



Worship and Liturgical Resources

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Place Where We Worship

A module about space where we worship; thoughtful preparation of existing spaces, changing or creating worship spaces, and the environment of worship. Written by the Rev. D. Foy Christopherson.

Leader's Guide

Revised: 6/2010

Notes for Leaders

Format

These modules were prepared by the churchwide worship staff and have been reviewed by a variety of reviewers around the church. Some of the sections have been carefully worded in response to ongoing debates about worship in the ELCA and comments and questions that are regularly fielded by the worship staff. Therefore, conversation with the worship staff about the content of the module is strongly advised, especially where there is confusion or disagreement with the assertions of the text.

A full text is provided. For the most natural and engaging presentation, you may choose to use the script as a guide putting the points into your own words. Take some time to consider your leadership and presentation style. You may decide create PowerPoint presentation for visual support of the module.

Notes and instructions for the leader are in *italics*.

Throughout the module, there is opportunity for the participants to discuss in small groups. Be prepared to assist people in forming those small groups and prepare for the movement between the large group and small groups when you set up the room.

Handouts have been developed that coordinate with the presentation. Be sure to make enough copies for all participants.

Consider an invitation to a musician who can lead participants in singing for the opening or closing devotional time of the module. If no musician is available, be sure to use hymns or songs that can be easily sung without musical accompaniment.

Although this module was written to be completed in a 3 hour time frame, it may take longer especially if participants are given a lot of time for discussion. You may need to edit the content down to suit your needs and time frame or plan for a longer time to present the module.

Physical arrangement

In a workshop about space, the physical arrangement is important. Two venues might be used: (1) the presentation venue, and (2) the “fieldtrip” (the local worship room) venue.

If visual projection is to be used, a clear view of a large bright screen is important. Participants arranged, based on the size of the group, in one large circle, or at multiple circular tables of approximately 6 participants per table.

Digging Deeper

This module contains a number of excuses titled, “Digging Deeper.” These sections, set off in text boxes, offer the presenter more information for further discussion that may or may not be included in the presentation. The presenter should review these sections and consider the context of the presentation determining if the information will be helpful to the participants.

The “Digging Deeper” sections also contain a number of discussion questions for participants. Again, context will determine if these questions are appropriate for your presentation.

Group discussion

Group discussions work best in small groups of 4 to 8 people. It may be beneficial for the same group to meet together throughout the event. If there are people from multiple congregations, encourage people to be in conversation with people from different congregations. You may decide to “count off” by the number of groups and then have like numbers gather together.

Be prepared to facilitate times of “reporting” from the small groups. Some groups may need encouragement to stay on task and focus their comments on the question at hand.

This module has been prepared assuming that the audience will be from any member of the assembly, not only worship leaders, planners, musicians, and pastors. If you know that there will be a number of people for whom much of this module would be a review, you may enlist their assistance with small group leadership.

Fielding Questions

Before leading the module, take some time to reflect about how you will respond to questions from the participants. Feel free to provide that e-mail address during your presentation. Be prepared to stop unhelpful conversations in a way that validates diversity and redirects back to the topic at hand.

A good strategy for responding to ideas from the participants is to encourage other participants to comment, balancing both the positive aspects and challenges presented by the idea.

Breaks

Breaks may be scheduled after most any section or group discussion time; two are suggested in the document.

Resource Review

Before facilitating this module, it may be helpful to review the following resources:

The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament (1997) available online at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/The-Use-of-the-Means-of-Grace.aspx> Pay particular attention to Part I: Proclamation and the Christian Assembly.

Renewing Worship 2: Principles for Worship (2002) available online at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/Principles-of-Worship.aspx> or for \$15.00 at www.augsburgfortress.com. Read the section on Worship Space. The Use of the Means of Grace is an appendix in this volume.

A Place of Encounter by D. Foy Christopherson (module writer) Augsburg Fortress (2004) www.aplaceofencounter.com. There are additional features and author contact info on the website.

Supplemental resources

Where We Worship by Walter C. Huffman (Augsburg Fortress 1989). This is a six session study; and leader guide with process guides for creating new space or exploring existing space. Includes helpful photographs.

From Age to Age: How Christians have Celebrated the Eucharist by Edward Foley. Liturgy Training Publications, (1991). This book contains helpful drawings of worship spaces.

Questions

If you have questions about the content or presentation of this module, contact The Rev. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen, Associate for Worship Resources, 773.380.2577, Jennifer.Ollikainen@elca.org.

Let us know how it goes! We would love to hear stories about how this material is being used, what can be improved, and what additional topics should be developed. Contact us at worship@elca.org.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Introduction

A theological movement thinks about “the place where we worship”

God acts – a brief history

Foundational Concepts

The arts form us

Evangelical arts

Everything begins with the Assembly

Unified space

Places of encounter

Centers of Liturgical Action

Place of the assembly

Place of the bath

Place of the word

Place of the meal

Other spaces

Architectural invitation - hospitality

Sacred space

Getting practical

Making evangelical judgments

Experimenting, honoring limitations and “fieldtrips”

Louis Sullivan’s trinity

“What makes a worship environment effective?” list

Conclusion

Prayer

Questions

The Place Where We Worship

Presentation Text

INTRODUCTION, THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

Introduction

Introduce yourself and welcome the participants. Share the location of restrooms, beverages, the plan for breaks, etc. Invite the group to mute communication devices.

Invite brief self-introductions by participants if the group is not too large: name, congregation (if diverse), and either a brief description of the worship space they come from or a powerful encounter of space from their experience.

If time allows, particularly with a smaller group, gather other information from the participants:

What is the capacity of your worship space?

What is the average size of your worshiping assembly?

DIGGING DEEPER: If you have access to the participants before the gathering, invite them to bring one image of worship space for this introduction. Have participants bring the image either printed to hold up and share (at least 8 inches x 10 inches) or delivered to you electronically for projection. As an image pops up – the “owner” introduces themselves and their site. (Alternatively participants may sketch and share a simple floor plan of their worship space showing arrangement of the liturgical centers.) This is truly a case of a picture being worth a thousand words. Manage the time of this introduction carefully. People love to talk about their church buildings!

