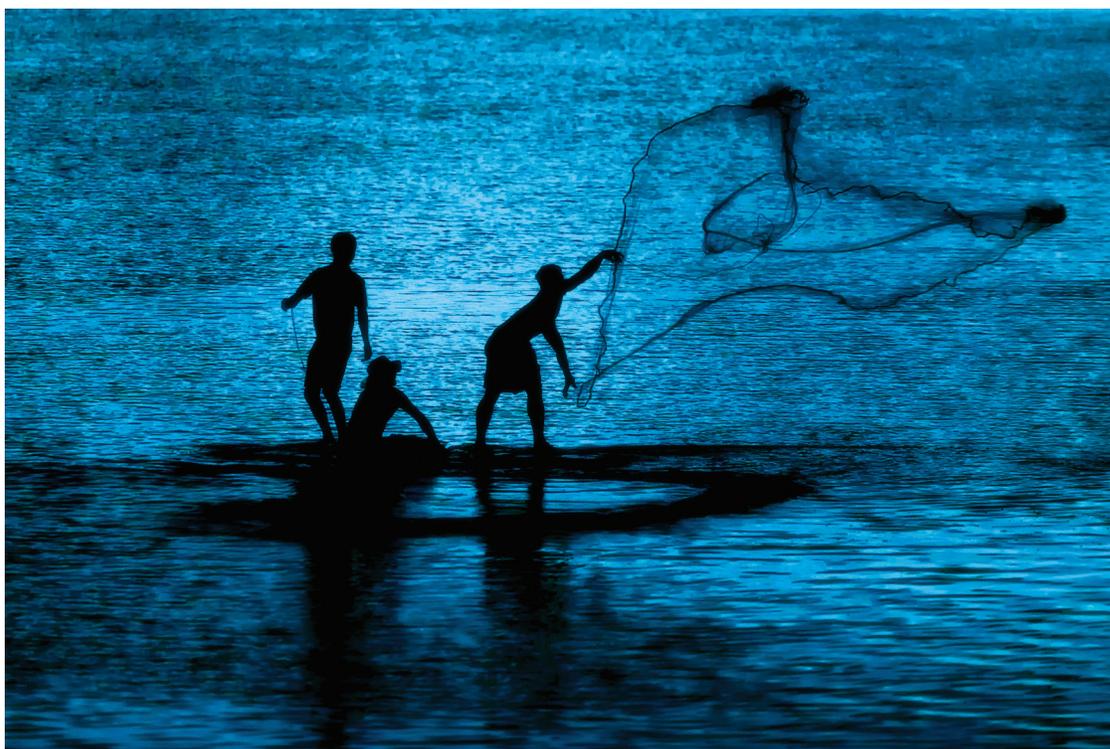


8 HABITS OF EVANGELISM



Worship • Generosity • Justice
Radical Welcome • Sacraments
Teaching • Prayer • Fellowship

8 HABITS OF EVANGELISM



**Office of Theology, Formation & Evangelism
Presbyterian Mission Agency**



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



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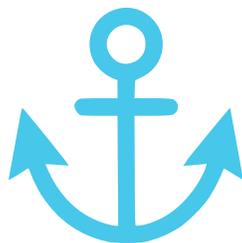
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WORSHIP

Bruce Reyes-Chow



I. OPENING PRAYER

*God of the chaos—
In the confines of a binary and calcified world
grant us the courage to embrace nuance in
ourselves and others,
awaken humility that manifests generosity
toward things we do not understand,
unleash the creativity of our souls that
expands our experience of you,
and strengthen our resolve to persevere
through the messiness of seeking justice in
the world.
This we pray.
Amen.*

II. THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP

A Generous and Expansive Table: The Beloved Community Gathers

It would be disingenuous to write anything about worship in 2020 without acknowledging the impact of the worldwide pandemic upon our worship life. Yes, COVID-19 has impacted all aspects of our congregational life, but I would argue that worship, the center of so many of our gathered communities together, has faced the most jarring disruptions.

