

not its primary purpose, for it is directed toward God, not toward the neighbor. (*Christian Century*, April 21-28, 1999, p. 455)

Pattern 5

The Public Witness of Worship

LINFORD L. STUTZMAN AND GEORGE R. HUNSBERGER

“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. . . . For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

(2 Cor. 4:5-6)

Pattern: Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God’s presence and God’s promised future. Flowing out of its worship, the community has a vital public witness.

Missional worship is neither inwardly directed, meant to satisfy the participants, nor outwardly directed, intended to attract and evangelize the unchurched. Missional worship is God-directed. Marva Dawn writes:

I am convinced that we should be using new music and new worship forms; however, we should use them not to attract people, but because they are faithful in praising God and forming us to be his people. . . . Good worship will be evangelistic, but that is

Often, traditional congregations with a developing missional vision struggle to create fresh and attractive worship forms in order to draw in new members, while at the same time keep traditionalists happy — a difficult agenda. The early journey of the Rockaway Church, one of the New Jersey IMPACT churches, illustrates that. The initial impetus toward developing a missional direction took the form of innovations in worship. They worked hard to hold both traditionalists and innovators together within the congregation, while also trying to bridge differences of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, generation, and personal taste. Originally Rockaway took the route of having two different kinds of services in order to give members the opportunity to divide along lines of worship style preference. It was an attempt to provide those in each self-selecting group something to which they were attracted, or something with which they would be comfortable. They were seeking both to affirm tradition and to reach out to unchurched persons in the community.

But what became clear was that implementing such style changes in worship to attract some while satisfying others would not necessarily produce a missional congregation. While this model may have seemed at the time to be the only possibility for introducing change while retaining those who opposed it, it created difficulties that continued to absorb a great deal of energy at Rockaway. And in the end, the attempt had limited evangelistic effect. The people with the original vision for evangelistic worship at Rockaway recognize today that so-called contemporary worship — indeed any particular worship style — does not necessarily get at the root issues.

In fact, style of worship or style of music or even quality of music did not seem to be important at all in terms of the missional character of the congregations we visited. Of the churches we observed, some had lively contemporary music; some had high-quality classical music; some had tepid music led by an uncertain choir. One congregation had no hymnals because they couldn’t afford them; the parishioners learned the songs by rote just before the service began. People were clearly there for some reason other than the music.

It is flawed thinking to evaluate worship primarily for its ability to attract or satisfy. What is evident among the churches we visited is that

they are driven by a deeper conception of worship and its relationship to mission. Among them, we saw a great variety of styles and elements in worship: traditional liturgy, rock music, meditation, drama, dancing. All are ways these congregations remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, celebrate the presence of the Spirit, and anticipate God's reign. Context certainly affects their choices, but their instincts move them away from using worship to attract or recruit people, or using it to satisfy the tastes and preferences of people. Such worship would be just that — worship that is being *used!* Used for some ulterior purpose, worship becomes devalued, a tool to perform some function, an instrument for something other than what it *is*.

Worship is by its very nature God-directed. And understood that way, its relation to the missional character becomes more apparent. Thomas Schattauer, a Lutheran professor of worship, has shown this in a forceful way. He suggests that there are three possible approaches to the relationship between worship (liturgy) and mission. The first he calls “inside and out.” This “conventional” approach understands worship as the primary activity that takes place *inside* the church community, and mission as the activity that takes place on the *outside*. In this understanding, “worship nurtures the individual and sustains the community in its life before God and in its life together, and from there Christians go out to serve the church’s mission as proclaimers and doers of the gospel” (“Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission,” in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. by Thomas H. Schattauer [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999], p. 4). So worship empowers those inside the church to take up the mission outside. The difficulty with this approach, Schattauer warns, is that worship is implied to be an instrument to serve mission, even if indirectly so. And in the end, worship and mission remain distinct activities. This view has a long heritage.

A second approach, “outside in,” is what Schattauer says is a contemporary response to the conventional model. The “outside” activities of mission are brought into the context of worship.