House, temple, theatre, warehouse, courtroom, auditorium, TV studio, or lecture hall?

River, baptistery or pool?

Dining room or catacomb?

In its 2000-year history the church has tried on many buildings,
and is ever seeking a more comfortable skin.

Exactly what that skin will look like

is guided by how the church understands itself,
by how it worships,
and by what it understands its mission to be.

To begin today,
let us look briefly at the theological and historical movements
in the development of the places where we worship.

ELCA Lutherans think about “the place where we worship”

The purpose of this module is to help you
think more theologically, pastorally, and aesthetically
about some very subjective things:
the worship spaces we love, or not,
the sacred spaces where we have met the Lord,
or baptized our children, married our spouse, buried our parent.

Presenter’s disclaimer and empowerment of the local assembly:

I don’t have all the answers. I don’t even have all the questions.
Only you and your assembly will discover the correct answers
for your worship environment challenges and goals.
Since I have never worshiped with you, or met your assembly,
it follows that I can’t know the solutions
that will assist you in developing a more effective place of encounter
between you and the risen Lord.

This much we do know:
As Lutherans we’ve never been afraid of using all the arts
(including architecture, music, etc.) in the service of the gospel.
As Lutherans we usually think about theology first;
other traditions may begin with polity, or history, or church organization, or culture.
We usually begin thinking about a topic by thinking theologically.
In a discussion about architecture or art that’s important,
otherwise we’re stopped cold by a tyranny of multiple “opinions.”
We look for some theological, pastoral and aesthetic principles to guide our thinking.

Gathering the assembly around word and meal and bath is the only necessary thing.
The church happens

where the gospel is preached
and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

The church has no building code, save proclaiming Christ crucified and risen.

So we begin with our story, our history, – the story of God’s saving activity.

God acts – a brief history

Our God is a God of history.

God acts.

God gathers a people.

God makes a covenant.

God creates a community.

God lives in the midst of the assembly.

God acts.

God breaks into space. God breaks into time.

This was true for Israel:

God took a specific nomadic people at a specific time and place to be his own.

Israel celebrated the saving activity of God in space first.

As a nomadic people,

when Israel encountered a place where God had delivered them in the past,

they paused, remembered the story,

and perhaps stacked up a pile of rocks, an *ebenezer*, a remembrance.

Presenter: Here is a hymn and scripture reference for ebenezer:

(ELW HYMN 807: Come thou Fount of every blessing... I will raise my ebenezer)

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel; the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. The towns that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites. (1 Samuel 7:12-14 NRSV)

Eventually Israel's nomadic period ended.

They entered the land.

They got a king like other nations.

They built a temple to replace God's nomadic tabernacle tent.

And they began to celebrate God's saving activity – not in space – but in time.

And an annual calendar of celebrations evolved

to replace the wanderings to the holy places.

God breaks into space. God breaks into time.
This was true for the crowds, and the disciples, and the early church.
The early church visited the places of Jesus' miracles and saving activity.
Churches evolved in pilgrimage locations.
Churches evolved near the graves of beloved leaders
in whom they had encountered Christ.

DIGGING DEEPER – Church architectural history

(See A Place of Encounter, chapter 3 “*Encountering God through the Ages: A Brief History*” for more.)

Synagogues (on Friday) were the original meeting places of Jewish Christians for the synax or hearing, preaching, teaching of the Hebrew Bible.

Christians then also gathered on the Lord’s Day (on Sunday) to remember Jesus’ resurrection and share in his supper.

As non-Jews joined the communities, and Jewish Christians felt excluded from synagogue worship, the WORD and MEAL were combined and observed on the Lord’s Day (Sunday).

The first Christian assemblies were held in the largest homes of the community members. After 312 AD (Peace of Constantine legalized Christianity) Christian communities could purchase these buildings. (And begin the first renovation projects). As communities grew, they searched out other bigger buildings to rent or purchase. In the Western tradition that building was the Roman “basilica” – a secular, rectangular, multi-purpose building with lots of light and an apse (semicircular addition) at one end. This model was the basis for purpose-built church buildings that evolved a cross form and moved through the Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque periods. In the Modern period, a return is being made to a unified floor plan.

God breaks into space. God breaks into time.
This is true for us, as we have heard in the stories you shared in our introduction.
We meet God in space and in time.

God breaks into space...
We are creatures and in God’s creation, created good.
God breaks into the creation in Jesus Christ
– in the incarnation [in-flesh-ment] of God among us.
This further hallows all of creation.
As God desires to communicate with us creatures,
God uses the materials of the creation to do so – water, bread, wine, flesh, word.

Professor Craig Satterlee (Professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) has said that Jesus says to us in effect:
If you want to find me in a hurry, its bread, wine, water, word and in the assembly of my people... that's where I'll be.

God breaks into space...into a place of encounter.

Now let's look at the place where we worship
from the formation and evangelical perspective.

FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

The arts form us

Art shapes faith, whether or not the intention is to proclaim the gospel.
The architectural and building arts shape worship space.
And worship space forms and shapes Christians.
It is here, in the space of creation, in the materials of creation, where we meet God.
We form our spaces and then our spaces form us. (For good or for ill.)

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright said this about houses,
but it applies to houses of worship too:
“Every house is a missionary.
Space that is transformative changes the people who live there.
Every house is a missionary.
I don't build a house without predicting the end of the present social order.”

On rededicating the House of Commons, Winston Churchill said:
“We shape our spaces and then they shape us.”

In the book, Where We Worship, retired Professor Walter Huffman (retired professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary) says:
“The shape of the worship environment will shape the faith of the next generation.”

Evangelical arts

Some Protestants abandoned the arts at the Reformation,
but as evangelical Christians,
Lutherans use all the arts to proclaim the gospel
and facilitate an encounter with the risen Lord.

