

Striving for Balance in Worship

WELS National Worship Conference 2017

Pastor Jon Micheel



or

?



It's important to remember two things simultaneously.



Aims for this workshop

Develop a useful framework for thinking and talking about issues in worship:

Striving to keep two corresponding ideas in balance.

Discuss practical examples of what this looks like in a congregation's worship life.

If this sounds familiar ...

- Martin Luther's "On the Freedom of a Christian" (especially the last part about ceremonies)
- Rev. Daniel Deutschlander's *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*
- Rev. Dan Leyrer's "Of Snakes and Doves: Using Our Heads and Following Christ's Heart in Evangelism"

Areas of discussion today

Striving for balance in ...

1. Continuity and Variety
2. Nurture and Outreach
3. Old and New
4. (Individual and Body)



The game plan

- I'll present thoughts on one of the four areas
- We'll take a few minutes to process and talk
- You can write notes on a blank page in your conference binder if you wish
- I'll make these slides available for download

Striving to Balance Continuity and Variety

In worship, we strive to leverage the advantages of doing things in a consistent way and also varying what we do.

An example of balancing continuity and variety:



The value of continuity

- Ensures we get important things done
- Embeds key spiritual truths in our minds
- Especially valuable for ...
 - pre-literate (e.g., young kids) & non-literate
 - those whose first language is not language used in worship

Cautions about continuity

- Patterns only as beneficial as their content
- Can contribute to externalism
 - “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.” (Amos 5:21)
 - “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matthew 6:7)

The value of variety

- Helps us proclaim the broad range of spiritual truths
- By heightening mindfulness, mitigates danger of thoughtless repetition

Cautions about variety

- A little “stress” can be helpful; too much = distracting “distress”
- “What’s happening next?” puts attention on process, not content
- Too much variety can inhibit participation

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 1: Ordinary and Propers

- Ordinary = recurring framework of texts, Word-Sacrament progression
- Propers = Scripture readings, “of the Day” sections
- Not just traditional; this system harnesses benefits of continuity and variety

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 2: The Church Year

- Life of Jesus, then Life of the Church
- Annual attention to key salvation events
- Echoes of Old Testament annual cycle: reinforcing a range of vital truths

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 3: Building repertoire of hymns

- “If I know a hymn, I sing it. If I don’t, I won’t.”
- New music: fun to some, frustrating to others
- Try a congregational repertoire of c. 250 hymns, then expand occasionally
- Stretch, but not too far too fast
- Introduce winsomely! “That sounds nice. Maybe I wouldn’t mind singing that...”

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 4: Rotating orders seasonally

- Rotating 4-5 orders of service in one month: common practice?
- Upside: no one order gets stale
- Downside: takes a long time to learn an order, especially for guests, new members

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 4: Rotating orders seasonally

Suggestion: rotate 1-2 orders seasonally:

- Epiphany (Jan-Feb): Service of Word and Sacrament, Haugen Morning Praise
- Lenten Sundays (Mar-Apr): Common Service, Service of the Word (or gathering rite followed by one of those)
- Easter Season: same two but with “This Is the Feast”
- Pentecost Season (first part): Divine Service II, CW Morning Praise

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 4: Rotating orders seasonally

- Adapt this to each congregation (e.g., one order per month)
- Can be appreciated by
 - worshipers still getting acquainted with orders of service
 - musicians—especially those not as proficient

Balancing continuity and variety

Example 5: Single rite, multiple settings

- Same basic progression of the service, same basic texts
- Multiple musical settings
- Combine this with previous suggestion: Don't try different music every Sunday; rather, try one musical setting through a season

Balancing continuity and variety

- Tell someone next to you one thing from this section that you remember (1 minute)
- Your thoughts, questions on this section?

Striving to Balance Nurture and Outreach

In worship, we strive to serve both those who don't yet know the gospel and those who do.

Opinions shaped by (bad) experiences?

Have we witnessed ...

- a lack of concern for people who need the gospel?
- “seeker-friendly” worship that compromises Scripture?



Can we acknowledge our experiences AND think beyond them?

Nurture and outreach are both essential!

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:17)

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

“Go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19)

Nurture and outreach are both essential!

- Worship = a once-a-week respite & recharge for believers (Ps 120, 133-134) ... and that's good!
- Worship = a can't-pass-it-up chance to reach unbelievers
- Reality: worship is often first contact with unchurched

Encouragements for veteran Christians

- Generally we need stronger encouragement to do evangelism
- “Freely you have received; freely give.” (Jesus in Mt 10:8)
- Appreciation for liturgical worship takes time to develop
- Etiquette for worship takes time to develop

Encouragements for veteran Christians

- Beware the “curse of knowledge”!
 - not everyone knows the gospel you know so well
 - not everyone knows the customs so familiar to you
- Educate, but don’t be condescending!
- Worship education benefits everyone
- A welcoming environment benefits everyone

Keep in mind ...

- Every place has protocol we need to learn
- We can’t make everything instantly understandable
- BUT our goal: remove hindrances to hearing gospel (If, before the service even begins...)

Keep in mind ...

