

CONSIDERING CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

The Ins, Outs, Ups, and Downs of
Contemporary Worship

Goal

- To explore “contemporary worship” from a variety of angles to gain historical, theological, and pastoral perspective on it

And so, our time together won't be...

...just a nuts-and-bolts explanation of how to do contemporary worship

...just a denigration of these ways of worship

The Sequence

- First, history
- Then, a tad of theology
- Finally, some pastoral ideas, suggestions, and case studies

Bibliography

- Today's powerpoint and a long bibliography can be found at sites.duke.edu/lruth/public-presentations/.

Where did it come from?

- The term “contemporary worship” as a technical term emerged in the early to mid-1990s as several new ways of worship were standardized and promoted to mainline congregations.
- What did we have prior to that?
 - New ways of worship that some called “worship”
 - New ways of worship that some called “Praise and Worship”
 - New ways of worship that some called by a variety of other terms, e.g., “Multi-media worship” in the Episcopal campus ministry at the University of Michigan in the late 1960s

Where did it come from?

- There were multiple points of origin for these new ways of worship:
 - Developments in youth ministry since mid-20th century
 - New worship developments in Pentecostalism and the rise of Charismatic Movements in the mainline (1940s-1960s)
 - Questioning of tradition/s by Baby Boomers coming of age (1960s-1970s)
 - Rise of the Jesus People Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s
 - Development of Church Growth pragmatic missiology applied to American context, esp. in suburban megachurches (1950s forward)

Each of These Strands...

...provided something to the DNA of what will eventually be called “contemporary worship.”

Developments in Youth Ministry

- A sense of urgency to change: “We’re in danger of losing the youth if we don’t meet them where they are!”
- A sense of future-orientation and the rightness of leaning into the future by adaptation: “Our children and youth are our future!”
- A sense of targeting and marketing, especially in music: “We have to figure out what speaks to the youth (and sell it to them)!”

Developments in Pentecostalism & Charismatic Movements

- A desire to be physical and expressive in worship: “Let’s raise our hands!”
- A sense of the direct, immediate, vivid presence of God: “He’s here!”
- Democratizing through charismata: “The Spirit is no respecter of persons! Stand aside clergy as worship leaders.”
- Intensity as a liturgical virtue: “Yes Lord, yes Lord, yes Lord....”

Questioning of Tradition/s by Baby Boomers

- Elevating the value of authenticity: “It’ must be of us!”
- The continuing quest for novelty and innovation: “Let’s sing a ‘new song’. Newer is better.”
- A sense of distrust of institutions and whatever belonged to previous generations: “Stick it to the Man.”
- Music as a marker of individual and social identity: “My music tells me who I am and to whom I belong.”

Rise of the Jesus People

- A focused piety on Jesus: “One Way! Jesus!”
- An expectation of the imminent return of Jesus: “Maranatha! I can almost see heaven now.”

Development of Church Growth Missiology

- An inherent pragmatism assessed by numbers: “What works? What works to produce the greatest numbers?”
- A fusing of evangelistic and liturgical concerns: “What works best for the people who aren’t here?”
- An inherent iconoclasm of tradition “We are as free as air as to means and measures.”

A Timeline of Developments

By the late 1980s...

- There were several strands of new forms of worship circulating and intertwining:
- Worship of “New Paradigm” churches: “worship”
 - More Pentecostal/Charismatic: Vineyard Fellowships
 - Less Pentecostal/Charismatic: Calvary Chapels
- New forms of Pentecostal and Neo-pentecostal/Charismatic worship: “Praise and Worship”
 - Within old-line Pentecostal churches, e.g., Assemblies of God
 - Within new startups and independent churches
- Pragmatic megachurches: “Seeker” and “Believer” Services, aka by the specific style of service

