Worship for the *Whole Body*

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR
MULTI-SENSORY WORSHIP PRACTICES

DISABILITY MINISTRY NETWORK

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Worship Gatherings... For the Whole Body

Both recent research and lived experiences teach us that our congregations are comprised of individuals with diverse learning styles, sensory preferences, and support needs. While some churches effectively incorporate multi-sensory elements in worship, others may struggle to imagine ways to engage the whole body in worship beyond, for example, auditory and word-driven (i.e., singing and preached word) expressions. Worship services are inherently sensory experiences. How might pastors, worship leaders, and others responsible for worship gatherings explore new pathways for engaging our whole bodies (as people), so that the Whole Body (of Christ) might more fully participate?

Based on a grant project sponsored by the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, this resource is the outcome of 17 individual projects conducted by member organizations of the Disability Ministry Network (DMN). Each organization convened groups of people in their regions for conversations about multi-sensory worship, asking, "How might we engage the senses in worship more effectively?" The conversations resulted in hundreds of ideas (over 575!) regarding ways to incorporate the senses in worship. We then compiled the ideas and, over a group working session at the 2024 DMN annual meeting, engaged in a process of organizing them according to themes. More than two dozen leaders in disability ministries participated in the process of discussing and considering how each idea might be utilized in a worship service. Finally, the team from the Baylor Collaborative on Faith and Disability organized and consolidated the themes (e.g., removing duplicates, combining similar ideas, and clarifying more general suggestions) to create the basis for this practice guide.

Many of these ideas come from older or long standing traditions in the Christian Church. Others are more recent creations, especially with the use of modern technology. Some were birthed from intentional initiatives to include people with different forms of disabilities in worship services with the result that they helped worship become more participatory and meaningful for everyone. We encourage you to exercise discernment as you consider what and how to adapt in your context.

Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.

-Psalm 34:8

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

-I John 1:1

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How Might We Design Worship Gatherings for the Whole Body of Christ?

WE HOPE YOU WILL:

1. Consider these practical suggestions to incorporate when planning worship services. Have fun with them, but also plan carefully so people know what you are going to try and why.

2. Contact any of the members of the Disability Minsitry Network for assistance in exploring strategies to include people with disabilities and their families more fully into the life and ministries of your congregation. For the full list of DMN members, visit our website at http://disabilityministrynetwork.org/.

Engaging The Whole Body in Worship

Engaging the Whole

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Fellowship and Greetings

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in the fellowship and greeting portion of worship services and beyond? Try these creative ideas.

1 Maintain a Flexible Posture

Depart occasionally from traditional greeting practices, such as passing the peace, to create a more accessible environment.

2 Embrace Creative Greetings

Model and encourage alternative options for formal greeting times. In addition to handshakes, demonstrate the acceptability of high fives, fist bumps, elbow touches, or dance.

3 Share a Meal

Eat together as part of the fellowship time before or after worship services to foster community and belonging. Potluck-style meals especially encourage contributions from each member of the community.

4 Make It a Game

Play games as a church to foster community and friendships. An extended greeting time could be turned into a "community scavenger hunt", where each person is encouraged to meet a person who grew up in a different city, is wearing a particular shirt color, or has a shared interest.

5 Sign the Greeting

Incorporate sign language for greetings or blessings. For example, a church that regularly practices the passing of the peace might learn to sign, "Peace be with you; and also with you."

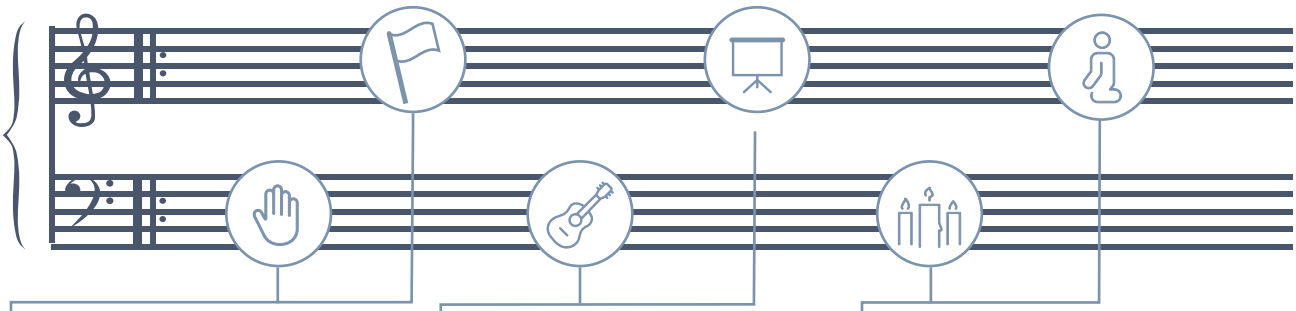
6 Leverage Social Media

Create social media groups to help church members connect throughout the week, enriching fellowship and connections beyond corporate worship gatherings.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Music and Songs

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in the music and songs of worship services? Try these creative ideas.