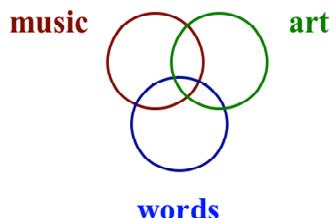
In Luther's day the emerging art form was the printing press.

In our day the emerging art form is electronic media visual art.
Lutherans use the arts as servants:

- to enhance those places of encounter
- to proclaim the gospel with more of the senses
- to foster participation
- to form faith

Evangelical art and environment seek to facilitate an encounter.
Evangelical art and environment seek to make Christ known.

Presenter: this is a good visual for a flip chart. Arts work in partnership with words to proclaim the gospel.



Reflection/Discussion on the formational nature of art:

Break into small groups for discussion:

Based on what we just talked about, discuss how your faith has been shaped by a particular building, image, or even a Sunday School or Bible illustration.

Presenter: To begin, have a brief story prepared to illustrate how an image or building has shaped your faith – for example, an image in a stained glass window that to this day colors your perception of a particular Bible story.

So, we have seen that sacred space is always formational, and can be evangelical. Because worship space is formational, for good or for ill, worship leaders are wise to always consider how their spaces are shaping their assemblies, and conversely, how their understandings of being church shape their spaces.

Everything begins with Assembly

Everything begins with the assembly.

Martin Luther wrote:

“Any one who is to find Christ must first find the Church...
Whoever wishes to know something about Christ must not trust to himself,
nor by the help of his own reason build a bridge of his own to heaven,
but must go to the Church, must visit it, and make inquiry.
Now the Church is not wood and stone,
but the company of people who believe in Christ...” (Luther’s Works Vol.10, 162.)

Paul says:

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”
1 Corinthians 12:27

Teresa of Avila says:

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
No hands but yours; No feet but yours;
Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ’s compassion on the world;
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless folk now.”

The assembly is the primary symbol of Christ in the place where we worship.

The assembly is the living breathing Body of Christ in the world.

Jesus gave us his body so we could become his body.

The assembly gathers around Jesus in Word, Meal/Supper, Bath/Baptism.

Principles for Worship in the section about worship space (S-4) states:

“The body of Christ gathered in prayer hallows the space used for worship.”

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups to discuss:

How does the architecture of our congregations honor and proclaim this statement: “The body of Christ gathered in prayer hallows the space used for worship”? Does the architecture of a specific worship space suggest something else is more important than the people gathered?

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

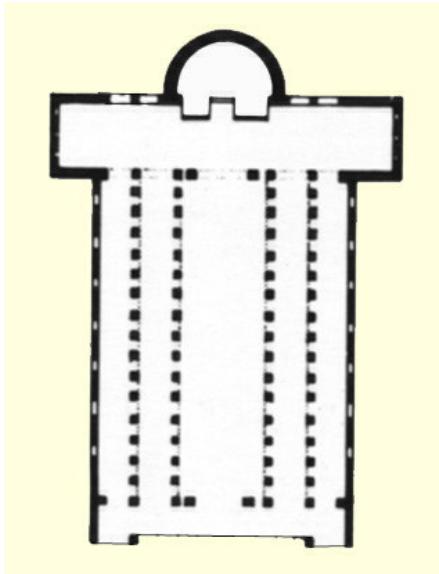
DIGGING DEEPER: *Domus dei* vs *Domus ecclesiae*

(Presenter: See *A Place of Encounter*, pp. 64-65 for an illustration of this concept.)

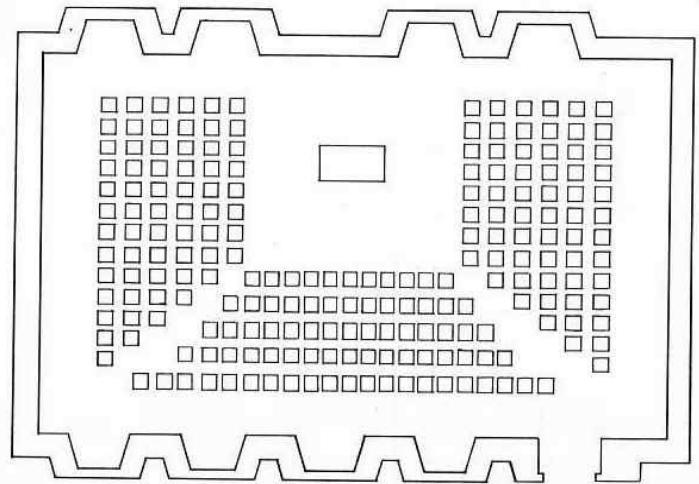
Every church building lives on a continuum somewhere between being a “house of God” and a “house of the Church” (God’s people). Does your church keep the world out with many steps, stained glass, and generate a sense of awe? Does it have a strong sense of transcendence? If so, it tends toward “house of God.” Does your church tend to invite the world in with easy access, open clear windows, comfortable places to gather and be “church”? Does it have a sense of familiarity? If so, it tends toward “house of the Church.” Every assembly decides where it is most comfortable along that continuum. What kind of holy space is your church building?

Unified space

Presenter: this is a good visual for a flip chart – in rough outline. (It could be prepared before the session.)



2-part space



unified space

4. In the Schloss Rothenfels-am-Main castle in Germany, designed in 1928 by liturgist Romano Guardini and architect Rudolf Schwarz.

Twentieth century church architecture and the reforms of the liturgical churches following the 1962 Roman Catholic Second Vatican Council mark a significant recent rethinking of the places where we worship.

For many communities and architects the ideal was no longer worship rooms that appear to have two levels of sacredness:

One level where the people gather, with modest finishes and appointments.
(nave or audience)

And another level, usually a literally higher level,
where the “real” holy people are – the clergy or ministerium,
with elaborate finishes, and fine appointments.
(chancel or stage)

Unified spaces,
with basically a single level, a single quality of finish and appointments,
with the assembly gathered around the table,
lifts up the assembly as integral participants in the event and not simply observers.