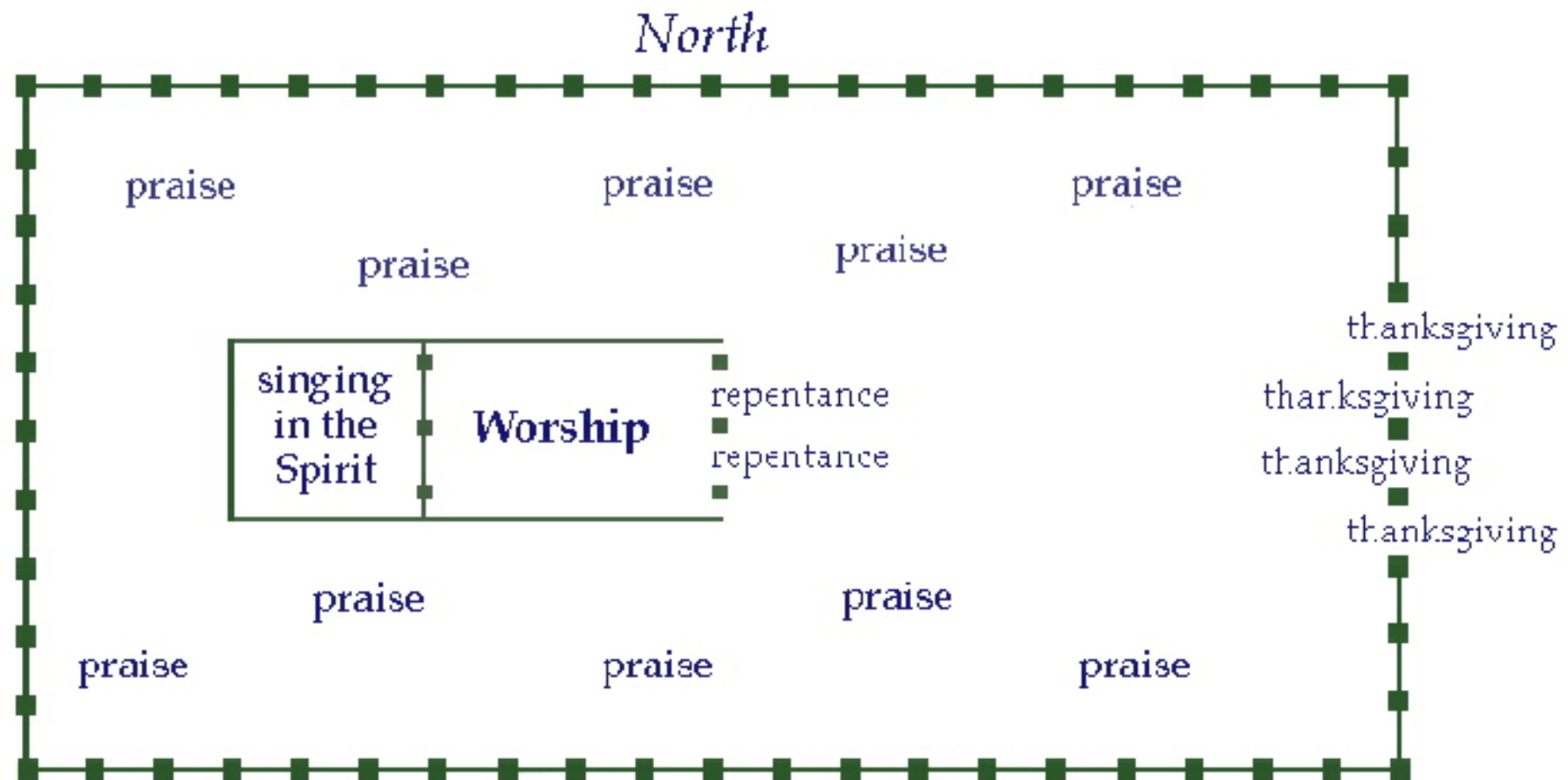




Ways to Construct Worship Sets, 1980s

- Vineyard model, mid-late 1980s: 5 Phases
 - Start with invitation
 - Engagement
 - Exaltation
 - Adoration
 - Intimacy