Sing with Your Hands and Feet

Incorporate hand motions into worship songs to provide a fun and interactive way to worship. Motions help reinforce memorization and participation in singing.

Dance and Wave

Dance while waving scarves or flags to encourage freedom of expression through movement.

Make a Joyful Noise with Instruments

Distribute rhythm instruments or kazoos during worship to facilitate participation for nonspeaking people.

Integrate Visual Aids

Use visual aids to reinforce the worship experience and illuminate concepts in the music. Include relevant images on the worship slides or tangible props related to the songs (e.g., rocks or pebbles accompanying songs describing God's strength).

Enhance Music with Light and Color

Complement music with lighting and visuals. For example, try using light projections to display religious symbols, dimming the lights and using candles to aid in reflection and meditation, or incorporating thematic color schemes throughout the worship service.

Move Together in Unity

Guide the church through various postures, such as kneeling or raising hands, to help church members express specific attitudes (e.g., praise, repentance, thanksgiving) during worship.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Readings

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in the Scripture reading portion of worship services? Try these creative ideas.

01 Sign the Scripture

Encourage people to memorize Bible passages in sign language. Teaching sign language for short verses or passages over time can increase accessibility and aid in memory.

02 Attend to Physical Postures

Adopt a variety of physical postures during the Scripture readings or blessing to help people more fully engage. For example, invite church members to receive a Scripture reading or blessing with their hands held out, or to face the exit doors during the benediction to symbolize going out into the world.

03 Embrace the Drama of the Bible

Depict Scripture through drama to bring stories to life. Plan skits, puppet shows, or read the story aloud while others act it out.

04 Illustrate with Video

Play videos during or after Scripture readings to provide a visual depiction of the text. For example, a video of wind blowing over a lake provides an image of the setting when Jesus calmed the storm.

05 Paint the Story

Display visual art, such as the projection of famous religious paintings, to depict biblical stories. Providing coloring pages and paint or crayons allows for participatory artmaking while a story is told.

06 Practice Lectio Divina

Pray through Scripture with Lectio Divina and encourage people to share their learnings in small groups.

07 Use Concrete Images to Symbolize Themes

Depict abstract concepts with visual representations. For example, pour water during a reading about forgiveness to symbolize the washing away of sin.

08 Sing the Scripture

Turn Bible passages into songs to facilitate deeper connection with the text and enhance memorization.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Prayer

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in prayer practices? Try these creative ideas..

1. Light Candles

Distribute candles to symbolize personal prayers while people interact with the tangible texture—and even feel the warmth—of the lit candle.

2. Pray Playfully

Pray interactively using simple group activities. For example, tossing yarn, a beach ball, or a balloon between church members can allow people to take turns sharing prayer requests or praying.

3. Get Moving

Encourage, demonstrate, and normalize a variety of physical postures during corporate prayer. Examples include guided movements, bowing heads, gathering in a circle, or dancing as a congregation.

4. Provide Finger Prayer Labyrinths

Use finger labyrinths to guide participants through various aspects of prayer. As a person traces their finger through the printed labyrinth, encourage them to pray prayers of gratitude, intercession, and reflection.

5. Write Your Prayers

Write out prayers on tactile surfaces to symbolize prayer themes. For example, write prayers on stones to symbolize prayers of trust, or on soft cloth to represent prayers for mercy.

6. Practice Breath Prayer

Lead guided breathing exercises to help focus attention on the body and mind, as well emphasize the role of our bodies in worship. For example, lead breath prayers to focus on a repeated phrase that matches a pattern of inhaling and exhaling. As people breathe in, say, "Jesus Christ, Son of God;" as they exhale, say, "Have mercy on me, a sinner."

7. Create Interactive Stations

Establish a physical space to write out prayers or reflections, such as a prayer wall or a whiteboard. Curate specific prayer stations with interactive sensory elements, such as water and sand, to reinforce prayer themes. Stations are also a great way to encourage a variety of physical prayer postures, such as sitting, standing, kneeling, or outstretching arms.

8. Pray Beyond Spoken Words

Incorporate sign language to increase the accessibility of services, including prayer times. Consider teaching signs to the whole congregation for the Lord's Prayer or favorite hymns.

