Engaging Patterns of Worship

In each generation, Christians have gathered, yearning for the presence of God, encountering the living Christ, and being sent by the Holy Spirit to do justice and love abundantly. Worship is at the heart of the United Church of Christ. If we do nothing else, we gather for worship. We seek to order our worship—to proclaim, hear, see, and taste the goodness of God and be transformed.

At this time in our history, our denomination is keenly aware of both the traditions we bring to worship and emerging new forms. Congregations are seeking to make their worship relevant and powerful. In some places, worship is grounded in a particular heritage and culture; others embrace ancient liturgical forms in fresh ways. Some blend ecumenical patterns with new media. Others employ language accessible to seekers—those shaped more by culture than the church. Our worship styles include blended, seeker, contemporary, traditional, and those grounded in particular racial or ethnic communities. Whatever we do, the ways we worship shape who we are, our ideas about God, and how we relate to neighbor and stranger.

How do you shape your worship? What does it mean? How does what you do compare with a variety of other patterns? Gather a group together and do one or more of the following activities:

- Pray for God’s presence and wisdom as you explore your worship patterns and life together.
- Pull together selected bulletins from the past and today. Notice what you do and how you do it. Or listen to a variety of members, perhaps of different ages, describe the worship service in your church.
- Reflect together on such questions as:
  1. When worship is especially meaningful, what happens?
  2. When and how does God seem to be present?
  3. How does worship reflect the hopes and dreams of your congregation?
  4. What do you long for in worship? When does that happen? What about worship currently doesn’t express that longing?
- Look over the ways that some other UCC congregations order their worship. Four patterns are included in this booklet. Describe the patterns to one another in the group.

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.
(1 Corinthians 14:26)

"[The United Church of Christ] affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God."
(Preamble, the Constitution of the United Church of Christ)
Reflect together on such questions as:

1. What might you find meaningful in these patterns of worship? What do you wonder about?
2. When or how might God seem present in this worship pattern?
3. In what ways might this pattern reflect the hopes and dreams of that congregation?
4. What do you discover about worship by looking at your own worship and the worship of others?

• Please pray a prayer such as “O God, what are you saying and revealing to us about the ways we worship?” Share together any responses evoked by the time of prayer.

• Please complete the response form online at www.ucc.org/worship/ or on the response form found in the packet.