other dimensions of worship, these lenses can help us notice what merits a closer look or a different angle. What aspects of your worship communicate what is central to Christians? How might worship better reflect your particular context, revealing the belief in a God who dwells among us? To what must you give a resounding "no" if you are to be faithful to Christ's call? How might you be humble, discovering how accompanying other cultures broadens and deepens your understanding of the divine?

Such questions are challenging, to be sure, but also enriching. From them can arise more questions, signs of your care for being church in the world God loves. In the church's thinking, conversations, questions and ventures old and new, we trust Christ's light and love leading the way.

"Cross-cultural sharing is possible for every church, but is especially needed in multicultural congregations..." (NS 5.1)

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#### Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Worship is the heart and pulse of the Christian Church. In worship we celebrate together God's gracious gifts of creation and salvation, and are strengthened to live in response to God's grace. Worship always involves actions, not merely words. To consider worship is to consider music, art, and architecture, as well as liturgy and preaching.
- 1.2. The reality that Christian worship is always celebrated in a given local cultural setting draws our attention to the dynamics between worship and the world's many local cultures.
- 1.3 Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways. First, it is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures. In all four dynamics, there are helpful principles which can be identified.

#### 2. Worship as Transcultural

- 2.1. The resurrected Christ whom we worship, and through whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we know the grace of the Triune God, transcends and indeed is beyond all cultures. In the mystery of his resurrection is the source of the transcultural nature of Christian worship. Baptism and Eucharist, the sacraments of Christ's death and resurrection, were given by God for all the world. There is one Bible, translated into many tongues, and biblical preaching of Christ's death and resurrection has been sent into all the world. The fundamental shape of the principal Sunday act of Christian worship, the Eucharist or Holy Communion, is shared across cultures: the people gather, the Word of God is proclaimed, the people intercede for the needs of the Church and the world, the eucharistic meal is shared, and the people are sent out into the world for mission. The great narratives of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit, and our Baptism into him, provide the central meanings of the transcultural times of the church's year: especially Lent/Easter/Pentecost, and, to a lesser extent, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany. The ways in which the shapes of the Sunday Eucharist and the church year are expressed vary by culture, but their meanings and fundamental structure are shared around the globe. There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one Eucharist.
- 2.2. Several specific elements of Christian liturgy are also transcultural, e.g., readings from the Bible (although of course the translations vary), the ecumenical creeds and the Our Father, and Baptism in water in the Triune Name.
- 2.3. The use of this shared core liturgical structure and these shared liturgical elements in local congregational worship—as well as the shared act of people assembling together, and the shared provision of diverse leadership in that assembly (although the space for the assembly and the manner of the leadership vary)—are expressions of Christian unity across time, space, culture, and confession. The recovery in each congregation of the clear centrality of these transcultural and ecumenical elements renews the sense of this Christian unity and gives all churches a solid basis for authentic contextualization.

#### 3. Worship as Contextual

3.1. Jesus whom we worship was born into a specific culture of the world. In the mystery of his incarnation are the model and the mandate for the contextualization of Christian worship.

God can be and is encountered in the local cultures of our world. A given culture's values and patterns, insofar as they are consonant with the values of the Gospel, can be used to express the meaning and purpose of Christian worship. Contextualization is a necessary task for the Church's mission in the world, so that the Gospel can be ever more deeply rooted in diverse local cultures.

- 3.2. Among the various methods of contextualization, that of dynamic equivalence is particularly useful. It involves re-expressing components of Christian worship with something from a local culture that has an equal meaning, value, and function. Dynamic equivalence goes far beyond mere translation; it involves understanding the fundamental meanings both of elements of worship and of the local culture, and enabling the meanings and actions of worship to be "encoded" and re-expressed in the language of local culture.
- 3.3. In applying the method of dynamic equivalence, the following procedure may be followed. First, the liturgical ordo (basic shape) should be examined with regard to its theology, history, basic elements, and cultural backgrounds. Second, those elements of the ordo that can be subjected to dynamic equivalence without prejudice to their meaning should be determined. Third, those components of culture that are able to re-express the Gospel and the liturgical ordo in an adequate manner should be studied. Fourth, the spiritual and pastoral benefits our people will derive from the changes should be considered.
- 3.4. Local churches might also consider the method of creative assimilation. This consists of adding pertinent components of local culture to the liturgical ordo in order to enrich its original core. The baptismal ordo of "washing with water and the Word", for example, was gradually elaborated by the assimilation of such cultural practices as the giving of white vestments and lighted candles to the neophytes of ancient mystery religions. Unlike dynamic equivalence, creative assimilation enriches the liturgical ordo—not by culturally re-expressing its elements, but by adding to it new elements from local culture.
- 3.5. In contextualization the fundamental values and meanings of both Christianity and of local cultures must be respected.
- 3.6. An important criterion for dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation is that sound or accepted liturgical traditions are preserved in order to keep unity with the universal Church's tradition of worship, while progress inspired by pastoral needs is encouraged. On the side of culture, it is understood that not everything can be integrated with Christian worship, but only those elements that are connatural to (that is, of the same nature as) the liturgical ordo. Elements borrowed from local culture should always undergo critique and purification, which can be achieved through the use of biblical typology.

