

Worship and Mission

For Lutherans, worship matters. In fact, worship lies at the heart of how we understand ourselves together. And, for Lutherans mission matters as mission stands at the forefront of our work and ministry. For a long period of time both worship and mission were treated as separate conversations and areas of focus. Worship has often been thought of as what happens “inside the church” and mission is what happens “outside” the church. In this separation, we have missed a foundational understanding of our life together as a church. Each week we are gathered around the means of grace and sent into the world to proclaim the good news that we have seen, heard, and tasted in that gathering. Our worship life is meant to be a formative encounter with Jesus Christ that propels us into the world for mission. Through the means of grace, God empowers the church for the work of mission. Worship is mission and mission is worship. Our gathering does not simply end at the conclusion of the worship service. The work continues as we are sent into the world—“Go in peace, Christ is with you;” “Go in peace serve the Lord;” “Go in peace, share the good news;” “Go in peace, remember the poor.” We are sent in the peace of Christ to share and enact the very things we have experienced in worship.

Consider the verbs that explain our worship life—welcome, forgive, love, teach, proclaim, share, feed, to name a few. Now consider the verbs of mission—feeding, reconciling/forgiving, proclaiming, welcoming, loving, sharing, etc. The verbs of mission are the verbs of worship and these verbs are not something the church has simply created. Rather, they are grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the one who sends us into the world to do the very things that he did.

We affirm that mission planning involves three great listenings—listening to God through scripture and prayer; listening to the community outside our doors; listening within the household of faith. The obvious connection to worship is listening to God through scripture and prayer. However, worship that is attuned to the needs of the world (praying for local and global needs, breaking bread with the hungry in mind, taking a collection to support the needs of our neighbors) will not only be listening to the needs of the assembly itself, it will also be listening to the community outside the assembly, as well as.

In any setting, mission planning is not effective unless it is the work of the entire congregation. The same could be said for worship. If we believe that worship is a participation in the redeeming love and grace of God, then worship needs to involve the whole worshipping assembly, not just one or two leaders. In worship we “rehearse” the language and practice for our lives as Christians—in worship we rehearse the work of mission. Engaging the whole assembly in worship is vital not only to an effective worship life, but it is also vital to an effective missional life.

For the sake of the mission we share, we would do well to begin our conversation about mission with a conversation about how worship and mission are mutual, and are equally important in our life as a church.

For further study there is a brief session, *Worship and Mission Study* that can be found of Mission Planning website. This study guide was adapted from a larger guide called *With the Whole Church*, which was part of the Renewing Worship project. You are welcome and encouraged to engage in all five sessions of the study guide which can be downloaded at the following address:
<http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/With-the-Whole-Church.aspx>