

The Rector's Reflections

by The Rev. Dr. Gregory A. Tournoux, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Springfield, Illinois



For the past two months, we've been discussing how worship is another evangelistic dimension of the Upward value. As I stated last month, the initial primary goal of cell worship is to guide pre-Christians and other participants to "focus on Jesus and lead them into God's presence" (Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 121). Thus, the worship experience begins with conversational group prayer which invites the presence and direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. Next, cell leaders invite the community to "offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and our bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee" (BCP, 336). What follows is a time of praise and thanksgiving through song. David Finnell describes this participatory experience of gratitude with these words:

The major portion of the praise time will be spent in singing songs of praise to God. This does not include songs about God or the Christian life, but should be songs of praise directed to God. Usually hymns are about God. This may seem a minor point, but there is a big difference between singing about God and singing *to* God. Usually songs sung directly to God are short choruses or Scripture songs that we often associate with young people.

Why is this so important? The praise time is actually a time of corporate worship where the group experiences the actual presence of a holy and living God (David Finnell, *Life In His Body: A Simple Guide to Active Cell Life*, 88).

A period of silence, interspersed during cell worship or after, allows for serious personal reflection and sensitivity to hearing God's voice (Psalm 46:10).

A small group must break the silence barrier. This doesn't mean breaking out of silence but breaking into silence – into the presence of God. When we come together with Christ in the midst, when does he talk? When do we listen? It's in our moments of silence before the Lord that he can speak to our hearts. Groups who can listen together will enter God's presence and hear him speak in life-changing ways (Bill Beckham "Community Life in the Cell Group" in *Making Cell Groups Work: Navigation Guide*, by M. Scott Boren, et al, 162-163).

The Book of Common Prayer “BCP,” interestingly enough, is an excellent evangelistic worship resource for cells. For example, a morning cell group can use Daily Morning Prayer: Rite Two (BCP, 75-102); groups which commence near the noon hour can use An Order of Service for Noonday (BCP, 103-107); a group which gathers in the early evening can use Daily Evening Prayer: Rite Two (BCP, 115-126); and late evening cells can use An Order for Compline (BCP, 127-135).

Each of these BCP services is saturated with Biblical content and references, highly participatory, strongly experiential, and naturally communal. The reading of the appointed Psalms can occur in unison or antiphonally, for example. Three of the four main services provide an opportunity for confession of sin and absolution; all contain the Lord’s Prayer and a time for conversational prayers and intercessions. In addition, “Calling out the names of God, praying prayers of thanksgiving” (Robert E. Logan and Thomas T. Clegg, *Releasing Your Church’s Potential*, 6-5) during open prayer, will draw cell members closer to the Lord. Incredible flexibility within the structure of these services allows for groups to adapt them to the specific needs of cell members and pre-Christians. Finally, the BCP offers four abbreviated versions of these main services in the section: Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (BCP, 137-140).

Other items can be implemented in the cell (during singing, praying, or Scripture reading) to facilitate meaningful evangelistic

worship. The use of interactive experiential multi-sensory elements, for instance, provides an atmosphere conducive for Postmoderns to connect with Jesus Christ. Specifically, Icons, incense, prayer beads, drawings, bodily postures (kneeling), and dance (Psalm 30:11), are helpful tangible realities which draw Pre-Christians away from the busyness of life’s demands and onto the Holy Trinity.

Please join me next month. Thank you!

Faithfully in Jesus Christ,

Greg +