9. Draw Your Prayers

Draw pictures of people or things you are holding in prayer. For example, draw pictures of loved ones for whom you are thankful, or draw laments on paper throughout the service before dropping them at the end to symbolize a prayer of releasing.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Preaching

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in sermons and preaching? Try these creative ideas

Remember the Kinesthetic Learners

Design tactile, interactive experiences to help people to engage with the message. Some examples include passing around objects related to the sermon or encouraging people to write or draw during the message.

Go Beyond the Sage on the Stage

Include interactive components in the service to help people engage with worship in real time. For example, use interactive digital elements, like polling or live feedback, as well as alternating between large groups and small breakout groups during the service.

Don't Just Tell - Show

Use object lessons and creative props during the sermon to enhance clarity and memory. For example, wave streamers to represent tongues of fire in Acts or pour water in a bowl to represent forgiveness.

Act It Out

Organize short dramas to illustrate sermon stories. Plan skits or puppet shows, or read the story aloud while others act it out.

Embrace Art

Display visual art such as stained glass, PowerPoint slides with images relating to the sermon, or live painting during the service to encourage visual connection with the message.

Let the Little Children Come

Encourage children to move to the front of the room for the children's sermon to help them more fully engage the lesson alongside their peers.

Show Them Your Notes

Provide sermon notes to help people follow along with the message. For example, project the sermon outline onto a screen, distribute summaries with pictures, provide interactive note-taking pages, or offer complete manuscripts of the sermon.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Sacraments

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in the sacraments, and how can these practices be made more accessible for all? Try these creative ideas.

Christian denominations vary in their theology and practice of communion and baptism; as with any creative approach to worship, exercise discernment when applying these ideas to your context.

Embrace Communion Practices That Are...

Multisensory | Use different types of bread to highlight the diverse body of Christ, bread makers to create the smell of freshly baked bread, or props such as displaying bunches of grapes to illustrate the elements of communion.

Accessible | Ensure that communion elements are accessible to church members. For example, communion elements can be brought to people who are unable to come forward, and the communion table can be moved to a more accessible area within the sanctuary. Additionally, gluten-free communion elements promote accessibility to church members with allergies.

Interactive | Create an interactive altar where congregants can touch the elements as part of the reflective process.

Embrace Baptism Practices That Are...

Multisensory | Invite the congregation to gather around the family of the person being baptized, hand out pebbles to help church members remember their baptisms, or use the sounds of water and wind to direct focus on the Holy Spirit.

Accessible | Maintain a flexible spirit in your approach to baptisms. For example, if someone is uncomfortable around water, it may help them to use sprinkling.

Interactive | Create interactive opportunities for the community during baptisms. For example, involve those in attendance in a spoken liturgy, or invite them to receive anointing with water to remember their own baptism.

Incorporate Multi-sensory Supports and Accents

Employ scented elements to represent purification, such as scented oils, incense, candles, and scented cloths. Playing instrumental music can help church members focus during times of prayer and meditation. Plan for ways in which sign language can be incorporated into the sacraments.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

The Whole Service

How might we incorporate our whole bodies throughout the service as a whole? Try these creative ideas.

Use Predictable Service Structures

Design repetitive liturgical elements across services to emphasize biblical principles and aid in remembrance

Weave Art throughout the Service

Provide art supplies and creative materials, such as origami paper, activity sheets, Play-Doh, or Lego bricks for people to use during the service. Creating art can center attention on the message.

Decorate for Engagement

Design decorations to enhance the space and represent biblical themes. Examples include using greens, floral arrangements, dramatic lighting changes, rich colors, natural materials, stained glass, and art installations

Offer Tactile Elements

Supply objects related to Bible stories, such as crosses or stones, to help people connect with the message on a deeper level.

Prioritize Movement

Encourage church members to engage in whole-body movement during the service through varied worship postures. For example, invite people to sit or stand as they are able, lift their hands, or participate in guided meditative postures.

Engage the Sense of Smell

Use different scents in the service, such as scented oils, incense, and candles, to create an immersive environment

Incorporate Textures

Incorporate various textures, such as burlap, rough wooden crosses, or soft prayer shawls to symbolize key themes and help people engage in tactile worship.

Provide Journals

Provide journals to the congregation to help them reflect on their thoughts and prayers throughout the service.

Experiment with Music and Soundscapes

Use a variety of sounds throughout the service to represent different biblical principles. For example, water and wind can help church members focus on the Holy Spirit, heartbeat sounds can symbolize life and renewal, and bells can represent angels.

Incorporate Moments of Silence

Plan for moments of silence throughout the worship service to help deepen times of reflection and calm.

Create a Play Area

Designate a play area in the sanctuary stocked with quiet toys for children.

Set Up Interactive Stations

Set up interactive stations with different sensory elements, such as sand or cloth, to touch during the service.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Holidays

How might we incorporate our whole bodies during special holiday services and seasons? Try these creative ideas in the seasons of....