The sacred precinct of the liturgy becomes one of two things — either a stage from which to present the gospel and reach out to the unchurched or irreligious, or a platform from which to issue the call to serve the neighbor and rally commitment for social and political action. (p. 4)

Strategies of church growth and social activism alike may reflect this approach. In either case, the instrumental way of seeing worship is even stronger, and more direct, than in the conventional view.

A third approach, the one Schattauer commends, would be to see the relationship as “inside out.” This approach locates worship within the larger scope of God’s reconciling mission toward the whole world, a mission into which the church is immersed by baptism. So then, “the visible act of assembly (in Christ by the power of the Spirit) and the forms of this assembly — what we call liturgy — enact and signify this mission. From this perspective, there is no separation between liturgy and mission.” Schattauer concludes that “the assembly for worship *is* mission” (p. 5).

So to keep the focus of worship on God and to resist the temptation to do otherwise is precisely the missional calling of the church. The churches we visited illustrate this “inside out” approach. Transfiguration Parish shows it when they are concerned to have in their sanctuary a simple symbol of Christ’s cross instead of a clutter of ornate and elaborate symbols that bear little correspondence to their calling to be present with the poorest of the poor. Eastbrook Church shows it when they begin worship with a cordial welcome to all who may be visiting, but with a direct and polite invitation for any who are members of other local churches to take Eastbrook’s greeting back to their church and pastor. They are convinced that if their worship is toward God, and if that God has come in Jesus Christ for the reconciliation of the world, and if that God has called “one holy catholic and apostolic church” to be joined to that mission, then worship is not for recruiting, and competition between churches is a violation.

The Worship of God as Public Witness

From earliest recorded history, worship was a public act, often connected with politics, the social order, war, economics, prosperity, and power. Worship was public performance of the deepest assumptions about reality held by a particular social group. There was nothing private about fertility rites done in “high places,” slaughtering bleating animals then burning them on outdoor altars, dragging a tabernacle through the wilderness. Historically, worship is the glue that holds

families, tribes, nations, and empires together. Worship differentiates groups of people from one another. Worship publicly reveals the hidden foundations of cultures and subcultures.

The biblical record of the Hebrew people in Egypt demonstrates the central role and the power of worship to transform a slave community into a nation by enabling this community publicly to reject both the religion and the oppression of their Egyptian masters. Passover, with its blood on the doorposts for all to see, with its open feasting in the middle of the night, anticipates, then later celebrates and reenacts the historical event of liberation. This event originated in worship and culminated in a collective escape from slavery and a journey in the direction of the vision, the promise, the hope, and the Land.

This act of liberating worship was not only a one-time event that religiously, emotionally, culturally, politically and geographically separated the Israelite slaves from their oppressors. For the Israelites in the wilderness and ever since, the Passover ritual was a public acknowledgment of God as the source of the liberation, the present life, and the future hope in this historical event. Passover was, and still remains, the publicly performed story of God's mighty deeds, a story that motivates the celebrants, living between memory and hope, to keep moving ahead in faith toward the promise. The Passover worship event, in its original and early meaning, constituted a statement of reality that clearly had historical, political, and cultural consequences: "Yahweh alone is God," it attested. "We are God's people. God will save us, sustain us, and bring us into the Land of Promise."

Christian worship forms itself around Jesus and the "exodus" that he accomplished in his crucifixion and resurrection. Central to it has been the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, instituted at Passover and in many ways like it. The Lord's Supper is worship, a ritual participation in the story of the Lord's death (the memory of liberation), and his presence now (the reality of the living Lord among his people) until he comes again (the promise and hope of a future completion). As the events on the day of Pentecost underscored, the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit inspired a public proclamation of the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, his sacrifice and lordship, his presence and coming again. The Pentecost event had revolutionary effects similar to those of the Exodus and the subsequent Passover remembrances of it. The fledgling Christian community became a worshipping com-

munity, recalling the recent memory of Jesus and waiting in expectation for the realization of the reign of God. We read, by the end of Acts 2, that the Pentecost community

devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
(Acts 2:42, 46-47)

At its heart, the public worship that developed within the early church following Pentecost was revolutionary, public, and powerful in liberating the worshipers from the shaping power of dominant culture. It attracted and incorporated new believers into the community. It gave the community a new identity.