One of the dangers of this moment of unrelenting disruption, especially when it comes to worship and the shift to online and digital spaces, is the pull toward immediately searching and seeking solutions, practices and tactics that can preserve what we have been doing all along. Make no mistake, this is a time when these are natural instincts, especially for pastoral leadership.

We want our people to feel loved and cared for, so we offer as much that is familiar as possible. In the process, we too become over-extended and overwhelmed when the last thing we want to do is spend more time engaging in the nuances of worship and church life.

As we settle into digital space and online worship, I hope we all choose to reject false dichotomies as a justification for stagnation, and instead choose to embrace nuance. Yes, rejecting false dichotomies is generally a good life lesson, but when it comes to worship, in-person or online, there are some strong ones that demand too much of our energy and devalue our ability to faithfully live and deftly navigate the wonder and chaos of life.

To name a few assumptions regarding in-person and online worship:

In-person worship builds deep relationships; online worship does less than.

FALSE. In-person as an ideal is built on the assumption that all of our in-person relationships are ones of depth. We know that many people have powerful relationships in online spaces *and* we are well aware that in-person relationships are anything but a guarantee of meaning.

Online worship is exclusive; in-person is inclusive.

FALSE-ISH. Yes, online experiences can be exclusively based on a variety of issues, but in-person worship can be just as exclusive for the same or different reasons. Online or digital, we must always seek to be more welcoming, but we cannot use this as justification to reject online experiences without examining our in-person offerings with the same lens.

Online worship is the future; in-person is the past.

FALSE. One of the reasons that I chose to be part of a denomination is that we together can be many things to many people. We are joined together by a commitment to the holy and that transcends style or space. We must be careful not to see online worship as the next great tactic to save the church, but rather as another among many manifestations of how communities gather.

You can spend time on the look OR the content of digital worship.

FALSE. This is a tough one because pastoral leadership is tired, so thinking about mastering or learning one more skillset (design) can be overwhelming. We then run the danger of falling into a mindset where we believe that we can either make our digital space visually meaningful *or* provide good content. We have been doing both in our physical spaces for some time now, so we should bring the same diligence and discernment to tending our digital spaces.

There are more, but you get the idea.

All of that said, the easy place to go when thinking about the future of worship is to curl up in this binary place of pandemic/pre-pandemic or online/in-person worship. I choose to believe that we can, and must, do better. I challenge us all to see this time as a mandate to reflect on our theological understandings of worship, release practices and thinking that hold us back, and reimagine how worship can be expressed in both in-person and digital spaces.

At the end of the day, this is not even about in-person *or* online worship, but about creating and curating a space for God's people to gather, no matter "where" that is. We have

always done the work to make sure these spaces are contextually appropriate, visually tended to, inclusive of broad participation, and built upon the love, hope, peace and joy of Christ Jesus. Today we have been given the chance to expand that experience even more.

Online, in person, today or tomorrow our worship experiences should always seek to give expression to God's possibilities for humanity. Pandemic has magnified the opportunity to do so, so let us not turn inward and constrict our experience of God, but let us look all around us and stay open to ways we are being beckoned toward a more expansive expression of God's hopes for us all.

III. SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE

Although I'm free from all people, I make myself a slave to all people, to recruit more of them. I act like a Jew to the Jews, so I can recruit Jews. I act like I'm under the Law to those under the Law, so I can recruit those who are under the Law (though I myself am not under the Law). I act like I'm outside the Law to those who are outside the Law, so I can recruit those outside the Law (though I'm not outside the law of God but rather under the law of Christ). I act weak to the weak, so I can recruit the weak. I have become all things to all people, so I could save some by all possible means. All the things I do are for the sake of the gospel, so I can be a partner with it.

