

“Please don’t do what we did!” – Examining a positive experience of adapting the school worship culture for ministry to families through worship.

Please don’t do what we did! Design your own approach! Four years ago we considered how we might invite school families with tenuous church connections to engage in community worship as whole families. In celebrating the consequent positive developments we recognize that the principles established in the planning process were just as important as the eventual implementation. Most importantly we were very intentional in focusing on specific needs for ministry to our school families rather than beginning with a set of expectations informed primarily by the ministry of our congregation. What has emerged has been a small, but growing worshipping community consisting of families with varying levels of former church connections from various different churches (or none at all!), from both our school and the wider community.

In this presentation I will share with you and discuss details of the planning process we used, early encouragement and difficulties, moments of excitement, and a few significant challenges for the future. I will also give details of the worship format we have used, always encouraging you to think creatively about your own context and people.

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ACLE4 – Elective 1A – Mark Greenthaner – “Please don’t do what we did!”

Examining a positive experience of adapting the school worship culture
for ministry to families through worship

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Please note: in the paper that follows the notes in italics were my annotations of the discussion paper distributed; others who participated in the planning process added their own...

Towards expanding the Good Shepherd worship program to encourage broader involvement by school families.... *Mark Greenthaner, 30 December 2008*

[note: OELC=Outer Eastern Lutheran Church, our local congregation; GSLPS=Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School]

We recognise...

- a number of our families are currently worshipping regularly in connection with their own church communities (Lutheran & non-Lutheran)
 - *depending on ‘timing’ issues some of these families may be happy to support a new worship opportunity (OELC, other Lutheran, other churches)*
- our current in-school worship* program engages all of our students and staff (Wednesday & Friday whole-school; plus department & classroom devotions) in a program which allows not only participation but also preparation and leadership
 - *I would like to start a campaign to affirm & validate school worship as a significant part of the worship life of the whole congregation/school community*
- our current whole-school worship* is attended by a significant number of parents/family/friends (particularly for class-led worship); for some of these (and a large proportion of students) school worship is their sole regular worship experience
 - *I recognize the fact that some of these are ‘spectators’; but I don’t discount this as a significant ‘first contact’ experience*
- our current school worship* program is liturgical and helps students develop a strong sense of corporate, liturgical worship; regular liturgical elements include: invocation, benediction, prayers, Lord’s Prayer, credal statements; confession of sin and absolution; responsive readings/psalms; singing
 - *‘liturgy’ helps people feel comfortable in corporate worship—they know ‘what to do’ and are not feeling anxious about ‘surprises’; liturgical structure also forms a natural transition and sequence in terms of the worship content*
- our current school worship places the Word of God centrally; it regularly includes Word-based proclamation/teaching (presented in a variety of ways) albeit with a message that is largely ‘child’-directed
 - *I would like to get the ‘chapel presentation’ language out of our vocabulary completely; we need to keep our teachers (and others who lead our worship) aware that they are speaking God’s Word to the community; any element of ‘performance’ or ‘visual presentation’ is there to serve the process of speaking God’s Word; [pastors don’t always remember this either! and I am the first to admit it regarding my own leading of worship...]*

- our current school worship has been sensitive to the church traditions of use of lectionary, church year/festivals, etc while not being rigidly prescriptive
 - *preparing worship by starting with a 'blank page' is fine for a while, but then it gets very demanding/challenging; we have a good, naturally established and valued culture at Good Shepherd of appreciating the themes offered by the church year, making use of the 'salvation history' structure of the biblical narrative, highlighting different literary types in the Bible (psalms, parables); this culture means that teachers/classes work together in a developmental way even though they focus on their own preparation; it also means that teachers less experienced with worship have a structured way of 'fitting in'...*
- we have not incorporated the availability of the sacraments in our current, common school worship program (apart from celebrating Holy Communion in staff worship once a year)
 - *as I indicate from time to time our ministry through schools helps us to appreciate that the Holy Spirit does some amazing work prior to and even apart from the specific use of the sacraments!; it is important for us to highlight Holy Baptism and Holy Communion as important in the life of the Christian; the LCA has become more and more 'flexible' in its stance on the use of the sacraments in ministry with a renewed focus on the sacraments as means of grace, rather than as 'tests' of membership or orthodoxy; there are provisions in place for the use of the sacraments in the worship life of schools; I think we can proceed with sensitivity here; [it is worth being aware of the fact that momentum is picking up again in discussing the possible practice of communing infants in the LCA—this is an issue which has particular significance in school-based ministry]*