- Look first for simple changes that will have beneficial impact. Examples:
 - Intentional welcome to worship
 - Clear notes, direction in the worship folder
- Our motivation = “the love of Christ” (2 Co 5:14)
- Concern for nurture and outreach = loving stewardship of God’s gifts

Balancing nurture and outreach

- How have you experienced the tension between nurture and outreach in worship?
- Any advice to help someone balance both in worship—proclaiming the gospel to the lost while building up the found?

Striving to Balance Old and New

In worship, we strive to use old, familiar treasures while also being open to what is new and unfamiliar.

Balancing requires constant evaluation,
adjustments

Old & New



Balancing requires constant evaluation, adjustments

- As we discuss old and new elements in worship, we won't find simple solutions.
- But we can consider things that will help us evaluate and adjust.

Get beyond caricatures

- “All traditional music is ...” Accurate?
- “All contemporary music is ...” Accurate?
- See a snare drum and leave? See an organ and leave?
- Willing to acknowledge both benefits and shortcomings?

Remember “*Abusus non tollit usum.*”

- Liturgy has been abused: empty ritualism, *ex opere operato*
- Contemporary worship has been abused: emotionalism detached from gospel
- But this does not rule out beneficial use
- Be aware of potential abuses, take steps to prevent them

Examine substance, not just performance

- Reacting to drum kit too loud or organ too slow?
- Take a second look at content, poetry, etc.
- Be willing to work with resources, musicians
- Strive for “best we can do with what we have”

Try stretching in both directions

- Try something old but unfamiliar
- Try something new and of high quality
- Introduce with patience and care!
 - choir or soloist to introduce, then support singing
 - teach it to the kids, then they can support singing
- Seek high-quality resources both old and new
- “Play within yourself”

We haven't solved the “traditional vs. contemporary” debate, but ...



Based on your experience, comment on something in this section that could be helpful in balancing old and new elements in worship.

Striving to Balance the Individual and the Body

*In worship, we strive to be attentive to the needs of the
worshiping body and the worshiping individual.*

Individual & Body

The Body, Example 1: Confessing the Faith

- Speaking the Creed—insincere?
- But another dimension: our shared identity as the body of Christ
- Rightly defined *catholicity*—our connection with the Holy Christian Church
- “We’re on board!”

The Body, Example 2: Singing

- Music in our age: almost all individual
- Can music have purpose beyond entertainment?
Example: the national anthem
- Music in church: proclaiming and praising *together*
- Setting aside individual preferences for a while for the benefit of the body
- Group singing: doing one thing with bodies and minds

The Body, Example 2: Singing

Suggestions:

- Choose singable opening and closing hymns
- Explain rationale for tougher hymns: “they’ve proven valuable for building faith”
- Use soloist/choir to introduce harder hymns (make a good first impression)
- Sing tough ones near the middle of the service

The Individual, Example 1: Encouraging personal devotional worship

- Freedom for personal confession, prayer, readings of my choice
- Martin Luther: “I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending on my mood and feeling ...”

The Individual, Example 1: Encouraging personal devotional worship

- Apply this to music: listen to (or sing along with) songs and hymns that touch us personally
- If only time I listen/sing is in church, then I’ll want all the songs to be my favorites!
- Time for personal worship can increase satisfaction with corporate worship

The Individual, Example 2: Time for personal reflection in the service

Examples of time for personal reflection/prayer:

- Brief silence after confession, before absolution
- Time for “private petitions”
- Personal prayer during Communion distribution
- After closing hymn, before announcements

The Individual, Example 2: Time for personal reflection in the service

Examples of time for personal reflection/prayer:

- After psalm in evening services
- But simple instruction may be needed:

After the psalm, we will spend a few moments in silence. Some suggestions:

Reread the words of the psalm and think about what they're saying.

Ask God to give you the blessings the psalm talks about.

Pray for someone who is on your mind.

Ask God for help with a stressful situation.

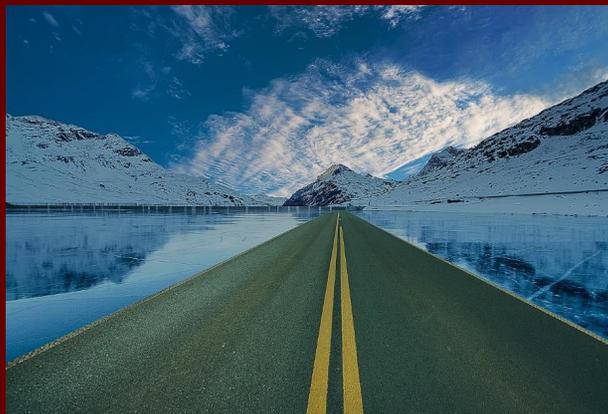
Balancing the individual and the body

- Share a suggestion for helping address the needs of both individual worshipers and the body.
- Your thoughts, questions on this topic?





Evaluate and adjust as you strive for balance.



Strive to build people up and to glorify God!

Today's slideshow will be available on
the conference website soon.

Pastor Jon Micheel
pastorjm@popslc.org
Office: 801-261-3808