(1 Corinthians 9:19–23, CEB)



IV. ILLUSTRATION

A Pandemic Story

Online worship is not for everyone, but we must be careful about what assumptions we make in order to justify upholding structures and practices that are in need of reimaging.

The congregation I serve is predominantly older—feisty and super active in faith-based social justice work—but most are in their 60s, 70s and 80s and many are living in retirement communities and assisted living. Even though we are located in Silicon Valley, one might assume that these folks would not adjust well to Zoom Worship.

Wrong.

When we moved to online worship in March of 2020, a week before the mandated shelter-in-place happened, we sent out some Tech Deacons and they helped lower anxiety about what was to come by helping people get set up, answer questions, and generally offer a presence of generosity and hospitality.

Without going into the twists and turns of our worship experience, technological and content-wise, we have managed to

collectively create a worship experience that has been meaningful to not only our current participants but to folks who have connected or reconnected with our community over the past months.

I can guarantee that the elements of our worship that made our in-person experience genuine (focus on social justice, playful and engaging, creatively traditional, and centered on the divine) did not change. What changed was how we manifested these things in a new space, how we expanded invitation, and how we reimagined what it means for our community to worship together.

Every time 90-plus-year-old Francis shares in our post worship “coffee hour” or a grandchild in Hawaii greets their grandmother joining from New York, or our new friends from Brazil or the Philippines share what happening in other parts of the world, I am reminded about what a gift this moment in time can be. No one would wish for the pandemic to have happened or see any kind of “silver lining” with the backdrop of hundreds of thousands of deaths, but we can say that we have adapted and found ways to see the hope, care and possibilities that God is revealing before us.

When Paul speaks of being all things to all people but remaining in the law, we are being given permission to embrace ever-changing and expanding expressions of faith. Hold on to the elements of worship that give worship depth, texture and meaning and let go of this or that, right or wrong, online or in-person thinking that only limits how we speak to the world.

V. HABITS FOR WORSHIP



Reimagine rather than replicate.

One of the dangers of moving to an online worship experience is trying to replicate what happens during the in-person gathering. While this is somewhat possible, this does not take advantage of the digital space itself. If a physical sanctuary transitioned from pews to chairs, worship would look different and the ability to reconfigure seating would be taken advantage of. Likewise, on Zoom or other video platforms, there are features that can help to make the experience differently meaningful. Again, worship is still happening, it just happens to be virtual.



Add more seats to the table.

Both from a participant and leadership perspective, online worship opens up a wealth of possibilities to expand who can play a part in the worship experience. Either recorded or live, take advantage of the ability to transcend boundary, border or wall and bring in voices that might not otherwise be able to be present. Community leaders, artists, preachers or mission partners can now attend to share, lead and connect the congregation to the community.



Think DJ.

DJs curate space that draw people into a communal experience. They create the general vibe, they read the room for reaction, they adjust the music and beat, and they are always thinking about how to create space

where the spirit can move most freely. These days, this adaptive muscle must be exercised more than most of us have had to in the past. Leading worship has always been an adaptive experience, but the online experience has turned the dial up to about 10 for most of us. Do not be eager to turn the dial back; rather, embrace the moment and see this as a chance to keep the spirit dancing.

VI. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Focusing on worship during a time of pandemic, I offer these process questions to help move conversations about worship forward.

1. **SORROW:** What have you lost? What losses have we grieved?
2. **JOY:** What have you gained? Where have we seen new life and growth?
3. **LEARNINGS:** What have you learned about yourself as a congregation, as participants and as leaders during this time of pandemic? What has surprised you about how you have navigated this season of life together?
4. **POSSIBILITIES:** What worship practices or perspectives might God be revealing before your community as you move forward?
5. **WONDER:** What are you still wondering about?

VII. CLOSING PRAYER

God of the chaotic skies and of the calming waters—

Call us again and again into the beautiful burden of faith, service and worship.

Gather your beloved people in ways that are generous, loving and just.

Send us into the world gladly embracing the unknowns of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Amen.

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