* suggest deliberate change of terminology from “devotion” to “worship”

- *to help develop a consistent thinking I think we should try and use the term “worship” right across our program: Sunday worship; Wednesday morning worship or chapel worship, classroom worship, staff worship; there is nothing wrong with our current nomenclature but I think we can enhance the status of our school worship by using the term; historically, in LCA documents, there has been a deliberate linguistic attempt to downplay school worship by distinguishing between 'worship' and 'devotions'; I think we need to fight back!; I also think that we want to consider developing **new** opportunities for worship as a natural extension of **current** worship experiences for our students and their families*

We would like to...

- encourage families who do not have current, strong links with a church community and no regular participation in worship outside of the school to develop a further appreciation of the value of worship for faith development, individual and family living, a sense of 'belonging' and 'identity' with the wider Christian church family
 - *there **is** an important issue in helping people develop a culture of worship and a sense of belonging that extends beyond the few years of the school connection with the church; but our goal is not necessarily to establish this in the traditional sense of formal LCA membership and attendance at OELC services at 10am on Sunday; we need to be working towards new developing models of personal Christian identity and institutional Christian congregation identity rather than getting stuck with the current, expected 'transition' concepts...*
- use worship as one opportunity to expand our teaching program for the benefit of parents (and wider family) of our students – helping those from non-church backgrounds to understand key concepts of biblical teaching, church doctrine and traditions, vocabulary, symbolism and the like
 - *I don't believe it is appropriate to see worship almost exclusively as a 'teaching' opportunity—corporate praise, fellowship, proclamation, confession/absolution, prayer for the community and the world—these are not primarily 'teaching' activities; but many of our unchurched parents currently come from a generation which has almost no church 'memory' and the inclusion of significant teaching elements in worship is important particularly for neophytes*

- provide an opportunity for broader interaction between congregation members and the school community through a shared worship/fellowship experience
 - *it is very significant that we already have OELC members who regularly lead whole-school worship; we can probably do more to promote school worship in the life of the congregation, especially with the opportunity for fellowship/study following, interaction with parents who attend, etc, if we have an additional worship opportunity that is intended to be more of a learning and fellowship worship time for school 'whole-families'*
- provide further opportunity for students and staff to participate in preparation and leadership of corporate worship
 - *while we have a number of our staff who are very active in their own church communities outside of the school, we also have a number of staff who are not!; I recognize that sometimes our staff want to get away from the school community for their own worship life; our staff have varying levels of commitment to the philosophical underpinnings for our school as a place of 'ministry' (over and against educational institution, a job, etc); I do not anticipate that all of our staff will be keen to get involved at another level; but, in the past, with extra school services, there have been a number of staff who have willingly contributed and appreciated the opportunity; I do believe that a number of our staff would be happy to help with music, visuals, etc; the developing "chapel band" may see another service as a great opportunity to play/lead...*

Key issues ...

- Timing:
 - When do we schedule such worship?
 - Frequency?
 - *I suspect weekly will seem 'too much' for families 'new' to engaging in worship (it's almost too much for our congregational families as is...); monthly is quite attractive in that it doesn't have any sense of imposition on the family calendar—but is it too infrequent to encourage a genuine family culture of worship?; depending on the timing I think fortnightly is worth considering...*
 - School term only?
 - *certainly in an establishment phase I don't think there is any point trying to pursue services during school holidays; if we have a well established routine, however, it will be easier to encourage such families to attend other OELC worship opportunities during school holidays, and especially at key festivals (Good Friday/Easter; Christmas)*
 - Day of week?
 - *Sunday morning still has a natural 'feel' to it, even for the unchurched(?); the sport issue is real...*
 - *a genuine mid-week, early evening might work as a real alternative to Sunday morning; bring a sandwich? soup provided...*
 - *Sunday evening is not to be discounted if it is a genuine tea-time event; anything that goes past 7pm won't work; tea-time, soup provided, might also be a reasonably relaxed end-of-the-weekend time to get together for a not-too-demanding worship opportunity*
 - *an advantage of mid-week or Sunday evening is that there is no clear 'clash' with other OELC Sunday morning worship and there might be enough difference/distance for other OELC members to consider worshipping twice in the week; the disadvantage is that it lacks a sense of training/encouragement into Sunday morning worship; on the other hand, it might also offer that genuine non-Sunday morning worship that some in OELC have missed since the demise of Evening Praise and Chapel on Sunday*

