

Catalog of Ideas

CAW NEWSLETTER

EPIPHANY 2002

Q and A

Children at Worship staff spend a lot of time on the road. Sometimes we are with one congregation only. Other times, with a diverse group from a cluster of congregations, or a Diocese or a Synod or Presbytery.

The questions that come to us are our food, really. They help us in so many ways to dig deeper into the concerns that hover around issues of declining membership, and biblical warrants for ethical behavior and children-friendly. They sharpen our thinking, which is a good thing, even though our responses are often disturbing and provocative, perhaps even alarming.

What we intend for this Question and Answer column is to share with all of you some of the questions we are asked on a regular basis, and then offer our reflections and responses. The responses belong to no one person. These are the questions we contemplate when CAW staff meet.

Clergy Despite several options, I know I will end up designing a Christmas Eve service that looks like all our other Christmas eve services. I know it won't work. It won't work for anyone. But Christmas is such a loaded occasion. I don't dare try something radically different. I seem to be stuck here. How do I get unstuck?

CAW There are myriad ways to unpack a question like this. Our first attempt it to try to tease out some of the threads that undergird such a question:

- Will I be uncomfortable leading worship?
- Will people know my discomfort?
- Will I look foolish?
- Will it fail?
- Will it still be church?
- Will I get anything out of it?
- What if people are uncomfortable?
- What if they come expecting one thing and they get something else?
- What if people get angry?
- Can I let go of the patterns I am used to?

As significant as these threads are, they are pale in the face of our continued failure to proclaim the gospel in such a way as touches a hurting and broken world.

A Lutheran pastor made the comment, shortly after September 11th, "I am awakened by last week's events to the realization that in so many ways we have only been playing church, without perceiving the extent to which the conditions of our world are a real matter of life and death."

That statement was no less appropriate before September 11th.

People We're trying to involve our children more in the regular worship life of our church, but we need more resources. What resources do you have for Advent? Or what resources do you have for Epiphany?



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CAW There are resources in abundance designed to teach, entertain, distract, humor, or control young people. But providing resources, although a piece of what CAW does, is not our primary function or vision. When young people know themselves to be of value in the worship community ~ their ideas, their music, their wisdom ~ they become the resources. The community itself is the resource.

People We are creating opportunity for children to dramatize scripture. We ask them to sing or play an instrument. Sometimes they do. Most times they don't want to get involved. Then, when we do something big, like a pageant, or a production of some kind, it's always a disaster. It's chaotic and dissembles.

CAW This is true. There are opportunities for music, drama, even dance. CAW is developing them on a weekly and seasonal basis. Others are as well. That is no longer the problem. The problem is that we want our half dozen inclusive services per year to work wonderfully so that everyone is happy. But we don't want to get muddy in the process. This is muddy work. Change ~ particularly the kind of radical change we are talking of ~ is muddy.

But...when our young people have a stake in the building up of the community...when they are routinely asked for their contributions ~ not just to specific and infrequent "youth" performances, but to the design of regular worship, to decisions about where the money goes, to decisions about education and mission and pastoral care ~ when that happens, you won't call it muddy. You will call it vital, alive, spirit filled.

Clergy It takes too much time. If I have an option

of a two hour preparation for Sunday worship or an eight hour preparation for Sunday worship, I will opt for the convenient. We are all stretched too thin. The people that work in the church can't take on anything more. I can't take on anything more.

CAW Picture the church body as a wire, being stretched thinner and thinner. Less and less energy can pass through, and what energy does pass through meets with increasing resistance. We are too tired. We are hanging on. We are stressed and disappointed that the Kingdom dreams that once compelled us seem to be so far out of our reach as to be laughable.

We're expending our energy on the things that don't matter. We're expending our energy on the things that are required to keep this great behemoth church functioning the way it has in the past, with its systems intact.

William Easum, in *Dancing With Dinosaurs*, writes, "If churches only improve what they have been doing, they will die. The best way to fail today is to improve yesterday's successes."

People We keep trying to add things to our service for young people, but now the service is too long. Everything we do to try to be inclusive just makes it worse.

CAW Again, we're not talking about "tweaking" a service. Tinkering is not what's required. We are talking about the design of liturgy that proclaims the gospel of Christ in ways that touch and move and convert and transform the people today. We are talking about liturgy driven by the Word of God, not by the tradition.



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Take on this exercise. Gather your congregation together, young and adult alike. If at times you need to separate into groups according to age, do that, but still be on the same topic. Take apart your regular Sunday worship, piece by piece, and examine it.

Start with the procession. Why have one? Do you always have to have one? Does it sometimes get in the way of the Word? What does the order of the procession signify? Who's the most important? What is its history? What does it say now?

Look at your opening prayers. Are they always the same? Why? Where do they come from? Do they mean something to the congregation? Is the congregation listening? Who offers (recites) them? Could someone else?

How many lessons do you read? Are they always read? Sometimes acted? Sometimes sung or danced? Why not? Are people engaged with the Word? Are they composing lists of things to do?

Who preaches? Do young people ever preach? Ever help? Are sermons ever interactive? Does the congregation have an opportunity to participate in the sermon?

How about the prayers? How do you pray as a congregation? Are the people active participants in the prayer life of your congregation? Are they the same from week to week? Why? How might you develop a powerful congregational prayer life?

Keep this conversation going as long as it requires to explore your entire service of worship. Leave no assumption undiscovered. Look at everything! Take good notes, and let the conversation itself inform the next steps toward liturgical renewal.

In closing this section, we would like you to add your own questions or comments via this website. We will continue to address what's on your mind as well as ours.