#### 4. Worship as Counter-cultural

- 4.1. Jesus Christ came to transform all people and all cultures, and calls us not to conform to the world, but to be transformed with it (Romans 12:2). In the mystery of his passage from death to eternal life is the model for transformation, and thus for the counter-cultural nature of Christian worship. Some components of every culture in the world are sinful, dehumanizing, and contradictory to the values of the Gospel. From the perspective of the Gospel, they need critique and transformation. Contextualization of Christian faith and worship necessarily involves challenging of all types of oppression and social injustice wherever they exist in earthly cultures.
- 4.2. It also involves the transformation of cultural patterns which idolize the self or the local group at the expense of a wider humanity, or which give central place to the acquisition of wealth at the expense of the care of the earth and its poor. The tools of the counter-

cultural in Christian worship may also include the deliberate maintenance or recovery of patterns of action which differ intentionally from prevailing cultural models. These patterns may arise from a recovered sense of Christian history, or from the wisdom of other cultures.

#### 5. Worship as Cross-cultural

- 5.1. Jesus came to be the Savior of all people. He welcomes the treasures of earthly cultures into the city of God. By virtue of Baptism, there is one Church; and one means of living in faithful response to Baptism is to manifest ever more deeply the unity of the Church. The sharing of hymns and art and other elements of worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen the sense of the communio of the Church. This sharing can be ecumenical as well as cross-cultural, as a witness to the unity of the Church and the oneness of Baptism. Cross-cultural sharing is possible for every church, but is especially needed in multicultural congregations and member churches.
- 5.2. Care should be taken that the music, art, architecture, gestures and postures, and other elements of different cultures are understood and respected when they are used by churches elsewhere in the world. The criteria for contextualization (above, sections 3.5 and 3.6) should be observed.

#### 6. Challenge to the Churches

- 6.1. We call on all member churches of the Lutheran World Federation to undertake more efforts related to the transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural nature of Christian worship. We call on all member churches to recover the centrality of Baptism, Scripture with preaching, and the every-Sunday celebration of the Lord's Supper—the principal transcultural elements of Christian worship and the signs of Christian unity—as the strong center of all congregational life and mission, and as the authentic basis for contextualization. We call on all churches to give serious attention to exploring the local or contextual elements of liturgy, language, posture and gesture, hymnody and other music and musical instruments, and art and architecture for Christian worship—so that their worship may be more truly rooted in the local culture. We call those churches now carrying out missionary efforts to encourage such contextual awareness among themselves and also among the partners and recipients of their ministries. We call on all member churches to give serious attention to the transcultural nature of worship and the possibilities for cross-cultural sharing. And we call on all churches to consider the training and ordination of ministers of Word and Sacrament, because each local community has the right to receive weekly the means of grace.
- 6.2. We call on the Lutheran World Federation to make an intentional and substantial effort to provide scholarships for persons from the developing world to study worship, church music, and church architecture, toward the eventual goal that enhanced theological training in their churches can be led by local teachers.
- 6.3. Further, we call on the Lutheran World Federation to continue its efforts related to worship and culture into the next millennium. The tasks are not quickly accomplished; the work calls for ongoing depth-level research and pastoral encouragement. The Worship and Culture Study, begun in 1992 and continuing in and past the 1997 LWF Assembly, is a significant and important beginning, but the task calls for unending efforts. Giving priority to this task is essential for evangelization of the world.