- Time of day?
 - *see notes immediately above*
- Relation to OELC program?
 - *I think it is important that we try to offer something that does not clash with other OELC worship*
 - *we have an opportunity to offer a genuine alternative worship opportunity (but probably not every Sunday, see above) both in terms of time, and style, and content*
 - *we want to encourage people who worship in the school community to engage in worship and fellowship with the wider church community*
 - *we want to offer congregation members a genuine opportunity to enjoy worship, fellowship and learning with school families in a way that does not seem an imposition, nor a 'doubling up' on congregation worship commitments*
- Anticipated length of service/fellowship?
 - *worship plus fellowship time 75 minutes max (worship 30-40 minutes; fellowship 20-30 minutes [prior or after depending on timing in the day])*
- Structure:
 - Liturgical? From outset? Developing? How much?
 - *I think we would build on the established culture in our school worship—inclusion of basic, simple liturgical elements and introducing others as appropriate and as part of the learning process; (ideally I would like to think that after a year anyone who attends our worship here would feel right at home at any Lutheran worship service anywhere in the sense of the 'feel' of liturgical responses, structure of the service, etc)*
 - Leadership: School Pastor plus...?
 - *I think it is appropriate for the School Pastor to have overall responsibility to prepare and lead the worship, but there is a definite opportunity to use students, staff and others in helping to lead (Bible readings, prayers, some teaching segments, music); there is also opportunity to use students in helping to prepare (prayers, responses, drama, powerpoint presentations)(sometimes we might be able to incorporate elements which students have already used in weekday school worship); clear opportunity for other school leaders to take a lead in fellowship, etc*
 - Content: Determined by...? Cyclical 'curriculum'?
 - *I have begun to put together a 'curriculum' that would introduce key concepts, teachings, etc; I think something 'cyclical' (two year? three year?) would be appropriate, recognizing that we hope to have an annual influx of new families!; the exact content of the curriculum can only be finalized when we have frequency/timing issues resolved...*
 - *I would like each service to include: the Word (proclamation/teaching); response (discussion?/prayer/singing); some kind of 'activity' that engages people in a controlled, but unscripted, relational interaction...*
 - *I would like to prepare some kind of 'worksheet' that accompanied the worship, containing readings, responses, written definitions or explanations of terminology, symbolism, etc and some kind of suggested follow-up activity, questions, discussion-at-home, reading suggestions, etc (the practicality of this depends somewhat on the frequency!)*
 - Sacraments? If...when...?
 - *I have a bit of a "wait and see" feeling about this; certainly the 'topic' of the Sacraments needs to be part of the 'curriculum'; the non-inclusion of the Sacraments does not invalidate the worship experience; the Sacraments are available in other community worship; inclusion of the Sacraments raises a number of pastoral and practical issues which may or may not be problematic depending on who is worshipping...*

- Offerings? If...directed to...?
 - *I think worshipping through offerings is an important part of the 'education'; I would not like to see the offerings simply shunted off to school or church budget, but would like to use this aspect as an opportunity also to educate about how we fit in with the wider ministry of the wider church; the maintenance of this worship opportunity and ministry is not dependant on offerings, so they could be directed, in different weeks, to different aspects of ministry, including in-house congregation/school, as well as ALWS, Croydon CAB, ALC, Vic District, etc; we would also need to make provision for OELC members to direct their offerings at such worship to their usual OELC contributions (availability of envelopes 'at the door'?)*

- Venue:
 - Luther College chapel?
 - *advantages:*
 - *currently available!;*
 - *a strong sense of 'sacred space';*
 - *aesthetically pleasing;*
 - *well set-up in terms of the symbolism of liturgical architecture, visual symbols, etc;*
 - *has a sentimental link for Luther old scholars or ODLF old-timers*
 - *logical/necessary if proposed extra worship is to lead into or link directly with other OELC worship*
 - *disadvantages:*
 - *not conducive to 'close fellowship' unless significant work is put into altering the seating [would be relatively easy if the parquetry floor area was not full of seats...but it is...];*
 - *somewhat subject to the 'whims' of change at the college [change of lighting, seating, PA, etc; little 'control' on our part...]*
 - *accessibility: not currently 'friendly' in terms of disability access, parking, etc*