DIGGING DEEPER BACKGROUND

The unified space illustrated above is Guadini and Schwarz 1928 Schloss Rothenfels-am-Main castle in Germany, one of the first experiments of this kind. In the US, Lutheran Edward Sovik's "centrum" is a prominent example of this thinking.

Many of the new spaces being built today could be described as unified spaces, in the style of Guadini and Schwarz Edward Sovik. These spaces have a single level of sacrality, made that way, not by the presence of the pastor, nor of reserved bread and wine, nor because of an "eternal light." Rather, their sacredness stems from the presence of the people of God. The place looks, should look, and is incomplete without the people.

As confirmation or Sunday School students, we learned words like chancel for that place where the action was, that holy of holies where we helped the pastor serve and went for Communion. This understanding, together with those fences or rails are remnants from times-gone-by when the rest of the building might be the town hall in effect, like the common areas of our local mall, hosting meetings, serving bartering merchants and farmers. Animals for trade might be present. In the medieval period, where much of our church architecture assumptions were formed, people were bringing their dogs and falcons with them to church. The space was appointed to accommodate (or exclude) all this activity. And like our attics and basements, all that stuff is still with us.

The language used to describe a two-part space was often "chancel" and "nave"
(with attending narthex, sacristy, porch, etc.).

Today,

as we think about evangelical worship space in a unified way
that honors the assembly,
old language that speaks of two levels is not helpful.

Rather, we seek to develop places of encounter with the holy within a unified space.
Our language changes to talk about
"places of encounter" or "places of liturgical action."

Places of encounter

Christ is present as the living Word of God:
in the assembly gathered
in the word proclaimed and preached
in the meal of Holy Communion and
in the bath of Holy Baptism.

Language is emerging for these places where we have come to expect to meet Christ. In *Principles for Worship* the centers of liturgical action are identified in principle S-7:

“The assembly space includes primary centers for the celebration of the word of God and the sacraments, secondary areas that facilitate the roles of all the leaders, and other spaces that complement the requirements of communal worship.”

From this we may infer four primary centers of liturgical action:
assembly, word, meal, and bath.

Thus:

- A place of the Assembly
- A place of the Bath/Font/Baptism
- A place of the Word
- A place of the Meal

We’re talking about more than furniture here.

We’re talking about places of activity, places where we encounter God.

In the assembly we meet God in the assembly of God’s people.

In Holy Baptism we meet God in the water and word.

In Proclamation we meet God in the word proclaimed in our hearing, in our midst.

In Holy Communion we meet God in the bread, wine and word.

Notice that at each center the primary symbols are not the furnishings.

The primary symbols, which receive pride of place are God’s people, water, book, and bread & wine.

In the discussion to come, we will look at these Centers of Liturgical Action in detail.

DIGGING DEEPER BACKGROUND:

By way of contrast, Roman Catholics might count word, meal, font, and presider’s chair. Other Protestants might not include the chair but the musicians or a place for prayer instead.

Presenter: possible BREAK here. Distribute handout (Centers of Liturgical Action chart) here or after break.

CENTERS OF LITURGICAL ACTION

Presenter: After a break, recap:

We've talked about theology.

We've talked about history.

We've seen that everything begins with the assembly.

We've discovered the concept of a unified space.

And we've set the table to look at these places of encounter, centers of liturgical action,
the places where we worship and meet Jesus, in more detail.

So let's dive in.

Presenter: this is a good visual for a flip chart.

Presenter: this is a handout.

Centers of Liturgical Action		
action	primary symbol	furnishings
Place of the Assembly		
Body of Christ	people	(flexible space)
Place of the Bath		
baptism	water	(font)
Place of the Word		
proclamation	book (lectionary/Bible)	(ambo)
Place of the Meal		
communion	bread & wine	(altar table)

Place of the Assembly

We meet God in the assembly:

in the warmth of a worshiper's greeting of peace,

in the promise of absolution,

in a song sung as we breathe as one body.

in the charity and love and comfort of the neighbor.

This is the Body of Christ.

This is where the presence of Christ is found.

The assembly is the primary symbol of Christ,

the primary icon of Christ in the room because the assembly embodies Christ.

Just as sometimes we dress up and adorn ourselves for special occasions,
so we adorn the space in which we worship.

Without careful attention we find ourselves stuck
in the old two-part spaces of chancel and nave.
We remember to adorn the chancel,
but without careful attention we may neglect the place of the assembly.
Or we can forget that the place of the assembly is movable and flexible.

Could we possibly move the entire assembly from encounter to encounter,
for they “would see Jesus” (John 12.21)?
Alternatively, move other centers of activity into the midst of the assembly.
For example,
move the place of the word, into the midst of the people,
carve out the place of the bath from the midst of the people,
or arrange the assembly so they are literally gathered around the table.

In our renewal of worship space,
We work to minimize the perception of stage and audience
or the perception that different parts of the room are more sacred than others.
Do not create a “holy of holies.”
Consider the place of the assembly
when adding temporary, seasonal art and environments.
Eliminate as many artificial divides as possible:
unnecessary changes in level, fences, screens, and rails.
This is a gradual process of renewal that we began in the 16th century Reformation,
and we’re still working on it!

Break up the illusion of assembly out there and word, meal, and bath up here.
Avoid paint or color schemes or floor and wall treatments
that separate the room into two parts:
the place of the assembly from a place of word, meal, and bath.
Individual centers of encounter may have unique floor or wall treatments,
but only as they define a space in relation to the assembly.

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups for discussion:

What it would take for the worshipers in your congregation to realize they are the primary ministers in the place where they worship?

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

DIGGING DEEPER

Imagine an assembly space with a linoleum floor and painted cinderblock walls adjacent to a red carpeted platform with a pulpit, lectern, font and an altar or two all behind a fence, this area more elaborately adorned with red brick walls or wainscoting. This model is not ideal. It creates a stage and a room of observers, not participants in a communal event. It suggests what happens on the platform makes it a more holy place, and the difference in quality of materials suggests the platform participants are more valuable than the assembly participants.