1. Advent and Christmas

Plan for engaging, multisensory Advent and Christmas services; ideas include lighting Advent candles, holding candlelight services, using Advent wreaths and calendars, setting up a nativity with live animals, and incorporating scents (such as cinnamon and pine) that represent new life in Christ.

2. Lent

Symbolize Lenten themes like repentance and humility by decorating the worship space with purple or black and white color schemes. Curate a community art piece by handing out broken pieces of glass during Lent, then forming the broken pieces into a cross at Easter. Historic traditions, like the imposing of ashes on Ash Wednesday, provide a tactile connection to the season's themes.

3. Holy Week & Easter

Many multisensory activities can be incorporated during Holy Week. Some ideas include:

- **Palm Sunday** | Host palm processionals to reenact Jesus's entry into Jerusalem and invite members to create their own palm branches out of paper.
- **Maundy Thursday |** Create stations for foot washing and share a meal together.
- **Good Friday** | Dim lights gradually over the course of the service to represent Christ's journey to the cross and crucifixion.
- **Easter Sunday |** Grow a garden to symbolize new life, place flowers on the cross, release butterflies as a symbol of the resurrection, use water to draw the cross on foreheads, or prepare a special song and dance.

4. Pentecost

Use fans or wind machines during Pentecost to symbolize the rush of the Holy Spirit.

5. Thanksgiving

Create a mosaic during the Thanksgiving holiday. Use squares of cardstock for people to draw, write, paint, knit, or crochet something for which they are thankful. Compile the completed squares on a large board as a mosaic art piece for the church.

ENGAGING THE WHOLE BODY IN...

Outside the Box Worship

How might we incorporate our whole bodies in worship services that are unique or "outside the box?" Try these creative ideas.

1. Plan Prayer Gatherings

Set up special prayer events, such as labyrinth walks and prayer walls, to encourage church members in their walks with God.

2. Host a Disability-Focused Worship Service

Design intentional times to focus on disability, such as celebrating Disability Awareness Sunday or hosting events for church members with disabilities.

3. Take It Outside

Hold the service outdoors to engage the senses in nature, emphasizing God's creation. Build a bonfire to represent the Holy Spirit, hold a short hike during the service, or take time to focus on the sounds of birds or wind.

4. Worship Together Beyond Sunday

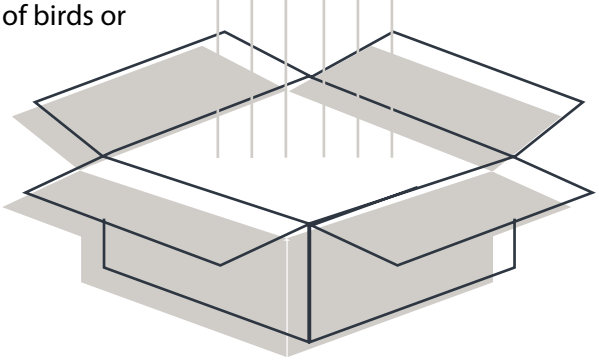
Plan special worship services outside of regular weekly gatherings with creative elements, such as passing out rhythm instruments, incorporating traditional instruments, and hosting Taizé worship.

5. Try Messy Church

Host "Messy Church" events for young families with monthly theme-oriented worship services. These involve short services that incorporate multi-sensory elements such as intentional movement, song, dance, or other sensory experiences; activities like playing with sand, water, or paints; and a short, interactive message.

6. Curate a Church Art Gallery

Create an art gallery made by members of the congregation to help people to reflect on their faith through visual images.



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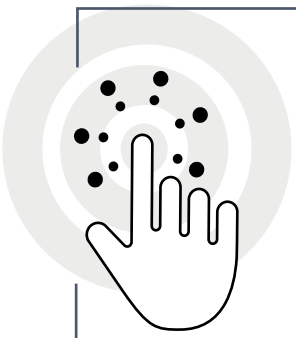
Exploring The Senses of the Whole Body in Worship

Exploring the Senses

EXPLORING THE SENSES OF THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Touch

How might we engage the sense of touch in worship? Try these creative ideas.



1. Offer Diverse Textures

Use different textures, such as burlap, scarves, or rough wooden crosses, to serve as symbols and help people to engage in tactile worship.

2. Distribute Tangible Take-Home Items

Pass out handheld items during the service such as prayer beads, stones, or cards. Tangible objects can be used as aids in personal meditation, remembrance, and symbolization of prayers.

3. Get Crafty

Plan a church-wide creative project. The act of creating something can help church members express concepts that are otherwise difficult to verbalize. For example, invite people to participate in a communal art project, model something from clay, or make their own compost to grow plants.