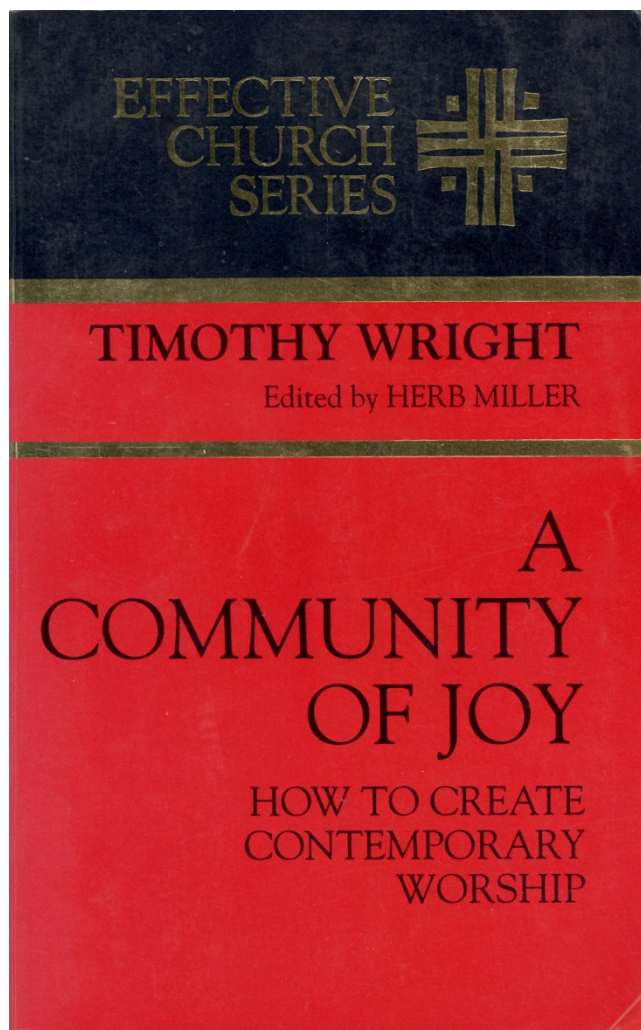
- (worship in the world)



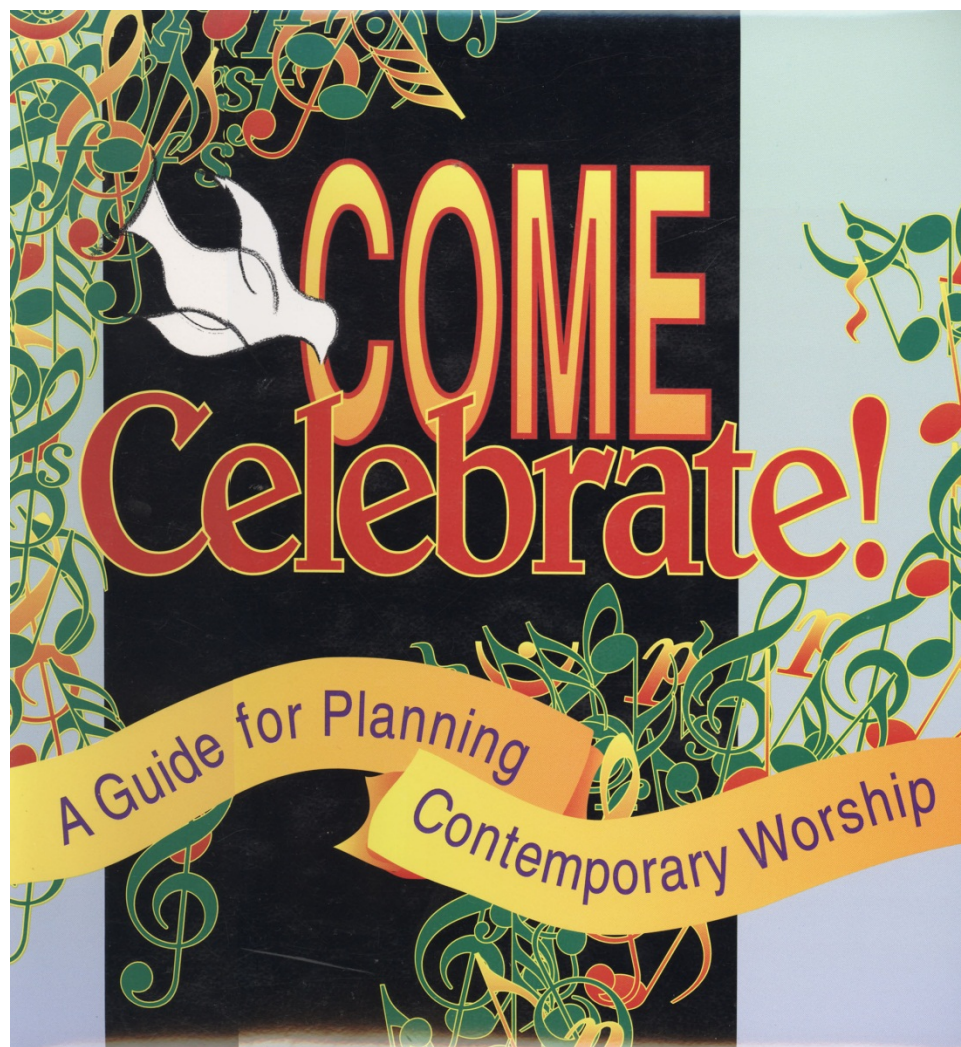
In the 1990s...

