



The Art of Worship – A Glimpse into Lay Ministry Skills

by Rev. Tisha Brown

One of the things I love the most about being the Director of our Lay Academy is watching participants grow throughout their journey. For some that journey is one or two years and for others it lasts for three or even four years. Each year participants gain confidence, develop skills and hone tools for engaging ministry in whatever way their gifts inspire, their communities seek and the Spirit blesses.

Those who participate in year 4 of Lay Academy, which is called “Lay Ministry Skills,” focus their efforts on dipping their toes into the waters of five distinct ministry arts: the Art of Faith Formation, the Art of Pastoral Care, the Art of Worship, the Art of Preaching and the Art of Discernment.

This past year Bryan Sirchio was the instructor for the Art of Worship weekend. One of the assignments from that weekend was to:

Visit a worshipping community of some kind that is significantly different from your home church in terms of the worshipping style. Was there anything this community did liturgically that taught you something important? If so, what was it, and what did it teach you?

What follows is an edited excerpt from a Lay Ministry Skills participant as she reflects on what she learned on her Good Friday visit to a Catholic church in her community.

The first important thing I learned by attending the Catholic service; liturgy is meant to be done as a community. It is best if it is informed largely by the heart. We are best to create liturgy that helps people feel the compassion and love of God for all of creation and inspires the community to be Christ’s body in the neighborhood. To put it another way, liturgy is best designed around what God cares about. What does God care if we kneel or not or offer communion or not?

God cares if we kneel, if it helps us realize that God’s love is worth getting on our knees for. Kneeling is excellent if it opens us to the knowledge that God’s love sets us free to be God’s children and is given to us no matter what. When we kneel as a community in worship we express our desire to

submit to the task of being God's love ambassadors in the world. It expresses our commitment to practicing God's love with its inherent humility and difficulty.

What does God care about us practicing communion? The Eucharist creates a supportive community where we can encourage each other and practice God's love and grace together in the world. Communion makes real God's expansive welcome table of deep affection for all people. It is witness to the everyday ways God's extraordinary love can be found and inspires us to look for God in the mundane. Communion makes us one body, one world, held together by God's Love Kin-dom. It tells us we are part of something meaningful and true. In a mysterious way, it is the experience of Christ becoming part of us and living through us.

Liturgy makes the reality of God more apparent to us and moves us to Her expanding space.

It is the work of the people to stay awake and keep each other awake. Ask questions and be uncomfortable. Why do we do this the way we do? Do we converse about it enough? Is kneeling the best way for us to express that we are Christ's followers? What do teens think about kneeling? Is everything just for show or are we feeling this in our hearts?

If liturgy is the people's work, then it can't be static. It must always be looking for the new expression of God's Love. Good liturgy says, "I am so excited to have you here. I have never worshiped with someone like you or in this way before. Pause. Whatever happens, listen to your heart."

We are in this together.

Twenty-four people from congregations throughout Wisconsin completed year 4, Lay Ministry Skills this year. These people have grown and stretched in amazing ways and will continue to offer untold blessings to their home congregations, their Associations and the Conference. Their passion for ministry, their wisdom and their longing to serve is an inspiration to me and all who know them.

A new cohort of faithful learners is being formed. Lay Academy registration is open now through the end of July at www.wcucc.org/layacademy. All are truly welcome!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me any time at the conference office or at tbrown@wcucc.org.

Tisha