

# WINDOWS ON WORSHIP

Anne Perry

When liturgy works, each worshipper is spiritually touched by some element of the worship service. When it doesn't, each person knows that as well. To better assure the former more often than the latter, worship leaders must have an awakened awareness of how to put in place that which makes worship work.

We are not monolithic people. Many personalities and levels of spiritual experience comprise a worshipping audience. What inspires some may be dullsville for others. The fact is that multiple intelligences make up each congregation. Everybody is "intelligent" in some way, or "a combination of ways" (Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 1983.) Each person responds to particular sounds, rhythm, volume, sights, people, movement as he or she experiences worship.

Something must touch the emotions, inspiring that person to feel visited by the Holy, which is what true worship is.

Some windows on worship from recent worship services reveal the following scenarios, sharing components of

worship which tease out particular intelligences at work in worshippers. *He was four years old*, barely visible behind the set of snare drums that he played so jubi-

12, played "Amazing Grace," allowing the melody to flow smoothly into the enraptured congregation, carrying listeners to a spiritual place where grace made its mark in their souls.

*They were mother and daughter*, Tonya and Brianna. Dancing together in choreographed rhythm, their movements ebbed, flowed, glided, painting collages of a soul obeying her Lord, witnessing that sometimes you just gotta dance.

*Tradition echoes in sounds* of the tried and true renditions of hymns we love, flowing gently, caressing troubled minds, soothing aching hearts; reminding all that God is love and is present in the midst of them, sustaining strength and inspiration, reviving tired souls, animating hands and feet to keep time and

rhythm with their God. In this congregation, Nan Walden and William O. Dorsey make it happen.

*A more stuccota rhythm*, part of Black Church tradition, Gospel music moves the nimble of spirit to swing, sway, clap, shout—as Minister Eva Taylor directs



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lantly. Steady cadence flowed from rhythm of drumstick upon drum, coaxing from the instrument sounds of joy and excitement, restrained and dignified, belying the tender age of the drummer.

*Perched on a chair*, saxophone protruding from poised lips, Joey Cousar, age

the Gospel Choir in what they are in demand for and do so well.

*With dred locks to his shoulders*, guitar perched on knee, Edmund Stewart teases the audience with the haunting lyrics from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, "I don't know how to love Him." What a teaching moment! I had the thrill of interpreting for our youth gathering the meaning of the words of the song. That is, the song captures what were, perhaps, Mary Magdalene's conflicting emotions about the holy man that Jesus was. Men had only cared about her body. Jesus wanted her soul. She didn't know how to love like that. Jesus showed her how.

Multiple intelligence, introduced by Howard Gardner as cited above, names specific intelligences: Linguistic intelligence, the ability to use words effectively, orally or written, or both; logical-mathematical intelligence, the capacity to use numbers effectively; spatial intelligence, the ability to perceive accurately the visual-spatial world such as with color, space, shapes, etc; bodily-kinesthetic intelligence which is the use of the whole body to express ideas and feelings as an athlete or dancer; musical intelligence includes the ability to perceive, discriminate, transform and express musical forms; interpersonal intelligence is perceiving and making distinctions in mood, motivations and feelings of other people; intrapersonal intelligence offers self-knowledge and the ability to act based on that self-knowledge which includes having an accurate assessment of oneself, ie, strengths, limitations, temperament, with the capacity for self-discipline, self-understanding and self-esteem.

With some basic knowledge of Multiple Intelligence Theory as resource, planning worship can be invigorating as the worship committee adds variation to patterns of worship. The purpose of worship is to enable a deeper awareness of

one's closeness and connection to the Holy. By offering different forms of expressions of worship, a congregation experiences a range of possibilities to witness the touch of the Divine. Such experience is received in life enhancing ways.

I offer the following suggestions out of our own experiences at Union United Methodist Church in Aberdeen, Maryland where I served as pastor until I retired this year. **One**, know that it is OK,

even preferable, to utilize more than one worship resource at a time. Be prepared to "paint outside the box." **Two**, let the make up of your worship committee reflect diversity in gender, age, gifts, race (if possible), and experiences. Think flower garden rather than tulip patch. **Three**, embrace the make up of your congregation as is in finding gifts and graces among your people. Refuse to believe that your congregation is too old, too small or any of those superlatives

that render you impotent to change. Therefore, search out from your congregation dancers, musicians, dramatists. You will be pleasantly surprised at what you will find.

Case in point. Two years ago, I appealed to our worship committee (two women, two men, a youth) to assist me in developing variety in our worship services. At that time, I had not heard of MI Theory. I felt the need for us to be more eclectic in our expressions of worship. I wanted drums, a guitar and liturgical dance, interspersed within our worship experience. We found all three. And, recently, we went forth with a worship service including a drummer, guitarist, a children's choir, a youth choir, piano and organ. Each offered its respective gift of music and participation in service under the direction of Marvlyne Stewart, worship committee chair and youth choir director. The congregation was elated! Drummer, Stephen Ringgold, 12, said

he'd always wanted to play drums. And, with no formal training, he took a few lessons from Melvin Spence, a member of the worship committee and performed extremely well. Our guitarist was a gentleman who is a regular visitor, Jackie Fields, who just wanted to play the guitar. This diversity in worship style helped our small congregation **to turn the corner from its plateaued status** to embrace many future possibilities in that area of our life together, appealing to the multiple intelligences of the worshipping audience. We intend to continue using various worship techniques.

Many African American churches have a history of using various instruments and forms of worship. Dancers, drums, drama, guitar, keyboard are regularly utilized to get across the Gospel message. We recognize, applaud and learn from them. We encourage the more traditional, so-called, "dyed in the wool," congregations to loosen the old hand holds and reach into the diversity of worship styles for fresh resources to enrich worship experiences. Your worshippers will thank you. And, although I had not heard of MI Theory when we began our adventure in worship, MI Theory informed my articulation of just what was at work in our eventual venture into diverse worship styles.

I began this article by saying that when liturgy works well, each worshipper is touched spiritually and worships God— influenced by some element in the worship service. We are a small, 155-year-old, African American congregation in the midst of an economically and culturally oppressed area. The Holy Spirit has moved amongst us, made himself at home and enlivened us to possibilities for freshness and growth.

I often quote, Psalm 92:14: "They shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing." To that, we say "amen." And, we invite you to open a new window in your worship, to receive the fresh wind of the Spirit. □

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