Seek to create a unified space, in which places of encounter are distinct but not separate. Perhaps the platform with the red carpet could define a single place of the word. A stone floor with a rough (non-slip) finish and a skylight might define the place of the bath. Hardwood flooring might define the place of the meal. All these are “islands” or “oasis” within the linoleum covered place of the assembly.

When preparing seasonal environments for worship we need to do better than pew-end candlesticks to adorn the place of the assembly. Because of a tendency toward entertainment and stage/theatrical models, most plans usually end up with all the elaborations “in the front.” This arrangement does not respect the assembly. The situation gets even worse when the stuff in the chancel is also in the way of the liturgy. Elaborately circuitous routes around poinsettias required of communion ministers on Christmas Eve to accommodate worship environment planners is not good!

Is all the liturgical action planned for the season anticipated by the environment committee? How do worship and rite planners advise the environment planners of the spatial needs of the rites?

HISTORICAL NOTE: Pews (or chairs) were not common in church buildings until the 1400’s – that’s less than one third of our history that we’ve had furniture for the assembly – let alone nailed to the floor!

Place of the bath

Don't you love those flume rides,
with the little sign at the end of a long, hot wait that says,
“You will get wet on this ride”?

In any event, you will get wet on this ride called baptismal living!
We meet God in the bath, in the water and the word.
Water is needed for this encounter.
Water is the primary symbol in this center, flowing water.

Principles for Worship, principle S-8 notes:

“The place and practices of baptism proclaim the church’s faith.
A generous space around flowing water
reinforces the meaning of baptism for the assembly.”

It is surely true that “a little dab’ll do ya,”
and that’s the principle we rely upon in an emergency.

But to fully grasp the power of this encounter abundant water is preferable:
deep enough to drown in,
plentiful enough to bathe us clean,
abundant enough to quench our thirst,
flowing enough to nourish the tree of life.

This is the one liturgical center that might be best permanently installed,
not only because waterworks are hard to move,
but also because God is unmoving in fidelity to our baptismal covenants.

If baptism can’t go to the assembly
the assembly will need to go to baptism,

The assembly can gather around the place of baptism,
or at least be able to see what happens there.

They participate in this encounter.

Don’t you see them craning their necks at every baptism in your congregation?
Aren’t baptismal rites often the times when the assembly seems most alive?

Minimally at the place of the bath,
space must be provided to accommodate the baptismal party
and include the assembly in some real way.

A vessel of water is required.

The place of the bath needs to be waterproof and water friendly.

A non-slip floor,
nearby rooms for drying and changing,
a paschal candle,
an oasis of plants (that don't get in the way),
tables for oil and candles,
garments and certificates nearby.

Proper lighting can further define this center of encounter,
together with art reflecting baptismal themes.

If this liturgical center is permanently installed,
special care must be given to where it is located:
certainly within easy access of the assembly, but then what?
To their right or left, at the entrance behind them?
In the gathering space? In their midst?

Placing the baptismal font near the entrance of the worship space
is a powerful witness to this sacrament as our entrance into the community.
The accessible font gives us encouragement to return to baptism regularly.
We will return to the font many times after our baptism:
for confirmation, for reconciliation, for affirmation of baptism,
as new members, upon taking on new ministries, for funerals and Easter Vigils,
for an entire Lenten midweek worship series perhaps,
and maybe even each week, to encounter again the water of life.

Imagine the many times we might want to gather at the font given generous space,
a strong symbol in abundant water,
and an environment that suggests the fullness of the promises.
We will certainly encounter rich diversity in our practice here
as we work out what is right for each of our communities.

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups for discussion:

Where is your congregation's baptismal font located? What is striking about it? What might its location or physical features reveal about your congregation's understanding of baptism? What might these things communicate to a visitor?

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

DIGGING DEEPER:

Large, abundant, permanent vessels for water are usually made of stone. Granite is the best material because it is not a porous stone. Abundant stone fonts can be considered in many shapes, both historical and allegorical: six sided, eight sided, four sided, round, oval, cruciform; washing tub, tomb shaped, womb shaped. Each shape suggests a baptismal image.

A large font with flowing water is a major and exciting undertaking for a congregation. Entire books have been published about the process of preparing a congregation and a building for a font with the features described in Principles for Worship. (Consult the bibliography.)

Short of having this large permanent vessel of water, interim steps can be taken.

- First, fill the font that you have. The water is the symbol.*
- Put the font where people can see it, touch it.*
- Hide the lid! Take it off. Put it away. Get rid of it.*
- Then, begin using more water in rites.*
- Preach and teach about the abundance of holy baptism, using all the images for baptism: washing tub, womb, tomb, watering hole, oasis, river...*
- Go to the font more often.*
- Take field trips to both Roman Catholic and Baptist worship spaces that usually place the font in a prominent location..*
- Experiment with creating a baptismal center of encounter with a temporary large vessel of water, during Lent for example.*

Place of the word

From the assembly, to the font, to the word.

“Sir [or Madame], we would see Jesus,” (John 12.21; Lent 5B)

is a classic bible verse to carve inside of pulpits
to remind preachers of their task,
of what the people of God are there for:
to meet the Lord, for an encounter with Christ, to meet Jesus.

We meet God in the word, proclaimed in our midst.

The reader embodies the word as the Scriptures are proclaimed.

The cantor, choir, and assembly embody the word as the psalm is sung.

The preacher cracks open the word in the sermon, or more accurately,
cracks us open to hear the word for our time.

The primary symbol of this life-giving word is the book,
the assembly’s Bible or lectionary, large enough to be seen by all.

The furniture on which it sits is a secondary symbol.

Principles for Worship states:

“Placing a Bible or lectionary on an ambo or pulpit brings to visible expression the presence and importance of the word of God.”

All this activity is proclamation of the Word of God.

We make no distinction between a lay reader or the clergy embodying the word,
and thus a single place of the word is desirable.