- Direct promotion of “contemporary worship” began among mainline denominations
 - Publications
 - Denominational evangelism boards
 - Church Growth consultants
- Direct appropriation of “contemporary worship” among mainline congregations, leaders, and laity
 - A residual hunger for something more emotionally and physically expressive as well as more direct in its affection for Jesus Christ
 - Attendance at megachurch training
 - Enrollment in [CCLI](#)
 - Proliferation of new services: having “contemporary” in addition to “traditional” services

Early Resources using the Term



1994



1995

A Historic Sampler: Sights & Sounds

- 1959 national Methodist youth meeting
 - Maranatha's first Praise album (1974)
 - 1982 worship at the Anaheim Vineyard Fellowship
 - Willow Creek Community Church (1991)
 - Come Celebrate! instructional video (1995; United Methodist)
 - Standard Praise and Worship music sampler (mid-1990s)
 - The new musical sound after the "British invasion" of the late 1990s
 - United Methodist county seat church, early 2000s
 - [The Passion Conference](#), 2013
- *Note: this sampler represents developments among White congregations; there are parallel developments among Asian- and African-American congregations*

A Striking Comparison: See How Far We've Come in Such a Short Time

- What does it mean to lead worship by guitar? (Fisher Folk, mid-1980s vs. Paul Baloché team, mid-2000s)

Major Developments & Evolution

- Domestication:
 - The original, underlying Pentecostal/Charismatic messiness (charismata, spontaneity) has been toned down and increasingly scripted and timed
- A dissolving—but still influencing—pragmatism:
 - The “pure” pragmatic forms of 1990s less likely to be found, i.e., a loss of seeker services by that name
- Increased distancing of congregations from worship
 - Height and distance of worship leaders and changes in the use of light and sound tend to marginalize the criticalness of the congregation, esp. in congregational singing that can be heard
- Increasing technical sophistication
 - Electricity seemingly becoming ever more necessary

Major Musical Developments and Evolution

- From folk sound to rock sound
- Decreased lag time between sound of worship music and pop music
- Increasing complexity of structure, melodies, and rhythmic lines
- Wider proliferation of songwriters and sources of music but fewer composers of the most-used songs
- Decreasing shelf life for individual songs: the push for new songs is accelerating
- Professionalization and “pop”-ularization of musicians (increased commodification and commercialization)

Questions? Comments!

And Now Some Theology

Developing Deep Commitments in Christian Worship
That Go Beyond the Style Question

Critical Questions

- If God is Triune, what impact should that have on all Christian worship?
- If Christ is both fully human and fully God, what impact should that have on all Christian worship?
- If the Holy Spirit has been poured out as a foretaste of the Age to Come, which will be the culmination of a long story of salvation history, what impact should that have on all Christian worship?
- If the church is one Body of Christ, a royal priesthood in its entirety, what impact should that have on all Christian worship?
- What makes Christian worship “worship”?
- What makes Christian worship “Christian”?

Making it simpler: WWPP? WDJS? WDJD?

- What would Paul plan? (if he was hired to be your congregation's worship leader)
- What does Jesus say/sing? (in our worship say in prayer to God the Father through us and say in the sermon to us; sing to God the Father through us)
- What does Jesus do? (in our worship, presuming Jesus continues his tactile healing, redeeming, saving ministry among us)

The WWPP Approach

- What would Paul plan (if he was your church's worship leader)?
- What kind of worship services would the apostle Paul plan and lead in Christian churches today?