 - GSLPS multi-purpose room?
 - *disadvantages:*
 - *cannot plan for the coming year because of building program;*
 - *as a multi-purpose room is always going to be somewhat less immediately comfortable as a 'sacred space' [compared to the Luther College chapel]*
 - *advantages:*
 - *"home ground" for students and families;*
 - *new building will be well equipped technologically and with a much improved 'sanctuary';*
 - *accessibility to canteen and 'old multi-purpose room' makes worship to fellowship connection a bit easier*
 - *absolute flexibility with seating, space for activity, etc*
 - *improved access for disability*
 - *more 'control' over usage/availability*

 - Other?
 - *we have used the senior centre 'snake pit' previously and it is workable, but not ideal; the music centre is also a workable space; these could be considered if we want to start something while the building program is on and we are convinced that we should be on site at Good Shepherd*
 - *the Lilydale complex would also be a great venue except that it has no easy, natural link with our school community and would be, psychologically, a bit of a stumbling block...*
 - *the rehearsal space at the college is more flexible than the chapel but presents a number of other problems...*

- Other support:
 - Worship team?
 - *we already have a worship team/committee at Good Shepherd and we want to develop new opportunities out of an existing culture; it would be good to build from that existing committee recognizing that the School Pastor has time allocated for most of the preparation; the scheduling of a new worship opportunity in relation to other OELC worship will impact the level of consultation with Tim and his worship team...*
 - Musicians/recorded music?
 - *there is an existing culture of using either/both; I believe that Matt Polack will be supportive, also a new staff member? Briony? Lyndas?—I think there is considerable scope for involving a number of staff at this point; also student involvement with recorded music; the new “chapel band” may be able to participate once in a while...*
 - Support for welcoming/fellowship?
 - *this will be critical from school staff and a range of committed school families; as stated above, there is good scope for wider OELC involvement in this, depending on timing, etc*
 - Logistical support? (‘stewards’; PA; data projection; service materials preparation)
 - *if a Good Shepherd venue is used it will be relatively easy to involve some students to take a key role in this; if the new multi-purpose room is used the set-up will be simple to begin with and familiar to students/staff who help out during the week; I would hope to develop a variety of approaches so that worship does not become too technology dependent or focussed; I believe the new set-up with Julie allows some scope for her support in preparing worship materials (handouts or powerpoint)*

Models “on the table” ... so far ...

1. GSLPS schedule worship for Sunday morning; family-conscious time (9am/9.30am?) to be followed by fellowship time; leading into OELC-Croydon worship...
2. GSLPS schedule worship for Sunday morning (10am/10.30am) following earlier OELC-Croydon worship...
3. GSLPS ‘go it alone’ and schedule worship without specific reference to OELC worship schedule...
4. GSLPS schedule worship at alternative, suitable day/time (mid-week evening?; Sunday evening?; Saturday evening? Friday evening?)
 - *I am not stating a preference at this time...better to allow others to consider the factors presented plus additional which I have not listed...*
 - *in an immediate sense the critical factor is “When will people come?”*
 - *we want to be sensitive to how this worship would fit in with wider OELC worship; on the other hand we don’t want to compromise a genuine development of a ‘mission’ worship opportunity by being overly sensitive to wider OELC issues; I believe that commitment to the model also opens up and allows for flexibility/change for other OELC commitments (service times, etc)*
 - *I suspect we won’t necessarily “get it right” on the first attempt and have to allow opportunity for review and change*
 - *we want to build/develop a culture of corporate worship for those who are relatively new to the church (through the school), so we need to focus on what is culture building not what is immediately ‘sell-able’ in the district newsletter or the annual statistical return*