The words pulpit or lectern can be replaced by an older word,

Ambo: meaning a platform, reading desk, or podium, should we choose to use one.

Lay and clergy embody the word of God there, each according to their gifts and callings.

This single center of encounter

may be defined by a platform, by an ambo,
by a unique floor treatment,
by lighting, by the presence of candles or floor torches
or a brazier of incense to honor the word,
by plants, textiles, and seasonal elaborations.

This center of action may even move seasonally,
into the midst of the assembly for Christmas/Epiphany or for Easter for example.
But wherever it is, it is from there that all the ministers of the word do their proclamation.

An ambo is best constructed of beautiful and natural materials to a human scale.
It is the human who stands with the book who is embodying the word for us in worship.
The ambo has a simple dignity that does not obscure the book or the minister of the word.

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups for discussion:

Does your congregation have one or two (or more) places from which the word is proclaimed? (Consider both the public reading of scripture and preaching.) What conclusions do you draw from that practice? What conclusions might others who are not regularly part of your worshiping community draw from that practice?

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

DIGGING DEEPER:

Avoid an ambo that suggests it is the home of the emcee, maître d', talk show host, or entertainer. Some communities like an ambo designed to not only be a reading desk, but to also cradle the book in a way that it can be seen and honored by the assembly. The place of the word should be well lit for reader and assembly and have a clear line of sight to the entire assembly. It should be located in a place where the reader is easily heard if acoustics are variable in the worship space.

The place of the word is probably the most flexible of the liturgical centers, and innovative communities find ways to make it speak. Explore ways that the community's Bible or lectionary can be honored here in this place of the book.

How does the place of the word serve for readings arranged for multiple voices?

What about proclamation accompanied by audio or visual examples?

An integrated surface to receive projected images may be designed nearby, or designed into several locations where the word might travel.

The processional cross might take up station over the shoulder of the preacher for the liturgy of the word, reminding us all that it is Christ who is the true preacher, our word of life.

The place of the word may take up a temporary place in the aisle, in the midst of the assembly, surrounded by torch bearers, or a canopy of banners.

Place of the meal

Augustine said:

“Since you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery that is placed on the Lord’s table, it is your mystery that you receive.... Be what you see, and receive what you are.”

We eat first with our eyes!

Think about Thanksgiving dinner, or Easter dinner, or Christmas dinner.

Why do we go to all the effort of setting a beautiful table,

of arranging food on our most beautiful plates and bowls, of garnishing the dishes?

We eat first with our eyes!

We eagerly anticipate the good things to come.

“Taste and see that the Lord is good!”

This is Holy Communion, Lord’s Supper, Last Supper, the Supper, Holy Supper, Eucharist, Great Thanksgiving, Meal, wedding banquet, feast of victory, foretaste of the feast to come, mass.

Principles for worship states (S-10),

“The table of our Lord Jesus Christ is set in the midst of the assembly.”

We meet God in the meal, in the bread and wine and word.

Bread and wine are the primary symbols.

The furniture is the secondary symbol.

That furniture is described as an altar-table in *Principles for Worship*.

That hyphenated word seeks to get at the many dimensions of Holy Communion:

It is here where our Lord offers himself to us,

for forgiveness of sin and for our salvation, to make us one with him.

It is here where he seeks us out.

But it is also here around the altar-table that we share in the meal, the Lord’s Supper.

It is in this place where the body of Christ appears, re-membered each week,

as the gathered assembly, and as bread and wine.

In all these ways we are in communion with God and with one another.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted at a meal, the Last Supper.

Most of the altar-tables being built today are in a table style,

rather than the tomb style of the medieval period.

The furniture style shapes our perception of the event:
toward family meal or toward somber sacrifice.
The medieval period also gave us altar rails
and all sorts of other altar and chancel appointments
that today compete with the bread and wine for importance
and with our understanding of Holy Communion as meal.

Holy Communion is a repeatable sacrament.
We return weekly to this place of encounter to receive and become the Body of Christ.

As a meal of the assembly, we need to be able to gather around the table.
Greater value is being placed on developing altar-tables
that the assembly can gather around.
That means at least that the presiding minister,
should be able to face the congregation across the table.
If we can do more than that,
we seek to eliminate barriers between the assembly and the table.
Extra steps that we once valued as signs of God's transcendence
– going up to a high place to pray –
now seem to impede people as we invite them to come and see Jesus,
and experience God's immanence, God's closeness.
Our concerns for hospitality lead us toward spaces with fewer steps,
with ramps that allow everyone access.
To gather around the table also means we'll need generous space around it
that graciously receives the assembly allowing them to come and go,
and facilitates the work of their communion ministers.
As usual, candles or floor torches, plants, and lighting
can serve to further define and adorn this place of encounter.

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups for discussion:

What aspects of Holy Communion are proclaimed by how your altar-table is crafted in your congregation? How well is your assembly able to gather around your altar table? How flexible is your worship space?

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

DIGGING DEEPER

Like the ambo, the altar-table should be constructed of beautiful and natural materials to a human scale; well-lit, and with a simple dignity. The standardized height for an altar-table is 39-40 inches tall, scaled to accommodate a presiding minister. Other dimensions should be scaled to the size of the worship space.

Vessels are necessary for serving. Some communities value precious metal tableware, the best we can afford, to hold this life-giving food. Other communities value glass or crystal so the primary symbols of bread and wine are not obscured. Others value stoneware or pottery in keeping with the simplicity of this meal. No matter the material, we value well-designed and well-crafted vessels and textiles that honor the Body of Christ. The primary cup and plate should be large enough to be seen by the entire assembly. Beyond the bread and cup, anything else placed on the altar-table is distracting and competes with these primary symbols.

Many of our buildings are absolutely symmetrical, with the altar-table anchoring the centerline. Symmetry is a very strong architectural feature. This placement of the altar-table we also inherited from medieval theology and architecture. The altar was the central thing. But what if we want the assembly to be the central thing?