Perhaps what is most telling about the way the early church saw the *public* nature of its life, witness, and worship is its choice of language to describe these things. As has often been noted, the Greek word chosen by the church for its self-description was *ekklesia*, the word for a "public assembly." Other words for distinctly "religious" groups of one sort or another were readily available. Most groups so designated were private club-like cults or groups that followed some secret path to salvation. It is noteworthy that none of these more private notions were used by the church about itself. Instead, it used a term meaning "the ones called out into public assembly." It was a term that connoted something like a town meeting. As God calls the whole world to its proper worship in public assembly, we can think of the church as the community that has thus far assembled. It lives its life, therefore, in public and for the public.

Another important New Testament word has public character: *kerygma*. It was a word for the public announcement made by a herald who spoke on authority of one who sent the message by royal decree. Jesus' proclamation and the church's are of that sort. The word conveys not only the authority of the proclamation but its intended public audience: Here is news for the world.

The same public character is found in one of the New Testament

words for worship, *leitourgia*, from which we derive our English word *liturgy*. The word joins together the Greek words for “people” (*laos*, laity) and “work” (*ergon*). In classical usage, the word indicated “a work done for the people,” in other words, something like a “public works project” on behalf of the *polis*, the city. The public nature of the word was especially emphatic. The word was used to translate Old Testament descriptions of cultic “service” rendered by priests and Levites. But its use in the New Testament signals a shift. It denotes the “spiritual worship” of Christians, that worship conceived in noncultic ways (Rom. 12:1-2). Paul is the example: he was a minister of Christ, carrying out his “priestly liturgical action” of proclaiming, so that the Gentiles might become an offering pleasing to God (Rom. 15:16). All believers are now “capable of emulating this ‘noncultic’ priesthood” and “their *leitourgia*, in imitation of Christ’s, is a life poured out in the service of God and humanity” (Mark R. Francis, CSV, “Liturgy,” in *Dictionary of Mission*, ed. by Müller, Sundermeier, Bevans, and Bliese [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999], pp. 284-85).

So we have these three:

- ekklesia*: an assembly gathered for decision making, a town meeting
- kerygma*: a public proclamation heralded in the name of one who has ultimate authority
- leitourgia*: a public works project, works on behalf of the people and their public good

The church as a community, the church’s message, and the church’s worship are all cast in the most public of language. Worship is public witness. And everything it does — when we look closely at its effects and consequences on participants and onlookers alike — has a public horizon. This is what is so inherently missional about worship.

Worship Declares God’s Reign

Worship — if we hear what we’re saying and watch what we’re doing — is a declaration of allegiance over against the present order. In one way or another, a declaration of God’s reign is latent in the language and actions of just about all Christian worship. If the Scriptures are read,

the story of God’s coming to reign is told. If hymns or praise songs are sung, the psalter’s acclamations of God as ruler are echoed. If sins are confessed and pardon assured, the good news of God’s reign is received. If baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the reign of God is shown to be at hand. Whatever else may be happening, the words and actions of worship declare that God rules, in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the churches we visited, we detected that, and something more. Noting the presence of the language of the reign of God in the words and songs and rituals does not in and of itself identify the missional consciousness of these congregations. What we noticed were signs that these churches were *attentive* to the seriousness of such a declaration. They realized how declaring God’s reign declares a contrasting way of interpreting the world, a way of interpreting things that contests all other interpretations. They are learning to recognize their worship to be a declaration of allegiance on their part. They yield themselves to this alternative regime and celebrate it as the world’s only hope.

In some of the churches we visited, this takes the form of a deliberate, prophetic witness over against some public policy or practice or proposal for public action seen as counter to the claims of God. For example, the Boulder Church engages in direct political action that “grows directly out of its identity and contrast with the world,” expressed in worship, that acclaims there is no other god than the God and Father of Jesus Christ. During the student riots on the hill in Boulder, members of the congregation walked among the police and the rioters attempting to talk to people in an effort to diffuse the violence. Another deliberate effort to speak and demonstrate the gospel within a violent culture is the Boulder Church’s ongoing involvement with the Christian Peacemaker Teams. The congregation also sponsored the “Peace Factory,” an interactive display that prophetically confronts the culture of violence that shapes Americans, including Christians.

