

Highland Mennonite Brethren Church

Ministry Manual - UPREACH

Worship Service Vision Statement

Our goal during Sunday Worship at Highland Mennonite Brethren Church is to practice warm hospitality (see article on reverse, *'Hospitality Sweet'* by Carolyn Arends) towards whomever God leads into our midst. We want to encourage people toward a growing life of worship.

Our beliefs:

1. Worship is *covenantal* in that our services are a conversation between God and us wherein God reminds us of and renews again His eternal covenant of grace with us.
2. Worship is *participative* and *enthusiastic* because those who serve from the front are not performers but enablers, encouraging the full, conscious, enthusiastic participation of the congregation (not audience).
3. Worship is *holistic* when we bring all of ourselves to worship: body and soul, mind and heart, doubt and belief, lament and celebration.
4. Worship is *reverent*, even while playful, because we acknowledge that it is God with Whom we deal when we gather together.
5. Worship is *inclusive* because we always invite non-believers to participate to the extent they are able.
6. Worship is *creative* because we continually look for new ways to convey timeless truth.
7. Worship is *expectant* because the Spirit blows where it will, so we worship with our sails raised, expecting great (and surprising) things from God.

Worship Leaders (*not only those who lead the worship singing, but also those who give announcements, pray, read scripture, etc.*)...

- be sensitive to newcomers who may not know what our "normal" is;
- fulfill your role to the best of your ability; your best matters, so prayerfully prepare and actively seek to grow and improve in how you serve God and the congregation (1. *Corinthians 14:40, Colossians 3:23*);
- explain why we do the things we do by giving verbal instructions to focus our attention when necessary, and sharing personal meaning from your own experiences when appropriate;
- seek to reflect Christ to the people.

We pray...

- as a community: using "we" instead of "I";
- for a variety of reasons: to adore God, to confess sin, to give thanks, and to ask God for something;
- without making a fancy speech: God has honoured our humanity in coming to earth in Jesus Christ, we can speak to Him knowing that He is our God *and* our Friend
- at a thoughtful pace, trying not to fear silence, nor fill it up with verbal fillers (e.g. "um," "just," "and Lord") because silence makes room for God to speak into our hearts.

And so we come together to worship on Sundays, eagerly expecting that...

- each member of the body of believers will meet God in a genuine, personal encounter as we worship;
- each believer present will participate actively and wholeheartedly in worship as the Holy Spirit leads;
- non-believers, who are present - although they may not understand every aspect of the service - will still feel welcomed and accepted, and will be attracted to Jesus as they observe us and are encouraged and inspired through our intentional hospitality;
- each member of the body of believers will interact with others, encouraging and strengthening one another because we affirm the priesthood of all believers;
- God will speak to us in a variety of different ways; through music and the reading of Scripture, through physical actions, through art and visual symbols, through eating and drinking, and through silence.



Hospitality Sweet

One of the forgotten keys to the dynamic worship of God.

IN A RECENT family vacation, we stayed with two sets of friends. We spent the first night in a small prairie town, in the lovely but simple home of some fellow musicians who fed us hamburgers and offered us a hide-a-bed. The second night we spent visiting the gorgeous, new urban house of wealthier friends who fed us organic roast and outfitted the guest bed with 1,000-thread-count sheets. In both places, the hospitality was extraordinary. Both hosts thought of what we needed before we did—clean towels, snacks for the road. Although the resources were quite different, the spirit was wonderfully the same. We felt so at home both nights that we talked into the wee hours about things that mattered, including our jobs, our families, and our churches.

I've attended some 2,000 church services in my lifetime, both as a church member and as a guest musician at a wide variety of gatherings across North America. I've participated in many different approaches to "doing" church.

We've sung from hymnals, songbooks, and PowerPoint slides with slick video backgrounds. We've been accompanied by choirs, folk singers, and rock bands. We've heard preaching from ministers in robes, suits, and graphic tees. We've met in cathedrals, sanctuaries, gymnasiums, and living rooms. We've read formal liturgies and followed the unspoken liturgies of a particular church's service format. Almost always, we have taken an offering.

We have called it all "church," and we've argued about the right way to do it in order to give God glory, reach seekers, and foster spiritual growth. Sometimes we've had trouble separating our aesthetic preferences from our theologies and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I have my own biases, and it's almost impossible to perceive any worship service outside of that lens. But lately I've been

constructing a mental catalog of gatherings I've attended that were especially worshipful, challenging, or nourishing. I've been shocked by how widely they range in style, size, and polish. I can recall a wonderful communal awareness of God's presence in churches mega and miniscule, charismatic and conservative, contemporary and classical. (And I have found only empty ritual in a similar range of gatherings.)

Evidently, God will move wherever and whenever he pleases, regardless of our resources and plans. But when I look at my list of the most memorable gatherings, I see certain commonalities. Each of those services—whether led by a gifted team of professionals or by decidedly less proficient volunteers—was thoroughly Christocentric and profoundly reverent. No surprises there. The common characteristic that I least expected? Hospitality.

Robert Webber was the first person I heard speak about hospitality in the context of worship. He told a story about attending an unfamiliar church while traveling. About half of the church members constituted the choir, sitting up front in the loft. When it was time to sing, the choir director turned to the congregation and took the time to teach each parishioner his part, going over the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass lines until everyone knew what to do. Webber claimed that in the course of the opening song, guided by the choir at the front, he went from being a stranger to someone who belonged. He knew exactly how to

enter into that community's worship, because he had been taught his part in it.

"In the church," Webber concluded, "singing is hospitality."

I've been in churches where the singing (not to mention the praying and preaching) is impressive and professional, but not hospitable. Those services have been more of a

show than a family reunion, more a presentation than a meal together at a life-giving table. They have been effective to a point, but they haven't held a candle to hospitable churches that use every resource available (from the church's architecture to its care in establishing and teaching its liturgies in any style) to make each person included and sure of her part.

Hospitality matters because every time we worship together,

we are drawn not only into our particular community, but also into the community of angels and saints who are always praising God. Even better, we are being reminded that we are included in the circle of fellowship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Son is the true worship leader who helps us express our thanks to the Father, the phenomenally hospitable God who invites us to make ourselves at home with him.

Church is powerful when it embodies this inclusion—much like our hospitable friends did on our recent family vacation. When church is like that, it becomes the home away from home where we offer each other a place to reunite, be fed, commune, wash, rest, and receive what we need for the road. ❊



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