How Would Paul Answer These Questions?

- What should we talk about in worship? Worship's content
- How much should we pray and what kind of prayers?
Prayer
- What's the role of Scripture in worship? Scripture
- Who get to go first? Should the initial stress in the order of worship be placed on divine activity or human activity?
Primary and initial actor
- What should we expect to be happening between us and God? Worship's interaction
- What's the role of the people? Participation
- How should worshipers relate to each other? Worship's fellowship

Cross-Check

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- Who get to go first? Should the initial stress in the order of worship be placed on divine activity or human activity? Primary and initial actor
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- What’s the role of the people? Participation
- How should worshipers relate to each other? Worship’s fellowship

Questions? Comments!

Finally, Pastoral Practicality

- What should we do?
- A variety of pastoral ideas, suggestions, and case studies

A List of Things to Aim for in All Worship Services

- Love
- Robust, full Trinitarian Gospel content
- Engaging reading of full diet of Scripture
- Solid preaching
- Robust congregational singing
- Rich, solid variety of prayer (don't lose intercessory prayer)
- Full, conscious, and active participation in all aspects among all the baptized
- A people who worship in daily life by picking up their cross daily and walking in newness of life

False Presumptions to Avoid

- “The preaching has to be topical, life-situational, or felt-need based.”
- “Everyone of the _____ generation wants a _____ style of worship.”
- “If we add a contemporary service, we’ll automatically attract unchurched and new people.”
- “I need to imitate _____ church if I want any chance of success.”
- “Form is neutral. We’ve only changed the form of worship, not its Gospel content.”

Be Able to Name the Real Differences

- Real Differences beyond just instruments and repertoires of song
- Recognize that presumptions formed over time in one style do not carry over to other styles
 - Think of a way of worship as a “language” or “culture”
 - Think of being able to participate well in it the same as being conversant in a language or able to live comfortably within a culture
 - The goal: ourselves as leaders and people as worshipers are bi-lingual and multi-cultural

Some of the Real Differences

These elements represent some of the differences of “pure” forms of “traditional” and “contemporary” worship.

- Indirect, descriptive, respectful praise vs. direct, personal, adoring praise
- Praise in the third person (God is so....) vs. direct affection for Jesus Christ
- Less praise vs. more praise
- Heightened vs. lessened communal awareness
- Booked and less physically expressive vs. unbooked and more expressive

Some of the Real Differences

These elements represent some of the differences of “pure” forms of “traditional” and “contemporary” worship.

- Overtly ritualized with culturally distinct practices vs. subtly ritualized with culturally-appropriated practices
- Sequential, one thing at a time vs. cyclical, simultaneous
- Delayed access to heaven vs. immediate access to heaven
- Expected virtues for a worshiper: patience/respect vs. passion/intensity/intimacy
- Maintenance and continuation (traditioning) vs. novelty and creativity (contemporizing)

Why is Worship Style So Contentious?

- People want to participate in worship well but have varying capacities that fit some ways of worship easily but not others.
- An individual worshiper also wants worship to be meaningful to her or himself in a positive way.
- For some, factor in negative meanings for prior religious experience, including liturgical, that was disappointing.
- For some, the worship service itself is a symbol of some other concern

Limited Resources? Consider “Traditional” Contemporary Worship

- Conduct yourself with a simple aesthetic, minimal ceremony, and warm accessibility
- Have a folk rather than rock sound in the music (acoustic vs. electronic)
- Use a more eclectic repertoire of music, utilizing older contemporary songs which are less challenging musically and vocally
- Organize the congregational singing by older models of “Praise and Worship” (see Barry Liesch book, *The New Worship*)
- Sprinkle a good diet of prayer through the service
- Emphasize genuine fellowship, care, and mutual prayer
- People who can speak of current experience of God in Christ

Can the denominational order of worship
be done in a contemporary style?

Yes!