Transfiguration’s relentless concern for the poorest of the poor and the marginalized is an indirect but potent indictment of the cherished American myths of limitless individual economic opportunity, of economic and social justice, and of the inevitable rewards of hard work. Sunday after Sunday, in the Eucharist — itself a powerful symbol of Christ’s own poverty and suffering — congregants are present with God in contemplative prayer and “present with heart and soul and

body with the poor.” The worshipers are reminded that the world they experience is in need of redemption. It is not the kingdom of God. The inherent injustices and fallenness of the systems within the dominant culture are routinely exposed in their worship.

In other churches we visited, the form is less direct and perhaps more apolitical, focusing on meeting the needs of people victimized or injured by the dominant values, desires, or policies of the general public. First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue invests its time and resources in this direction. They support a program for high school completion for drop-outs from the public education system. The scope of their youth ministry enfolds teenagers from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and from homes beyond those of the church. They share involvement with other churches in food bank, soup kitchen, and affordable housing ministries, both in the core of the city as well as in surrounding areas. Even though there is a tendency for faith to be understood primarily in individualistic ways, the social implications of that faith are consistently stressed. Bible studies for businesspeople envision not only bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ but enabling them to work out the implications of Christ’s lordship in their work worlds.

While Spring Garden Church is becoming surrounded by “monster” or “trophy” houses, it stubbornly refuses to let itself and the neighborhood forget that “the poor are always with us.” Albert, the custodian, gives shelter to a homeless man in a garage on the church property. The congregation practices prayer walks and public worship on the streets. These acts of worship are at once prophetic protests of the status quo, and learning opportunities for the participants to see the effects of sin within the flawed social structures of which they are a part.

In at least one church we visited, Eastbrook, there was nervousness about being thought to be “political.” But even this congregation’s actions make obvious its members’ awareness of the disjuncture between the dominant culture and the reign of God. Their worship is deeply saturated with music drawn from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds. This is by intention and conviction. The church, while having a majority of Anglo members, is also home to numerous people of Hispanic, Asian, and African descent. The church has been especially welcoming to recent immigrant populations in the city. So when on occasion there are multiple national flags displayed in the sanctuary during

worship, this is not merely a gesture indicating where Eastbrook has sent missionaries. It represents their own multiple national origins and the nations within which they have sister churches with whom they have cultivated relationships. The American flag is on those occasions displayed alongside the other flags, but it is not prominent or otherwise present in the worship place. This is at once a rejection of nationalism and a declaration of allegiance to Jesus’ lordship that transcends all national identities and unifies the diverse human family into one new community of faith.

In worship, there is always something of a contest going on. A worshiping community places itself in the middle of that. Whose story do we take to be the true picture of how things are? Under which regime will we live? In the North American setting, there are many versions of reality being presented, and many claims made upon our loyalty. The missional dimension of a church’s life comes to focus when it is recognized in worship how much the gospel is at odds with the going commitments of the culture. Michael Warren illustrates that by looking at how forceful consumerism has become in our society. “When worshipers who have ingested the religion of consumerism bring it unnamed and unrecognized into the place of worship, we have a radical conflict between two claims of ultimacy, the overt one of a formal religion and the covert one of the consumerism faith.” But, on the other hand, he says, “When a community enters worship in touch with the message of Jesus and its deep contestation of the consumer ethos, the act of worship celebrates the gospel in a way that itself radically contests that ethos” (*At This Time, In This Place: The Spirit Embodied in the Local Assembly* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999], p. 18). The counter-consumerist lifestyle choices of the Boulder Church and some of the Rockridge Mission Covenant Groups loom large as acts of worship when this is understood.

