

# Clarifying the Vision for Worship

## The Importance of Worship

Worship is recognition and celebration of our oneness with the God who is love. Through worship, we surrender our whole selves to God—embracing God’s love for us, and freely and consciously loving God in return. Worship is holistic: as we live in the reality of the God of love, we seek to make everything we do an act of worship. Worship can be intentionally expressed through service, obedience, resting, giving, and many other ways.

As we surrender to our oneness with God, we become increasingly aware of our oneness with others. Worship is therefore not just an individual act, but also a corporate celebration of our community in God, as well as a means to strengthen the bonds of community. This embrace of loving relationship with God and with one another leads to transformation: to repentance from all that is not loving, to forgiveness of those who have been unloving towards us, and to a desire for justice and mercy for all people.

Through worship we draw closer to a loving, accepting and healing God. In diverse ways we declare to ourselves and to one another God’s transcendence as the author and creator of all things, and rejoice in the goodness of God and the beauty of creation. At the same time, we worship with confidence, knowing that the Almighty God is also our good parent, loving savior, and intimate friend. Through worship we recalibrate our perspective: we recognize our smallness before an infinite God, as well as our significance to be known and loved by such a God. We become aware of our brokenness as individuals and as a community, as well as God’s power to bring healing and reconciliation in and through us. We rest in God’s unconditional love, as our desire deepens to live as agents of God’s love, peace and hope in our beautiful but marred world.

## Characteristics of Corporate Worship

At Cedar Ridge, we view worship as an integral part of discipleship that is nurtured by being mindful of how we think, speak and act in the various contexts of our daily lives. We seek to “practice the presence of God”—intentionally inviting God into every aspect of our lives; and we serve others, treasure the earth, and pursue social justice from an attitude of worship.

This daily, integrated approach to worship is complemented by specific times devoted to individual and corporate worship. As individuals, we build into our lives spiritual disciplines, prayer practices, creative activities, engagement with nature, and other “spaces” in which we can worship God. As a community, we gather together to worship through music and song, as well as through other art forms and media, in recognition of our oneness through Christ, and our collective surrender to the loving sovereignty of God. Our corporate worship has a number of characteristics, as described below.

**1. Predominantly musical**

Music is an ancient and powerful medium that creates a worshipful space. We are exhorted in Scripture to make music and to sing to God, and music and song have been essential elements of Christian worship down through the ages. Singing together is an expression of unity as we declare together our collective love and dependence on God. While music is the mainstay of our corporate worship, we include other art forms and media alongside music and as separate worship experiences in their own right. The celebration of communion, lighting of candles, and other sacred rituals are highly valued expressions of worship for our community.

**2. Nurtured through leadership**

Gifted leaders with musical ability lead our congregation in worship. Leaders prepare and execute songs with competence and skill to enable people to participate. But the goal is to engage the whole congregation in worship, rather than to deliver a polished performance. Worship is an expression of who we are. It is therefore led by members of our own community, and should reflect to the extent possible our ethnic, gender and age diversity. Each corporate worship time is an opportunity for us all to grow as a worshipping community.

**3. Creatively simple**

Through worship we participate in the creativity of God. We offer up to God the artistic expressions of our community: we sing songs we have written or arranged, and incorporate other artistic expressions we have created. At the same time, we strive for integration, simplicity and a sense of flow, so we are not distracted in our worship.

**4. Authentic**

Since worship is a surrender of our whole lives, corporate worship should be real and honest about God and about our experience of life. We want the components of worship—including the songs we sing—to express our story and theology. Through worship we recognize we are broken, humble people coming to a loving, beautiful God, and so we seek to create safe space to be intimate and honest with God and with one another.

**5. Transcendent and grounded**

Authentic worship is grounded in the “here and now,” and reflects not only our personal brokenness and struggles, but also the pain and brokenness of the world. Worship includes lament as well as the prophetic heart-cry for social justice. But worship also transcends to the “yet to come,” recognizing that God has great hope for us and change is possible. Through worship we welcome God’s presence, surrender to divine love and mercy, and open ourselves to the Holy’s Spirit’s healing and transformative work.

**6. Inclusive**

Corporate worship is an expression of who we are as a community. We worship together as one body, rather than as a collection of individuals. Our worship is therefore intentionally inclusive: we seek to use gender-inclusive language for God and people, and to engage all ages in worship. We strive to create a generally consistent style of worship that draws on diverse

musical roots and that has broad appeal, while thoughtfully deviating from that style at times for variety or communication purposes.

## **Priorities for Moving Forward**

Cedar Ridge's approach to worship has been evolving over the past couple of years to increasingly embrace the characteristics described above. Significant progress has been made and many of the priorities for moving forward have already been initiated.

### **1. Develop the worship team**

Since worship is an integral part of discipleship, it needs to be "owned" by Cedar Ridge leadership as a whole, and provided pastoral team support and oversight. Worship leaders play an important influencing role in our community, and should be nurtured as spiritual leaders. Recruitment and integration systems will be developed to bring in new musicians and artists in an effective and non-disruptive manner. Worship leaders and key team members will be included in service planning.

### **2. Encourage congregational participation**

As we continue to transition away from a performance culture, we need to encourage and facilitate congregational participation. Songs should be easy to sing, and new songs introduced gradually. Effort will be made to create extended space and flow for uninterrupted worship. Interactive forms of non-musical worship such as rituals and creative activities will be used as appropriate to enrich worship and encourage participation. Periodically, Sunday services will focus exclusively on worship. Through messages, discipleship materials and other means, we will communicate our desire for inclusive, participatory worship.

### **3. Nurture worship creativity**

We will create safe places for our community to grow in creativity, including worship choirs, creativity workshops, songwriting, and monthly worship gatherings. Creativity in corporate worship will be expressed through the periodic use of different musical genres as well as non-musical forms of worship and artistic expression. We will seek to use lighting and multimedia to deepen our sense of worship.

### **4. Integration**

We will continue to establish a general consistent worship style that has broad appeal and is inclusive of a range of relevant influences, which will allow people to enter into worship without being distracted by weekly changes in musical approach. We will seek to create impactful multigenerational worship experiences on First Sundays and in All Ages Together services through intentional consideration of the capacities and experiences of children and youth, as well as through the appropriate incorporation of children and youth into service planning and execution. We will identify and develop young people as worship leaders, and worship team members will work with youth leaders to nurture worship experiences that youth consider relevant.

**5. Worship as discipleship**

Consistent with our understanding of worship described above, we will continue to promote worship as an integral part of discipleship. Messages, discipleship material, blogs and other content will encourage people to leverage everyday “moments of awe” as opportunities for worship, and to integrate worshipful spiritual practices into their daily routines. Through discipleship materials and training and support to group leaders, we will create feasible and meaningful worship experiences for groups.