4. Tell Stories through Touch

Use tactile, interactive storyboards to help communicate biblical passages. For example, move flannel pictures on a graph or magnets with images on a white board to act out a story.

5. Incorporate Symbolic Tactile Elements

Sand | Invite church members to interact with sand during worship to teach biblical concepts. For example, sand trays can symbolize the impermanence of life and the need for spiritual renewal.

Wind | Blow fans during Pentecost to symbolize the rush of the Holy Spirit.

Water | Incorporate water into the service beyond baptisms. For example, use water to make crosses on people's foreheads on Easter to remember their baptisms, pour out water on people's hands during the assurance of pardon, or hold a foot washing time to teach humility and service.

Ashes | Impose ashes on foreheads or hands to symbolize repentance and humility. Beyond Ash Wednesday, create a cross on a piece of paper using ashes from a bowl.

6. Set Up Interactive Stations

Set up interactive stations to deepen times of reflection. Activities for stations include lighting candles, touching altar elements, and placing flowers at a cross. Using oils, lotions, water, or cloth can engage the sense of touch in healing and blessing.

EXPLORING THE SENSES OF THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Hearing

How might we engage the sense of hearing in worship? Try these creative ideas.

1. Provide Instruments to the Congregation

Furnish instruments, such as drums, handbells, and rhythm sticks, for use during worship. Those who need extra help to use the instruments can be supported by buddies, or fellow congregants.

2. Signal Transitions with Auditory Cues

Use specific sounds, such as bells or gongs, to signal different parts of the service.

3. Pause for Silence

Incorporate moments of silence to foster engagement beyond spoken communication. Plan ahead for times free of speaking, music, clapping, and other sounds.

4. Use Soundscapes

Include a variety of sounds during the service, such as water, heartbeats, and wind, to enhance the atmosphere and emphasize God's handiwork in creation.

5. Lectio Divina

Use prayerful approaches to reading Scripture aloud, such as Lectio Divina, to invite meditation on the sound of the words.

6. Select Songs with Intentionality

Be creative and intentional with song selections. Examples include Taizé worship, songs with simple melodies and lyrics, songs with prophetic lyrics, instrumental/humming versions of songs, spoken word poetry in worship, and Scripture set to a tune.

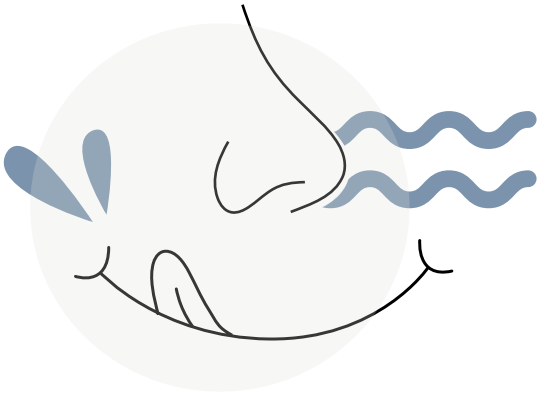
7. Use a Predictable Liturgy

Incorporate repetitive, spoken liturgical practices to add an auditory element to the service and aid in memorization of biblical principles. Familiar songs and hymns can aid those who have difficulty with memory.

EXPLORING THE SENSES OF THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Taste and Smell

How might we engage the senses of taste and smell in worship? Try these creative ideas.



1. Remember the Sensory Nature of Communion

Highlight the many ways in which communion practices encourage worship through tasting and smelling the bread and cup. Creative ways to engage in this practice include using visual aids, such as a bunch of grapes, using different types of bread to highlight the diverse body of Christ, and encouraging church members to serve the elements to one another. Freshly baked bread can reinforce the smell and taste of communion.

2. Share a Meal Together

Partake in a meal together as a congregation to encourage fellowship and unity.

3. Teach with Food

Use food as a companion to learning. For example, food can be used as part of an object lesson, such as popping popcorn to represent "popcorn prayer."

4. Fill the Room with Fragrance

Arrange flowers to symbolize resurrection, new life, growth, and beauty. Scented oils, cloths, and anointing water can be used during times of prayer to represent purification, blessings, and healing. Seasonal scents, such as cinnamon or pine near Christmas, can also be used to represent new life in Christ.

EXPLORING THE SENSES OF THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Movement

How might we engage movement in worship? Try these creative ideas.

1. Move throughout the Service

Incorporate Whole Body Movement throughout the Service | Design the service structure to include movement, such as creating a large group and small group breakout model or inviting church members to move to different parts of the sanctuary throughout the service. A short "movement break" or "praise break" for dancing using scarves, streamers, or flags during worship can help people release energy during a lengthier service.