Principles for Worship suggests that the community's altar-table need not be spatially centered. (page 80) It shares focus with other places of encounter, with the other centers of liturgical action. This begs the question, which will be answered differently in every context, "How will the centers of liturgical action interact with one another and with the assembly in our worship space?"

So we've established our four places of encounter,
but we still have some "puzzle pieces" around the edge of the board.
What about the leaders, the musicians, the hospitality?

Other spaces

Principles for Worship notes (S-11):

“The worship space includes designated spaces for worship leaders. The place for presiding and assisting ministers is distinct, but not overly separated or elevated.”

Though not a center of liturgical action in the strict sense,
our worship spaces must also provide for a place for worship leaders,
including the presiding minister, the assisting minister
and other lay worship ministers, and the cantor, musicians and/or choir.

For some denominations the chair or place of the presiding minister
is a formal and distinct center of liturgical action,
but Lutherans understand all the worship leaders, musicians included,
as part of the assembly.

And the kind of environment they need to serve effectively is functionally
only a little different than what the rest of the assembly needs.

The presiding minister and other lay worship leaders need a place to lead the assembly,
from which they can be seen by all, and throughout the liturgy.
That might mean a platform to enhance their visibility,
or at least clear sightlines to the entire assembly. (No hiding behind the pulpit.)

Also useful are well designed chairs to accommodate vestments
and support good posture and vocal support,
good lighting, good acoustics with perhaps sound system access,
generous space to allow easy access and the ability to lead from their chairs,
nearby tables for worship supplies,
and easy access to the place of the bath, word and meal.

Principles for Worship (S-12) states,

“Providing adequate areas for choirs and instrumentalists allow them to function
effectively as worship leaders.”

Musicians are also integral worship ministers
whose primary responsibility is to lead the assembly’s song.
As such, they are part of the assembly.
Musicians need space for gathering, and for their instruments,
from which they can lead effectively.

This means,

Good chairs for posture and vocal support,
good lighting, good acoustics,
flexible and generous space,
easy access to the font, ambo, and altar-table,
and nearby storage are marks of a serving environment for musicians.

For all worship leaders, easy access to rehearsal spaces
and preparation spaces and the gathering place, is also ideal.

The location of the sacristy must also be considered in relation to other liturgical action.

Now let's move to a hospitality question.

Architectural invitation – hospitality

The centers of liturgical action don't stand alone.

Effective buildings gather and send.

They invite the assembly into these places of encounter.

Hospitality is a series of architectural invitations.

Hospitable signs guide people from the street or parking area to the main ritual entrance,
usually the one most convenient to the worship space.

Ideally, the building's ritual entrance (the one used for funerals and weddings)

invites into gathering or hospitality space,
which further invites to the font,
which further invites to the place of the assembly,
and further invites to the word, and to the meal.

Effectively arranged spaces also send.

They send to mission and ministry in the world.

They send to fellowship, and to faith formation.

DIGGING DEEPER

Processional and gathering spaces are also important to include in any plan. Without generous processional space surrounding the centers of liturgical action the assembly is locked into their pews or chairs. Liturgy and sacraments and seasonal rites are activities, events. They involve movement by leaders and by the assembly. Think carefully about how to provide for all the movement of the rites that we celebrate throughout the year. Beware of obstructing the processional space during seasonal or occasional worship activities.

DIGGING DEEPER DISCUSSION: (for a small group) Show floor plan sketches of the relation of liturgical centers in your home congregation (as described at the INTRODUCTION). Or imagine a new floor plan relationship

Sacred space

Thinking about a facelift of worship space might raise issues of what makes space sacred.
So what makes space sacred?

Who gets to decide what can be modified, what can't be touched?

Creation makes worship space sacred. (A Place of Encounter p. 49)

Incarnation makes worship space sacred. (p. 50)

God's people and their history make worship space sacred. (p. 52)

Lawrence Hoffman,

in his book *Sacred Places and the Pilgrimage of Life*,

identifies three types of sacred places:

1. Natural beauty

for example, the Grand Canyon, the Blue Ridge mountains, the seashore

2. Historical significance

for example, Golgotha, Gettysburg, Ground Zero, Normandy

3. Human ritual and artistic creation

for example, where you were married, proposed, baptized your child, graduated,
had a great meal, saw a performance or work of art

A discussion of sacred space will help your congregational leaders

understand the special emotional bond that the assembly holds for these spaces.

Sensitivity to sacred space history is important.

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups for discussion:

Name some examples of how your worship space has acquired a sense of holiness for
you because of the history you have praying there.

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

Presenter: possible BREAK here.

GETTING PRACTICAL ABOUT THOUGHTFUL PREPARATION OF EXISTING SPACES OR CHANGING OR CREATING WORSHIP SPACES AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF WORSHIP

Presenter: this section has three handouts.

Presenter: The following methodology is explained in detail in A Place of Encounter, pp. 66-69

Now that we've covered the principles of the ideal place where we worship, let's get practical about the places where we come from, and get to go back to.

Evangelical space – Making judgments

Consider this methodology for evaluating worship environments and appointments for existing spaces and for the building of new spaces.

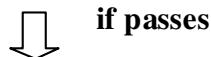
How shall we evaluate our works of art, our media presentations, our spaces?

A method for making worship decisions includes:

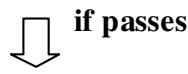
- theological evaluations
- pastoral judgments
- matters of aesthetics (quality, taste, and style)

A methodology for evaluation:

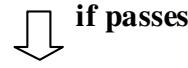
THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (primary)



PASTORAL EVALUATION (secondary)



AESTHETIC EVALUATION (tertiary)



IMPLEMENTATION

Presenter: This could be a flip chart graphic.