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### How did the Nairobi Statement come to be? What is its value today? From someone who served on the development team

A few texts, a few study reports, have a continued resonance, a longer life than one might have expected. The Nairobi Statement is one of these.

The product of the Lutheran World Federation Worship and Culture Study in the 1990s, the Statement arose from the face-to-face discussions of Lutherans from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, the Central African Republic, Chile, China, Germany, India, Japan, Kenya, New Guinea, Norway, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, and the USA, as these participants urgently talked together about faithful worship in Lutheran churches in our time. They were helped in this discussion by ecumenical partners who came from the Philippines, Kenya and the USA. They were convened by the Rev. S. Anita Stauffer, and it was she who created the draft which, at a meeting in Kenya in 1996, became the whole group's Nairobi Statement. I remember this meeting and its discussions with deep joy. I was glad to help a little as Pastor Stauffer, with the participants and with the other principal resource person, Fr. Anscar Chupungco OSB, worked through the draft. But then I, too, probably expected the final Statement to suffer the fate of many other church reports: it would soon be forgotten.

It has not been forgotten. Pastor Stauffer has since tragically and too soon died. So has Fr. Chupungco. But their work—and the work of the whole study team—is still being read and discussed. It is widely quoted. It has been at the center of a recent ecumenical collection of studies, with voices from many churches joining the discussion (Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, ed., *Worship and Culture: Foreign Country* or Homeland, Eerdmans 2014).

And it comes now to you. I urge you to join the discussion. Use the Statement as the tool it was meant to be. The authors in this publication will help you as you ask specifically how your own congregation's worship can be more faithfully and clearly centered in the *transcultural* gift of word and sacrament while at the same time being *contextual* in your place, *counter-cultural* when that is needed, and enriched by the responsible welcoming of *cross-cultural* gifts. These are questions that rightly belong among Lutherans who confess, with the Augsburg Confession, that church is always an assembly around Christ's gospel in word and sacrament and that these, and not our sometimes wonderful but culturally differing ceremonies, make us church and give us unity. And these questions are still the most urgent questions about worship in our time. They are lively, interesting, important questions now for you.

Gordon W. Lathrop

Gordon W. Lathrop is an ELCA pastor, a retired seminary professor, and the author of *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Fortress 1993), *Central Things: Worship in Word and Sacrament* (Augsburg Fortress 2005), and *The Pastor: A Spirituality* (Fortress 2006), among other books. He was, along with Anscar Chupungco OSB, one of the two resource people for the Lutheran World Federation Worship and Culture Study, 1993-1999. He lives in Arlington, Virginia.

#### For Further Reading

#### Nairobi Statement

A PDF of the full **Nairobi Statement** 

Vasconcelos-Wilkey, Glaucia, ed. Worship and Culture: Foreign Country or Homeland? Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. *A thorough collection of essays related to the 1996 Nairobi Statement*.

To access the links to online resources, use the online version of this document available at ELCA.org/worship.

#### **ELCA Resources**

*In These Or Similar Words: Crafting Language for Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015. A helpful guide for creating contextual language for worship.

*Leading Worship Matters: A Sourcebook for Preparing Worship Leaders.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013. A collection of practical articles related to all forms of worship leadership.

*Musician's Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007. A resource that gives practical guidance on all hymns and songs in Evangelical Lutheran Worship as well as essays focused on diverse styles and cultures.

*Principles for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available for download at www.ELCA.org in **English** and **Spanish**. ELCA principles related to language, preaching, worship space, and music.

**Frequently Asked Questions**. An online collection of questions/responses on a host of worship topics.

Ramshaw, Gail. *Praying for the Whole World: A Handbook for Intercessors*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016. A brief and helpful guide for locally crafting intercessory prayer.

#### **Ecumenical Resources**

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Faith and Order Paper #111.* Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982. A document that deals especially with the transcultural aspects of Christian worship.

*Duck, Ruth C. Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2013. A comprehensive, recent book on worship that addresses cultural diversity throughout.

Hawn, C. Michael. *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship.* Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2003. A book that explores the themes of multicultural worship including case studies from churches and a worship audit for culturally conscious congregations.

Miller, Barbara Day. *Encounters with the Holy: A Conversational Model for Worship Planning*. The Alban Institute, 2010. A resource to help congregations broaden participation in worship planning and reflection.

Plantiga, Cornlius, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom. *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. This study series from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, written as a group project, presents a wide constellation of liturgical communities' approaches to worship and culture.

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