Move with the Music | Use hand motions during singing to emphasize key words and ideas, as well as aid in remembrance of the songs.

Posture for Prayer | Lead people to assume physical postures for prayer. Examples include guided movements, bowing heads, gathering in a circle, or facing the exit during the benediction.

2. Adjust the Space to Encourage Movement

Vary the Seating | Provide a variety of options, such as rocking chairs or bean bag chairs, to allow freedom of movement not normally possible in typical seating.

Dedicate Space for Children | Set up a dedicated space for children in the sanctuary to encourage play and interaction with others. For example, invite children to move to the front of the room during the children's sermon or create a play area with costumes, games, or soft, quiet toys.

Create Prayer Installations | Establish a physical space to write out prayers or reflections, such as a prayer wall or a whiteboard, to encourage engagement in worship and prayer.

Curate Creative Prayer Spaces | Design interactive art installations for church members to walk through, to help bring biblical principles to life and inspire wonder. Creating specific prayer stations with interactive sensory elements, such as water and sand, can help church members deepen their times of reflection and prayer. Create a prayer labyrinth with a paper labyrinth option available or set up interactive stations of the cross.

Change the Service Location | Hold outdoor services or activities to incorporate movement and encourage deep contemplation. For example, invite church members to hike through the woods, sit by a fire, or do activities such as camping and kayaking together.

3. Experiment with Interactive Elements

Increase Movement through Interactivity | Incorporate interactive activities into the service to provide times of movement for church members. Examples include walking to the front to write a question for God and placing it in a bowl, holding symbols of laments and dropping them at the end of the sermon, and incorporating symbolic responses like raising hands or using colored cards to answer questions from the sermon.

Encourage Journaling | Provide journals and note-taking pages for church members to use during the service. This kinesthetic activity can help people process their thoughts and prayers.

Provide Symbolic Props | Use interactive props to help church members engage with the message more fully. Examples include creating Palm Sunday processionals, using handheld fans to represent the Holy Spirit, waving streamers to represent tongues of fire, pounding nails in the cross, and laying flowers at the cross.

Offer Handheld Instruments and Tools | Stock a table with rhythm instruments like shakers and drums, journals, and coloring materials to allow people to participate in the service in a variety of ways.

Explore Creative Outlets | Encourage a range of creative expression. The act of creating something can help church members to express certain concepts, as well as serve as creative symbols. For example, invite congregants to participate in a communal art project, model something from clay, make their own compost to grow plants, build with Lego bricks, create mosaics, make origami art, illustrate their faith journey with pictures, or draw crosses with ashes.

Supply Tangible Representations for Prayer | Provide ways to interact with physical objects for prayer. Interactive elements, like lighting candles and writing on stones or slips of paper, can symbolize prayer themes. Include tangible elements for members to interact with as part of written prayers.

Try Playful Prayer Activities | Lead playful activities during times of prayer to encourage interaction with one another. Activities may include tossing yarn, a beach ball, or a balloon between church members to take turns sharing prayer requests or praying.

4. Normalize and Model Movement

Act it Out | Use theater to help bring the stories to life for church members. This can be done in many ways, including skits, puppet shows, and pageants.

Use Object Lessons | Prepare object lessons during the sermon, such as using water and sand play to demonstrate biblical concepts (e.g., God washing us clean from sin), to help clarify the message and aid in remembrance.

Pray Through Breath | Guide breathing exercises to help focus attention on the body and mind, as well as emphasize the physical aspect of worship. Lead church members through guided prayers during the service.

Incorporate Sign Language | Use sign language to bring movement to congregational worship and promote inclusion. A church might learn to sign simple liturgy, such as "Peace be with you," closing blessings, the Lord's Prayer, or favorite songs.

Check in with the Body | Give space for people to connect with how their bodies are feeling. For example, invite church members to physically express thier prayers.

5. Explore Movement Opportunities in Traditional Worship Practices and Sacraments

Wash Feet | Adopt foot washing for Maundy Thursday services or other special occasions. The physical act of foot washing can symbolize humility and service.

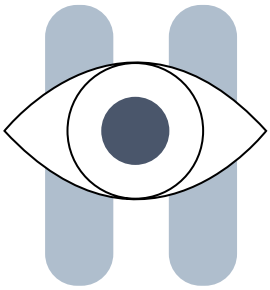
Incorporate Movement in Baptisms | Create movement opportunities for the congregation by inviting them to gather around the baptism candidate and family members.

Incorporate Movement in Communion | Explore movement opportunities into regular communion practices. For example, invite church members to physically move to the communion table or serve one another the elements.

EXPLORING THE SENSES OF THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Sight

How might we engage the sense of sight in worship? Try these creative ideas.



