

**The idols of the nations
are silver and gold,
made by work of human hands.
They have mouths,
but cannot speak,
eyes,
but they cannot see;
they have ears,
but cannot hear,
nor is there breath
in their mouths.
Those who make them
will be like them,
and so will all
who trust in them.**

Psalm 135: 15-18

**As we plan and participate in
worship we ask ourselves –
Who do we want to be?
A hopeful answer for me is:
A missional
discipleship
community.**

Our gathering for worship
as disciples of Jesus
is determined by
who God is.

Or - expressed differently -
how we worship shows us
who we are actually worshipping!

Churches often find themselves rent by worship culture wars. We argue for reverence or spontaneity, quality control or team leadership...it goes on and on. It can help to invest some time in developing an intentional vision for your worship.

An important aspect here is to understand that you are choosing – someone else somewhere else will do it differently – and that's good. But what shape is the Spirit of God prodding you into as a community? What will you do? Can you see and say how this reflects how God has revealed himself among you?

All methodologies can be done well or carelessly, constructively or destructively.

- music for its own sake
- small groups for the sake of 'doing something different'
- multi-media 'because we can' will not serve us well.

Being clear about the material we are called to engage with, and then seeking the best ways/methods/media to explore it with God, will lead us to best practice: creative, relational, inclusive, intelligible faith building.

The following pages give two samples of communities that have sought to articulate the framework for the ways in which they seek to see their community take shape.

Here's a sample 'Vision for Gathering' from one church. What do you think?

God is
inclusive

God welcomes all with love, acceptance and grace:

Our gatherings will pursue ways to include all. Worship is not to be 'presented' from the front by an elite few, it will be done by all in their diverse ways in the pews.

God is
Creative

God is endlessly making all things new:

While God is eternal and does not change, God is not threatened or troubled by change. We will allow God's creativity to embolden us to seek new ways of doing things.

God is
Active

God is alive and active, intentionally engaged in the world:

Our worship will not be passive or disengaged, but will seek to model and actualise our engagement with God and God's work in the world. We will avoid being simply a crowd of onlookers. We will provide ways to step into active discipleship in following Jesus.

God is
Knowable

God is revealed in the Bible, by the Spirit and through the community of faith:

We will allow and affirm all of these revealers of God as expressions of truth and contributors of wisdom.

God is
Relational

God is intrinsically relational, as a trinity of three persons, and as demonstrated in the creation of human beings in God's image, male and female, for relationship:

Our worship will model and facilitate relational and communal interface, valuing right relationship with one another alongside right relationship with God. Time spent listening to one another is valued theologically, just as listening to one preacher is.

God is
Gracious

God is more concerned with how we live than with how it looks like we live:

Taking risks, having some bumps and experiencing awkward moments are worth the real life discipleship gains, and more precious than slick and perfect production values. We are not slackers, but mistakes and giving it a second go are acknowledged as part of doing anything properly. God is gracious to us and we will be gracious to one another as we take the faith adventure together.

Here's another sample 'Vision for Gathering':

What might our worship look like in the future...

(a dream for intergenerational worship)

We acknowledge and welcome and 'speak into' a range of ages and backgrounds, life experiences and theologies.

We address many learning styles, many cultural expectations, many 'love languages', many stylistic preferences and multiple intelligences. By definition we are multi-media: sound, sight, movement, touch, word, rhythm, story, summary, repetition, explanation, participation.

We provide multiple access points to participation.

We offer many opportunities for people to come 'on board' (not all of these will be verbal).

We make clear our intentions and explanations of what we are doing, and why we are doing it, but we also participate in the mystery of God.

Children value 'handles' to hold in dealing with the abstract. A consistent, purposeful theme helps orientate them on our journey of worship. Whilst what is ultimately important is the internal, spiritual process, much of what we do is an outward sign or narrative or symbol or interpretation of that inner process. These externalisations help children know what is going on.

We value the process of coming together, being together, discovering more of God together. We enjoy and forgive as appropriate the lumps and bumps of the process. We prepare well for this time, focussing on opportunities for many to contribute and participate. We acknowledge the risk taking and unpredictability inherent in this process and trust God with the end product.