Ideas for doing Word and Table in a Contemporary Style

- ✓ Integration of music: developing a narrational Scriptural imagination
 - ✓ If starting with Scripture, ask “What song from my church’s repertoire could I imagine that biblical character singing?”
 - ✓ If starting with a song, ask “What biblical character could I imagine singing that song?”
 - ✓ Tell their stories, orally or visually or dramatically
- ✓ Integration of music: what standard features of the order of worship could be done in song?
 - ✓ Examples: Calling the congregation to worship; prayer to be made ready to worship; prayer to ask for the Spirit to inspire the reading of Scripture; petitions and intercessions; signs of peace; offering of ourselves

Ideas for doing Word and Table in a Contemporary Style

- ✓ Integration of music: aim for seamless of the flow of the service
 - ✓ Music as the ongoing table cloth or backdrop upon which the key liturgical actions are set (be aware of what the standard acts of worship are trying to do, not just what their labels are, e.g., Collect for Purity or Prayer of Illumination)
 - ✓ More than one thing at a time can be going on: be simultaneous, not just sequential
 - ✓ Adapt the space so the musical team doesn't have to stand down for other people to be involved in leading worship
- ✓ Use music sets after the sermon
 - ✓ Ask: in light of the sermon, how should we respond? In that response, what should we say? To say that, what songs do we know?
 - ✓ what standard features of the order of worship could be done in song

Realize much of the contemporary worship music is not Wesleyan in its perspective

- The underlying theological flavors of various types of contemporary worship tend to be either Reformed or Pentecostal.
- Seen in the typical way awe is triggered in a song
 - Reformed: divine/human differential based on size, power, or space
 - Pentecostal: immediacy of extraordinary divine action
 - Wesleyan: the scope, breadth, and overwhelming quality of God's love as seen in the width and depth of Christ's saving activity, in which I have gained a share

Questions? Comments!

Case Study #1: Small, Rural UMC

- Currently a “traditional” service using order of worship from mid-20th century
- Young pastor is more comfortable with contemporary music and order from contemporary services
- Musicians, standing:
 - 60 year old electric piano/organist with health issues and poor sight; he is open to learning new music but not necessarily a new style
 - 80 year old piano player who plays what she knows; minimal musicianship
- Other musical resources: a few younger people who play guitar, sing, and occasionally offer “special music” which is received well
- Other musical dynamics: one guy who plays guitar well is open to learning new music; the choir director is also the chair of the worship committee and the wife of the organist

Case Study #1: Small, Rural UMC

- The pastor is contemplating a “blended” service.
- Should the pastor attempt to initiate something in terms of worship change? If so, what? Why? How?

Case Study #2: Small City UMC with Existing Contemporary 2nd Service

- UMC with approximately 600 members
- Two services: larger “traditional” service in sanctuary and smaller, earlier “contemporary” service in old fellowship hall
- 2nd service began in 2000, called “Extreme,” and sought to reach the unchurched
- Soon attendance reached 200 (but weren’t really unchurched, but transfers)
- Since 2005 has been experiencing a slow fading: change in musical personnel and leadership; perception of lack of support from senior pastors; rise of other contemporary options in the area; the “pillars” of the contemporary service settled into their own level of happiness

Case Study #2: Small City UMC with Existing Contemporary 2nd Service

- 2008: the name changed from “Extreme” to “Connect” so that service could be a place for broken people to connect
- But numeric decline continued, dropping to 40-50, fueled by lack of unity concerning purpose, music personnel being short-term, and a sense that service was lifeless
- 2012-2013: church attempted to revitalize service by hiring worship leader coming straight out of college who had led worship in campus ministry; some thought it felt like a campus ministry led by a rock star
- Summer 2013: new worship leader hired who is gifted musically and with a strong sense of passion; attendance has risen to about 55-60
- But still, the senior pastor wonders if the service has a sense of purpose; an uneasiness about what the service is remains.
- Should anything be done? If so, what? Why? How?

Bibliography

- Today's powerpoint and a long bibliography can be found at sites.duke.edu/lruth/public-presentations/.

Select Bibliography: Highly Recommended

- Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship*
- Cherry, *The Worship Architect*
- Plantinga & Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits*
- Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding* (esp. "Soul Food for the People of God" and "Planning and Leading Worship as a Pastoral Task")
- If you can find it, Ron Rienstra collections of "contemporary" services for seeing "contemporized" versions of four-fold order: *Ten Service Plans for Contemporary Worship*