1. Envision the Flow of the Worship Service

Design visual cues to help congregants stay engaged and focused during worship. A countdown clock can help people know the time remaining in the service. "First-then" boards and visual schedules aid in visually tracking with service order. Picture icons in a bulletin or on a screen make a sermon outline or an entire worship service more engaging and understandable.

2. Show the Message

Act it Out | Use theater to bring the message to life. These do not have to be complicated and can involve simple skits, shadow plays, and puppet shows.

Worship Through Visuals | Distribute scarves, streamers, flags, or ribbon wands during worship for a fun and interactive way to visually express worship.

Create Art | Invite church members to create artwork, such as paintings, mosaics, and drawings to illustrate the sermon.

Represent Stories Visually | Depict stories through visual aids such as felt boards, story boards, and digital icons.

Show-and-Tell Testimony | Encourage church members to depict their faith journeys by drawing pictures or bringing in special items from home or nature. The drawings and objects can be used as visual aids in sharing their testimony.

Plan a Procession | Host a processional with banners and incense to evoke a traditional and sensory-rich form of worship.

Incorporate Object Lessons and Visual Symbols | Provide object lessons/visual symbols to represent different themes and ideas. Examples include using water and sand to represent transformation and lament, putting up mirrors to reflect introspection and relationships with God, lighting fires to represent the Holy Spirit, using floral arrangements to symbolize growth and life, using disintegrating paper to visualize sin, using food for object lessons, and using a triangle to describe the Trinity.

Install Sacred Artwork | Use artistic pieces, such as stained glass, paintings, or icons, to illuminate the message and help church members connect with Scripture more deeply.

Represent Prayer Visually | Symbolize reflective prayer with visual illustrations. Examples include writing prayers on stones, paper, or white boards; hosting a prayer wall; creating a prayer line with yarn; tying ribbons with written prayers around the church; using a loom with woven prayers; and using icons to symbolize prayers.

3. Adjust the Visual Atmosphere

Employ Lighting Effects | Employ various lighting effects, such as dimming the lights or incorporating dramatic lighting changes, to represent different moods and atmospheres.

Light Candles | Light candles to help church members physically engage with their prayers, as well as symbolize reflection.

Decorate the Space | Use a variety of decoration elements,, such as natural materials (e.g., wood, stone), drapery, a cross, various fabrics, Bible verses on the walls, floral arrangements, altar designs, wooden figures, and rich colors. Hang banners with words and images in the worship space to reinforce biblical themes.

4. Leverage Visual Media

Interact Using Digital Tools | Employ interactive digital elements, such as live polling, to create interactive moments in larger groups.

Project Images | Use PowerPoint slides or other projections of images on a screen or wall.

Show Videos | Play video clips to visually communicate biblical stories or themes. Record sermons or create videos of worship songs so church members can watch throughout the week.

5. Offer Opportunities for Visual Engagement and Response

Try Visual Check-ins | Use images, such as memes, as a way to check in with church members.

Learn Hand Motions | Learn hand motions for songs to emphasize keywords and ideas and aid in memorization.

Provide Printed Materials | Hand out printed materials, such as bulletins and sermon notes, to help church members stay engaged during the service.

Distribute Take-Home Items | Invite church members to take home items, such as nails, crosses, or blessing cards, to help people remember the service and prayer requests.

6. Use Visual Elements in Seasonal Worship

In the Seasons of Advent and Christmas... | Invite church members to hang the Christmas greens, use lighting to represent the stars over Bethlehem, hold candlelight services, and use candles to light the Advent wreath.

In the Season of Lent... | Use purple or black and white color schemes to lead up to Easter, invite the congregation to hold broken pieces of glass to represent brokenness, and use ashes on Ash Wednesday to symbolize repentance and humility.

In the Season of Easter... | Invite church members to place flowers on the cross, release butterflies to represent new life, or build a cross mosaic from broken pieces of glass.

In the Season of Pentecost.... | Use props, such as orange and red streamers, to represent the tongues of fire.

In the Season around Thanksgiving... | Set up a Thanksgiving tree and encourage the congregation to create a Thanksgiving mosaic together.

7. Practice Visual Aspects of the Sacraments

Attend to the visual aspects of communion and baptism. For example, use different types of bread to highlight the diverse body of Christ, as well as props or visual demonstrations to help symbolize themes. Pour water into a bowl for the congregation to view before performing baptisms.

Including the Whole Body in Worship

including the Whole

INCLUDING THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Accommodations and Supports

How might we support and adapt practices so that all may participate? Try these creative ideas.