Tools or standards for evaluation:

THEOLOGICAL

- The Use of the Means of Grace*
- Principles for Worship*
- Biblical and Lutheran confessional principles

PASTORAL

- Principles for Worship*
- Mission or programmatic goals
- Americans with Disability Act resources*
- Our experience as the people of God

AESTHETIC

- Our experience as the people of God
- Our experience of God's creation
- Our experience as revelatory of God
- The experience of trained artists and designers

As you work with your lay leaders,
experiment, honor the building you have,
and use fieldtrips to other worship spaces to deepen appreciation of these principles.

Experiment

Experiment with temporary arrangements.
This low-risk trial period will help you and your congregation
imagine possibilities in the real world.

Honor limitations

Carefully consider what is possible in the current context.
One liturgist says: "If you fight the building the building will win." Always.

For example,
sometimes there is only one place that makes sense for the font or the table.
Try other things and the architecture just won't work – the experiment will fall flat.

Sometimes there is only one path from the parking lot, and it's not very hospitable.
But no matter how many signs and announcements
that's the way the assembly likes to arrive, though the back door.

The building (the architecture) as it exists will always prevail, try as you might.
Often it's these limitations that precipitate a building project.
In the mean time, practice the art of the possible.

“Fieldtrips”

Develop “critical eye” by taking field trips to others’ “sacred spaces”
before attempting evaluation of your own.

Separate (but never forget) emotional ties
from theological, pastoral, and aesthetic evaluation.

Presenter: This could be an exercise to the local worship space “field trip” venue mentioned on page 2.

1. *Enter a space. Walk around, experience it for 15-20 minutes in silence. Observe it in light of the new principles you've learned.*
2. *Make notes about its feel, the places of encounter, accessibility, lighting, etc.*
3. *Gather together to share and reflect upon your experience of the space. How does it rate in light of the theological principles we are imposing upon it. (These are our principles, not necessarily those of the owner).*
4. *(Perhaps a representative from the space may offer a brief introduction or their own evaluation.)*

Reflection/Discussion

Gather in small groups for discussion:

Small groups comment on one another’s photographs in light of what you have heard today.

Alternatively go into the sanctuary, or visit local sanctuaries at home with your leaders, and evaluate that space (Be careful that members of the local community are NOT present. This is meant as a learning exercise to develop brand new critical thinking concepts and tools, not as a critique or architectural evaluation.)

After a time for discussion, invite the small groups report important points to the larger group.

Louis Sullivan's (a famous Chicago architect) trinity:

Every project has a trinity:

Cost/price

Scale/size

Materials

As a client, the congregation cannot have control of all three.

The professional trades (architect/contractor/builder)

must be allowed to control at least one.

For example, we want to build a church and:

Congregation determines:	And congregation determines:	Then Trades get to decide:
COST/PRICE: \$1,000	MATERIALS: Marble	SCALE/SIZE: 12" model church
COST/PRICE: \$1,000	SCALE/SIZE: Room for 100	MATERIALS: Cardboard and plastic
SCALE/SIZE: Room for 100	MATERIALS Marble	COST/PRICE: \$ "a million"

What makes a worship environment “effective?”

Ask these questions of your worship space or plan:

- Does the space/environment gather graciously and with hospitality?
- Does the space/environment function as a servant of the assembly and of their liturgy?
- Does the space/environment foster and energize the primary action of the assembly as the primary symbol of Christ?
- Do liturgical centers encourage encounter with the mysteries of God?
- Does the space/environment exhibit a sense of sacredness both as house of God and house of the church?
- Does the space/environment reveal Christ? Is it evangelical?
- Does the space/environment form Christians in greater understanding, lead to deeper discipleship?
- Does the space/environment send to mission?

CONCLUSION

We have examined the space where we worship.

We have looked at its theological and historical origins.

We have examined the way our worship space

forms our assemblies and proclaims the gospel.

We have discovered the recent development of unified worship space.

We have explored the centers of liturgical activity as places where Jesus meets us.

We've discussed strategies for preparing existing worship spaces

to serve more effectively

and strategies for thinking about creating new worship spaces.

What questions do we have as we conclude?

Allow some time for questions and discussion. You do not have to be an expert nor will you have all the answers. Rather, consider this as a time to facilitate discussion with the larger group. Call upon the wisdom of the participants to respond to rather than answer questions that arise.

Prayer – *prepare a concluding prayer*

This prayer is adapted from the service of dedication for a church building (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly*, page 143)

Let us pray.

Most High God, whom the heavens cannot contain,
we give you thanks for the gifts of those
who have built houses of prayer to your glory;
we praise you for the fellowship of those
who by their use make our places of worship holy;
and we pray that all who seek you may find you in our houses of worship
and be filled with joy and peace,
through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

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The Place Where We Worship

Centers of Liturgical Action: Places of Encounter

action

primary symbol

furnishings

Place of the Assembly

Body of Christ

people

(flexible space)

Place of the Bath

Baptism

water

(font)

Place of the Word

proclamation

book

(ambo)

(lectionary/Bible)

Place of the Meal

communion

bread & wine

(altar table)

Based on material in **A Place of Encounter: Renewing Worship Spaces**

By D. Foy Christopherson, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, ©2004.

www.aplaceofencounter.com

The Place Where We Worship

A methodology for evaluating worship environments and appointments

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (primary)

↓ if passes

PASTORAL EVALUATION (secondary)

↓ if passes

AESTHETIC EVALUATION (tertiary)

↓ if passes

IMPLEMENTATION

Tools or standards for evaluation:

THEOLOGICAL

- The Use of the Means of Grace*
- Principles for Worship*
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PASTORAL

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The Place Where We Worship

Getting practical

Experiment

Experiment with temporary arrangements.

This low-risk trial period will help you and your congregation imagine possibilities in the real world.

Honor limitations

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Develop “critical eye” by taking field trips to others’ “sacred spaces” before attempting evaluation of your own. Separate (but never forget) emotional ties from theological, pastoral, and aesthetic evaluation.

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The Place Where We Worship

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The Place Where We Worship

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That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities, National Organization on Disability, Washington, DC, 1992.

These Things Matter, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, (video to accompany a study of sacramental practice in the congregation)

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