



# WORSHIP Q & A

Church worship can be a hot potato for us in the LCA/NZ, as it is in many other denominations. No congregation or pastor is exactly alike in the way they conduct and participate in services. We asked two pastors from the Commission on Worship for their personal responses to some burning questions on the subject.

## 1 WHY DO WE WORSHIP GOD FORMALLY? WHY DO WE HAVE TO GO TO CHURCH TO WORSHIP?

**Pastor Adrian Kitson:** We don't 'have to go to church', but we do need the mutual encouragement of other Christians to remain faithful, fruitful disciples of Jesus. We need him, his word and holy gifts no matter what, when or where. We can gather in loungerooms and bars and parks and schools. We are also free to gather in the buildings purpose-built for worship. Any worship gathering is a miracle. God serves us and we respond in thanks and praise, listening, proclaiming, singing and prayer. The question is, why would any Christian want to miss out on what God does for us when we gather in worship?

**Pastor Tim Klein:** Why do I worship in a congregation? For me, at the base level, it's about being part of the body of Christ. Sure, I worship God in many personal ways, from celebrating and giving thanks to the Lord for all good things around me as I go: singing, whistling and writing songs of praise, and serving the Lord in all sorts of ways. But going to church every week to worship is heartland; it's biblical; it's life in the family of faith. I worship with my faith family, into which I am baptised.

## 2 WHY DOES GOD WANT TO BE WORSHIPPED? ONE OF THE THINGS GOD WANTS OF US IS HUMILITY - AND YET HE WANTS TO BE WORSHIPPED. HOW IS THAT EFFECTIVE ROLE MODELLING?

**AK:** For the most effective role modelling of being fully human with the deepest humility, all we have to do is look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. His words and actions of acceptance, challenge and calling, all said and done in love, are not just for information but also for transformation of the heart and mind. For all he has done and all he continues to do for us, there is only one appropriate response – to follow, to love, to pray, to sing, to listen to him above all others. We call that 'worship'.

**TK:** I'm neither puppy nor puppet – not licking the hand that feeds me, nor dancing to the puppeteer's tune. God wants me to worship him so he can bless, feed, forgive, guide, refresh and restore me for everyday life. God doesn't need my worship; he loves it! In worship he has my full attention and that maximises his blessing potential on me and those with me. We are built for relationship with God and with each other. God knows that worship together is good for us all.



### 3 WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF LUTHERAN WORSHIP AND WHY THEY ARE CRITICAL?

**AK:** The essential element of our worship and what makes it divine and spiritually alive is the presence of Jesus. What we participate in is truly of profound spiritual blessing because Jesus speaks to us, and because his word does what he says. He is far beyond our understanding and yet he reveals his character and intention for us by his powerful word, as it is proclaimed in words and in actions of baptism, absolution, the Lord's supper and the blessing.

**TK:** All of the above. It's the Lord present with his body – together in one place. Baptism into Christ affirmed; sins confessed and forgiven; God's word publicly read aloud, taught and proclaimed; feeding at the Lord's table; being blessed and sent. These are for me the essentials of worship. There's one other key for me: that in worship God is both subject and object. It's not about me. I can proclaim Jesus as Lord in worship only by the working of his Holy Spirit. So he has brought me there, he inspires my worship and there the body of Christ worships God in his entirety.

### 4 WHICH 'INGREDIENTS' OF WORSHIP COME DOWN TO PREFERENCE?

**AK:** Our worship has a rhythm to it from the Scriptures. The point of this rhythm or shape is not to restrict us, but to keep us firmly fixed on Jesus and the gospel at the centre of worship. The words, songs, prayers and actions within this rhythm are not set in concrete, and yet it is good to have common words, songs and prayers from Scripture. God has also called pastors in his community to proclaim God's word and administer his gifts of grace. This includes the training, support and empowering of others to assist in worship, including the organist or band, the Bible readers, pray-ers, those who share messages for children, people who usher and welcome the stranger, and lay preachers.

**TK:** As the body of Christ in worship we fit into the rhythms laid down for us – shaped around the cross of Christ – with biblical foundations. Each of us brings to the body of Christ unique gifts, character and style. But I am conscious that my personal ideas, gifts and character should not move worship away from the biblical models upon which our service orders are based. We do, however, add to the collective memory of worship with modern expressions, new songs and ritual appropriate to the context.