Worship Sustains the Identity of the Christian Community

The church is called to have a different political identity from the people around it. The symbol of the church’s alternative identity is worship. In its most concrete origins, the Hebrew word for *worship* denotes the physical act of falling down on

one's face on the ground in homage before one's ruler. Thus God the Ruler is at the center of the church's worship. The praise and prayer of worship, the reading and preaching of Scripture, the fellowship around the table, and the washing of baptism that initiates new citizens of heaven — all these define an alternative community with an alternative allegiance. (*Missional Church*, p. 119)

One of our friends and colleagues, Craig Van Gelder, has frequently said that in North America the Sunday worship hour has become a *substitute* for the church. That tendency is subverted and set right by the way Transfiguration Parish sees things. For them, worship expresses "the community that is already there; you cannot make community in worship." "Ritual," says Father Bryan Karvelis of Transfiguration Parish, "doesn't have any meaning unless you are living it." Participants experience the weekly meetings of the fraternities as the place where the life of the community is nurtured through close fellowship and by reviewing their lives of discipleship together. The Saturday morning gathering of the responsables includes contemplation of the Eucharist, in which, Father Bryan says, "we are present to God in quiet, silent, long, contemplative prayer." The Sunday Mass, then, is worship in which that communal life is publicly and collectively celebrated.

That Sunday Mass plays a crucial role in the life and mission of the community. "Ritual reinforces your living. It's not how stimulating or inspiring or energetic the music is that changes us. Rather, worship expresses a profoundly distinct worldview. The worldview expressed in worship and the experience of the people must correspond." The unique worship of Transfiguration did not produce the changes in the life of the church over the last 40 years. Rather, it accompanied and contributed to the life of the church in the world.

There is a wonderful paradox in all of this. The church is called to worship God and to do it in public view. Its worship is not about itself, but about God. The people of God don't approach worship for what they can get out of it. In worship, they are called instead to give something to God: their adoration, their confession, their faith, their loyalty, and their obedience. And yet, by worshiping that way, their identity as the people of God is being formed! They are being formed as Christ's disciples, personally and corporately.

The churches we visited give attention to how they shape the expressions of worship they will give to God. It is also true of them that worship shapes their identity as Christian churches in this postmodern Western culture by nurturing and sustaining those things in their life and witness that distinguish what is good news about the gospel. As in the celebration of Passover by the Hebrews in the wilderness, worship reflects what the congregation already is, and makes the congregation what it is becoming. God's liberated people both shape and are shaped by their worship. As an architect once noted, when you are designing a new house, you are in a sense shaping your world. But once you move into it, from then on it shapes your world.

The very act of worship can function to declare the identity of a Christian community. The gatherings for worship frequently stand in sharp contrast to the normal public routines of life in a particular neighborhood. Even the church facilities to which the faithful flock on Sunday morning for worship, like the tabernacle in the wilderness, or the cathedral in a European city, publicly and continuously announce the presence of the worshiping community throughout the week. In some cases, well-maintained or newly renovated facilities, or facilities with nontraditional symbols, present a marked contrast in the midst of decay and ruin in the surrounding environs and thus enhance the public's awareness of the worshiping community and its impact on the neighborhood.

For moderately large-sized congregations such as Holy Ghost in Detroit and Eastbrook in Milwaukee, located as they are in crumbling urban neighborhoods where they focus their ministry, simply going to church on Sunday morning is a public statement. Worship is the mode of their most visible presence in the community. While people stream toward the church on foot or by car, traffic patterns, both vehicular and social, are affected each week.

At Holy Ghost, this is brought into sharp relief by the case of Luther, who gradually walked his way into the church. At first he came into the lobby in his self-assigned capacity of guardian and greeter; over time he began to stay for worship. Ultimately, he came fully into the church, coming to the faith. The deliverance the gospel brought to him lives on in his life in the neighborhood.

While more independent congregations and those with a shorter history seem to be able to develop their own unique missional identi-

ties within their neighborhoods fairly readily, congregations such as the IMPACT churches struggle with their 300-year-old Dutch Reformed, Atlantic seaboard heritage. In one church the worship planning team asks, "How can we make our worship missional?" They are asking what needs to be changed in light of the fact that they "no longer live in the Christian nation that our parents and grandparents took for granted." There is a formation process occurring as congregations discover new ways of understanding, acting on, and making relevant the historic faith confessions that have been part of their worship for three centuries. Even the difficulties mentioned above surrounding the efforts of the Rockaway Church are part of the shaping process of the congregation toward becoming more missional. Some newer, younger members have come into the congregation. Together with the conscious wrestling over styles, that has had an indirect shaping effect.