1. Foster a Flexible and Supportive Culture

Model an Open Posture to Disability

Foster self-reflection in the leadership team, encouraging a learning posture regarding disability and accessibility. For example, pastors can explain that spontaneous noises and movements are welcome in the worship service. Adapting language for liturgical instructions, such as asking the congregation to "rise in body or in spirit," promotes a welcoming environment. Invite the contributions and leadership of disabled people commensurate with their gifts.

Adapt Practices

Adapt practices as necessary to support members. For example, some churches adapt baptism for members who are afraid of water, or use hand sanitizer instead of fragrant oil to anoint members with sensitivities to strong scents. Instructions during worship should use simple language to maximize understanding and participation.

Solicit Regular Feedback

Solicit feedback from disabled congregants and their families to ensure practices are working for every member of the body. Listen closely to needs and suggestions, celebrating constructive feedback as a gift to enrich the whole community.

2. Leverage Supportive Technology

Attend to Audio

Explore pathways to increase the accessibility of church service audio. For example, offer hearing loops for members who are hard of hearing. Other ideas include using lapel microphones and incorporating familiar hymns into the service, which can foster participation.

Use Video and Visual Graphic Supports

Ensure the accessibility of videos and visual graphics. For example, all publicly shown videos should include closed captioning. Additionally, using simple graphics and high contrast can make visual slides easier to comprehend. Finally, when using photos to illustrate a point in the message, be sure to verbally describe them so church members with visual impairments can access the material.

Use a Variety of Technology Supports

Incorporate technology to support participation. For example, using adaptive technology and communication devices, as well as providing materials in e-reader format, increases accessibility. Livestream and record the service for members who cannot attend in person or would prefer not to sit in the main sanctuary. Another way to use technology is to record songs so people can listen to and learn them throughout the week.

3. Communicate Effectively for All

Provide Sign Language Interpretation
Support worship participation for all through sign language. Teach the whole congregation signs for regular service elements, such as liturgical readings, songs, or the blessings.

Distribute Handouts and Printed Materials
Review handouts and other printed materials for accessibility. Ideas include using large print, incorporating symbols and simple language, and offering materials in braille. Send bulletins ahead of time and offer full manuscripts of the sermon. Visual schedules can help people follow along with the service through images symbolizing parts of the service. Include simple words in the bulletin to identify parts of worship like, "help," "I'm sorry," and "Thank you."

4. Create an Accessible Environment

Attend to Room Design
Design physical spaces with accessibility in mind. For example, provide multiple types of seating, such as rocking chairs and flexible seating, for members who need to move around while seated. It is also important to address structural accessibility (e.g., ramps, power assist doors, pew arrangements). Some church members might enjoy attending "micro churches" at people's homes, where they can incorporate activities such as music, storytelling, Lego building, and drama in a sensory-friendly environment.

Curate a Sensory-Friendly Environment
Audit the overall sensory environment of the worship service. As needed, consider how to make the environment comfortable and less stimulating. For example, adjust lighting, incorporate continuous or neutral colors, provide sensory tools like fidgets or weighted blankets, offer ear plugs or headphones, designate a sensory room, and establish a fragrance-free zone.

5. Design Service Structures with Intentionality

Structure the service to support all church members. For example, it may be helpful to provide visual cues, a countdown clock, or auditory signals so congregants know the timing and order of the service. It may also be beneficial to shorten sermons or break them up and have dedicate time for fellowship, singing, and movement breaks. Slow down the pace of the service.

6. Provide Buddy Support and Peer Accompaniment

Offer peer accompaniment during the service to help church members who need individual assistance to participate more fully. Maintain a group of one-on-one buddies and/or mentors to support congregants. It may also be helpful to have hosts for certain parts of the service, such as at prayer stations.

7. Ensure Accessibility of Communion

Ensure that communion is accessible for all members who wish to participate. For example, it is helpful to offer gluten free elements. Additionally, leverage creative ways to offer communion, such as taking the elements to members who cannot come forward themselves or moving the table to a more easily accessed area.

INCLUDING THE WHOLE BODY THROUGH...

Physical Spaces

How might we ensure the accessibility of physical spaces in church? Try these creative ideas.

01 | Design for Access

Foster awareness of unintentional messages communicated by who is, or who is not, fully able to belong based on the meeting space design. This includes the overall design of stages, seating, and fellowship areas. Ensure all people, including those who use mobility devices, are able to access all areas of the space.

02 | Make Room for Play

Create a dedicated space for play during the service to help children stay engaged. Set up a children's corner in the sanctuary with dress-up clothes or toys.

03 | Create Dedicated Spaces for Movement...

Allocate space for movement-based practices, such as a prayer labyrinth.

04 | ...and for Stillness

Set up dedicated stations to facilitate areas of calm and contemplation in the worship space. Some ideas include prayer stations, a station for the nativity scene, and the stations of the cross.

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