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Sunday Chapel Themes

A. Topics exploring basic concepts associated with Worship	
Concept:	Advertised ‘theme’:
A basic introduction to what worship ‘is’	Because you’re worth it
The nature of corporate worship	Body not bits
The key dynamic of worship – God acts, we respond	Up, down, sideways...
Understanding ritual and the structure of worship	Do it again!
The place of God’s Word in worship	At the heart
The Bible as God’s written Word	A word in the hand is worth...
An overview of the Bible’s message & structure	His story or my story?
An introduction to prayer	A daily chat
The place of confession & absolution in worship	The word everyone thinks is so hard to say...
Confession as preparation for worship	Unpacking & Moving In
The church year and the use of symbolic colours	Another rainbow...
The place of music in worship	My life is music!
Visual arts and symbols in worship	Picture Perfect?
The role of the worship leader & symbolic postures	Pastors, Priests and Posture
Singing Rounds/Responsive Psalms	Round, round, get around, I get around...
The offering as worship and service link with others	widow’s mite → widow’s might → widows might!
B. Topics exploring basic concepts associated with the Church Year	
Concept:	Advertised ‘theme’:
Advent & two biblical understandings of ‘time’	Estimated time of arrival
Lead into Advent/Advent calendar	Counting the days
The Transfiguration	Christian Cicadas
Relationship between Passover and Good Friday	Passover Parallels
Exploring the passion story (stations of the cross)	Stations along the Journey
Jesus’ incarnation through to exaltation, Philippians 2	Geometric God
Easter as first day of new creation (baptism connection)	And on the eighth day God created...
Thematic narrative Palm Sunday/Good Friday/Easter	A very special event!
Good Friday/Easter combined worship	Unless a seed falls...
Tradition, passing on Easter as ‘most important’	Hand-Me-Downs
Jesus coming to us with our doubts and questions [Thomas]	What? Are you kidding me?
Pentecost (mission ‘out’ to the world)	Pentecost paradigm shift
Pentecost (Babel to Pentecost)	...in our own languages!
Pentecost (community shaped by the Holy Spirit)	Community Spirit → Spirit Community
Using symbols in celebrating Christmas	Do you see what I see?
Christmas: God coming to those who are weak	A poor man’s holiday...
C. Topics exploring basic concepts associated with Christian Faith & Living	
Concept:	Advertised ‘theme’:
The concept of ‘God’	The hardest makes it easy
The Gospel as the ‘heart’ of God’s Word	Here I Stand
Gospel as inclusive (Zacchaeus & Luke 19:10)	...on the outer...
Understanding the nature of God’s Law	Letter of the Law?
Faith as ‘trust’	I believe!

Childlike faith & maturing faith	Childlike, not Childish
Prayer as a relationship concept	I give up...
Reconciliation of all people; breaking down barriers	From Walls to Bridges...
Christian hope and confidence	Lift up your heads
Baptism	God's love in baptism
God's Word effects growth (baptism)	Baptism
Holiness (as opposed to piety)	Wholly holy!
Christian service	Guest: Jonathan Krause from ALWS
Stewardship	Matthew's Money
The Church as Christ's body/Harvest thanksgiving	Stone Soup
Theology of the Cross	Cross Promotion
Faith as trust in God's power, rather than in one's self	Power failure?
Staying Christocentric (Luther/Reformation)	Stay Focused
Jonathan Krause on ALWS north Africa/Matthew 25	Well-Come
What heaven is like (or <i>not</i> like – Revelation 21:3,4)	Sneak Preview
God's grace, our sin; Peter's denial and forgiveness	Do numbers count?
D. Topics exploring various concepts & stories from the Bible	
Concept:	Advertised 'theme':
The synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark & Luke	Synoptic Synopsis
Feminine images for God in the Bible	Mother's Day Special
An introduction to the nature of Hebrew psalms	Two by two
The 'lost' parables in Luke	Lost & Found
The prodigal son	An old man running... but why?
Psalms 46	God in the middle
The parable of the sower	First Century Broadcasting
Angels	Angels we have heard on high
The prophet Jeremiah	Troubled Teenager!
Paul's conversion	Paul's Blind Spot
God's good plans & our frustrations (Paul, Acts 16)	Road Closed
The concept of Messiah (Christ) in the Old Testament	Messiah
The genealogies in Matthew & Luke	Jesus' Genes
The parable of the Good Samaritan	Gospel on the ground
Sense of urgency, place of miracles in Mark's Gospel	Urgent: Action Required!
Visual images in the Bible as metaphors	Picture Perfect
Jesus' promise that he with us always	Always
Luke as an historian; Jesus' life set in history	It happened that day when...