In each of these churches, worship is shaped uniquely by the congregation's cultural context. Worship at Holy Ghost is rooted deeply in the African-American tradition. The presence of immigrant communities in and around the Eastbrook Church is evident in the multiethnic, multilingual music of the worship. At West Yellowstone, worship blends popular styles in an informal atmosphere reminiscent of a television variety show, reflecting something of the culture of a small, isolated Western resort town: informal, open, relaxed. Of course, cultural forces are not the only ones deemed important. Church traditions, and the dialogue between those and a renewed sense of the calling of God discerned in the Scriptures, are shaping forces as well. The churches are led to questions like these: Can missional worship reflect and critique the surrounding culture at the same time? Can worship constitute prophetic resistance to the dominant culture while it utilizes the genres and modes of expression of that public culture? How can worship be expressed in incarnated ways at the same time as it maintains the proper critical distance that addresses local custom and popular choices with a call to conversion? How does the worship so shape the church that it keeps the church's sense of mission on course?

Hans Hoekendijk, a missionary leader of the mid-twentieth century, was remarking once about the emerging selfhood of the "younger churches" of the third world. Among several signs of what shows such a church to be authentic, he included this one: it composes and sings its own songs. On our visit to Eastbrook, the liturgy included a duet com-

posed by one of the singers. It was not the first song she had composed and contributed to the church's worship. Music that comes thus from the heart of the congregation is frequently the most powerful expression of the way the gospel is good news there, in that particular congregation, for the gathered and for all others who live nearby.

Worship Permeates the Public Life of the Congregation

The folks at Transfiguration say: "People do not come to the Mass because of the music, but because of the impact the church has in the community." After our visits among these churches, we found ourselves less and less able to draw clear lines between public witness and worship in their experience. We began to see that their worship is public witness and their public witness is worship. If worship is a kind of public intervention, an acknowledgment of God's purposes, so also is the church's public witness. Worship motivates and permeates public action, for it is an encounter with the God who both calls his people out of the world and sends them into it.

In spite of the variety of public, creative, and often prophetic missional activities evidenced among the churches we visited, there was a singularity in the way they understood that their concern, involvement, and commitment to persevere in their missional engagements is motivated and sustained in their worship. And worship is never far from their public action.

Eastbrook deliberately located its worship center in a neighborhood neglected by many other churches and ministries. Some members of the congregation have moved into the neighborhood and have become involved in the programs of education, recreation, and racial reconciliation it has developed. Reconciliation is a central theme at Eastbrook, and worship is a reenactment and reinforcement of this theme, touching upon relationships within the worshipping community as well as on the way the church sees itself working in the broader community. In worship, this is done two ways: by celebrating diversity and by reinforcing solidarity. The conviction that "we are all sinners, reconciled to God and to one another" is celebrated and demonstrated weekly at Eastbrook's worship and continuously in the lives of the members in their relationships.

The understanding that “wherever our worship is located, that is where our ministry occurs” focuses Holy Ghost’s outreach of “Christian community development” (to borrow a phrase from John Perkins), a complex of social ministries among the disadvantaged. That context shapes its message of hope and life-quality improvement as part of the good news of the gospel. “Deliverance” is the prominent theme. The message is clearly and directly communicated and demonstrated in both the public congregational worship and public activities in the community among families, the marginalized, and at-risk residents in the neighborhood.

At Spring Garden Church, the worship focus is shaped by, and shapes, the actions of the congregation in things like prayer walks, economic development projects, local evangelism, international mission teams, and social reconciliation. While not a church seeking a high profile as “political” or “activist,” in 1997 Spring Garden found itself on the local Toronto news, quite apart from any intentional effort to get press there! In their province, a deadlock in negotiations between teachers and public school authorities prompted a strike. The church recognized that this would affect not only teachers and other school employees, but children and youth who would suddenly be out of school. Working parents would be forced to find child care on extremely short notice. A lot of chaos promised to follow as the strike began.