### 5 GOD MADE ME UNIQUE, NOT A CLONE. SO WHY CAN'T I WORSHIP HIM ANY WAY I WANT?

**AK:** God promises he is with us. At any time we can speak with him, hear him speak, ask him for what we need and seek his will for our lives. In this sense we can and do 'worship' him anywhere, anytime. But he has created a special gathering where he gives us unique gifts. In this more public gathering of church, through pastors, he gives us his gracious acceptance and love in concrete, tactile means of word and water, bread and wine, in a public, corporate, communal way that makes us his body on earth in a visible, tangible way.

**TK:** Of course you can – especially when you are alone. When we are together, we share a common ritual – something that belongs to all of us. Some people worship with arms and heads raised high; others with hands clasped and heads bowed. Some sing loudly; others softly. Some read the Bible and some listen. Some smile and laugh with joy as they are fed the bread of life; some weep. But in worship the Lord meets all our needs. In forgiving each other our differences, God is at work in us refreshing us with a new sense of being gathered around the cross in the body of Christ.



## 6 WHAT IS LITURGY AND WHY DO WE NEED IT?

**AK:** 'Liturgy' is a strange word to our ears. We say now that it is the 'shape' or 'rhythm' of what happens when God's Spirit gathers us in Jesus' presence. Sure, the liturgy can be done poorly in some dead, rigid, formal, lifeless kind of way, with little regard to those gathered and what their culture is. But when enacted with the gospel at its centre and when people's needs and language are taken into account, it shapes us in good ways – in the gospel way, with Jesus at the centre. We receive him and respond to him in prayer, praise and thanks.

**TK:** The word 'liturgy' comes from a Greek word meaning service. For me, liturgy is the framework that makes way for God to serve us and for us to respond to him. Without a frame our worship would, in some ways, be spineless. It's the 'order' that frees us to worship in a way that is not cluttered or bent out of shape by our own ideas and expectations. Healthy liturgy moves and flexes, responding to needs and circumstances. It responds to the word of God so that real 'serving' happens. I went to hear a visiting speaker who said, regarding the shape of worship: 'We should be rooted in tradition before we can innovate with integrity' (Nadia Bolz-Weber).



## 7 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP AND WHY DOES IT MATTER WHAT WE SING/PLAY?

**AK:** Music is a beautiful gift of God that enhances our worship because it can engage people in ways the spoken word often cannot. Its purpose in worship is to serve. Luther called it the 'handmaiden to the gospel'. The role of musicians is to support people in the singing of the word, prayer and praise. They also support the preaching of the word as they work with the pastor to enact the drama of the liturgy, telling the story of God and his people. A well-played old song, sung with a faith-filled heart and rhythm, led by an old organ or single guitar or no instrument at all, can be just as helpful and encouraging as a song played by a cast of thousands with great skill and the same good heart.

**TK:** Like Pastor Adrian, I'm a musician, primarily a singer. I have a broad range of musical knowledge and taste. For me, music suited to church worship needs to be faithful to Scripture and serve a function of teaching, prayer or praise. Music can be liturgy or prayer. It can convey truths of God into deep levels of subconscious, or simply celebrate moments of grace. Some music is better suited to larger or smaller gatherings; some is more personal, reflective or devotional. Some is better performed, while some melody is easier sung by various generations. But church music belongs to all of us. We share a collective memory and need to be wary of dismissing the heartland of that memory.

## 8 WHAT SHOULD THE RELATIONSHIP BE BETWEEN WORSHIP AND OUTREACH?

**AK:** All we do in worship is, by its very nature, 'outreach'. This is because wherever God speaks his word, he achieves the purposes for which he sends it. Therefore all worship services are evangelistic in nature. Strangers need to be welcomed. Words and actions need to be inclusive. The gospel needs to be the main word in everything done and said. The coffee needs to be good and the welcome full. The preaching needs to use common language, and stories told need to be God's story intersecting with those of everyday people. Love needs to shine and the Spirit's calling, gathering and enlightening power needs to be welcomed and prayed for.

**TK:** Only a person who knows God can worship God, so worship is perhaps, by definition, meant for the faithful followers of Jesus. But worship is also a place where the Lord feeds and equips us, forgives and refreshes us. Good news is proclaimed and done. His purpose is that we should serve him; that we would be his presence in the world! So, while the primary focus of worship might be for the body of Christ to gather, it also has dimensions of outreach where the Lord reaches out to us and others in our brokenness, to bring us back to the foot of the cross – worshipping and serving the Lord.

*Adrian Kitson, above, pastor at Nuriootpa, SA and writer of the LCA theme song Where Love Comes to Life, and Tim Klein, above left, pastor at Warradale SA and also a musician and songwriter. Both pastors are members of the LCA's Commission on Worship. However, these responses represent their personal reflections and are not official statements on behalf of the commission.*