It is always the habit of Spring Garden to pray when things like this occur, and on this occasion it was no different. But as they prayed, they began to reason that if they were praying for the schools and the teachers and the students and their families, and if the God they were praying to was a real and living presence, then of course they must act in line with that confidence. Quickly, with primary initiatives from high school students and teachers within the congregation, they organized a Teachers’ Strike Day School for as many children as they could accommodate. High schoolers became tutors to younger children, working parents were helped in the care of their out-of-school children — and the local news camera crew came to get some footage! The spontaneous initiative became a political act, born of their simple responsiveness to things they knew God cared about. These were simply their “lived prayers.” Worship and public witness were joined at the hip.

Transfiguration’s worship, centered as it is upon solidarity with the poorest of the poor, has direct connections with the forms that soli-

arity takes. Casa Bethsaida, a hospice for patients with AIDS; the Southside Community Mission which provides social services and meals for the homeless and immigrants; and the work of attorney Anne Pilsbury to advocate for immigrants all grows out of the constant pulse of the prayer of Charles de Foucauld, “Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. . . . I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve. . . .”

Of all the observations we made of the way worship and public witness are intertwined in the experience of these churches, two of the most poignant images are these:

At Rockridge United Methodist Church in Oakland, one of the Mission Covenant Groups moved in worship into the midst of their neighborhood in a vivid way. The group had concern for two things. First, they were artists who understood that art is an important expression of worship. A lot of what they did as a group grew out of that conviction. Second, they had concern for reconciliation among the people in the difficult neighborhood where they lived. The public act of worship they led included the invitation to their neighbors to carry rocks to the church property and name them as their fears, troubles, and burdens and then leave them behind. These rocks were permanently incorporated into the landscaping, resulting in an artistic display of liberation for all in the neighborhood to observe and ponder.

The connection between public action and worship would not seem to be apparent in the Boulder congregation. Social-activism types of ministries that include local political involvement, witness for social and economic justice, support of and participation on Christian Peacemaker Teams, the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program, and Mennonite Voluntary Services are all part of the public face of Boulder Mennonite Church. The relationship between those ministries and the congregation’s worship could easily be missed by the casual observer. But it is important to notice that prayer and singing are sometimes deliberately incorporated as part of the public actions. Even more interesting is the fact that work is currently being done to assemble a new collection of “songs appropriate for singing at public protests.” In that effort the deep inner relationship between public witness and the worship of God is made obvious.

A rockscape and a book of protest worship songs are symbols pa-

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rated and erected, compiled and published to attest that the God and Father of Jesus Christ worshiped in ritual storytelling is the God of absolute care for the brokenness of the whole world. And this people called “church” is sent to bear witness to that!

Our postmodern society has come to regard worship as the private, internal, and often arcane activity of religionists who retreat from the world to practice their mystical rites. By definition, however, the *ekklesia* is a public assembly, and its worship is its first form of mission. . . . The reality of God that is proclaimed in worship is to be announced to and for the entire world. The walls and windows of churches need to become transparent. (*Missional Church*, p. 243)

Pattern 6

Dependence on the Holy Spirit

WALTER C. HOBBS

“So that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

(2 Cor. 4:7b)

Pattern: The missional community confesses its dependence upon the Holy Spirit, shown in particular in its practices of corporate prayer.

Words change. The meanings and pronunciations and spelling of words, even the contexts in which words are used, are always in flux. The English word *bankruptcy* is an example. In an earlier day, a craftsman who could not pay his debts stood in danger of watching his creditors smash his workbench to smithereens (another witless practice in the sorry history of getting even, about as sensible as debtor’s prison). He was said to have been bankrupted — *benc* [Old English] *ruptura* [Latin]. Today, however, a person who cannot pay his or her debts may seek legal protection against creditors by filing *for* bankruptcy. The workbench still gets smashed, so to speak, but the debtor has a bit more say in the process.

Many words that had been part of the common vocabulary in pre-Enlightenment days, such as *knight* and *squire*, either have disappeared