



*Greetings from
The Institute for Clergy
Excellence. We are
pleased to send this
field report from
The Round Table
Group study
regarding 'Effective
Worship.' It is our hope
that this information
will be useful to you
and your church in the
coming year. Enjoy!*

What is effective worship?

The Round Table Group brought Dr. Thomas G. Long, Bandy professor from Candler School of Theology to Huntsville, Alabama for a laity/clergy event as they reflected on the qualities of worship. After reading Dr. Long's book *Beyond the Worship Wars, Building Vital and Faithful Worship*, they found common elements within vital congregations who are able to find a balance between traditional and contemporary worship, remaining true to historic forms of worship while also being responsive to the present cultural environment. There are nine characteristics that these congregations shared concerning worship styles:

- **Allowance for the experience of mystery** where worshipers are "lost in wonder, love, and praise."¹
- **The practice of hospitality** allowing people to offer themselves in worship by recognizing and receiving the gifts of the people. "People come to worship ready to make an offering, hungering to be known as persons so they can join with others in offering themselves to God."²
- **The recovery of a sense of drama** "will be worship full of action, an event of Gospel community theater generating excitement and summoning people out of their seats and onto center stage."³
- **An emphasis on excellent, eclectic music;** "music ... selected out of alertness to the moment in worship — a vigorous hymn of praise here, a reflective lament or a hopeful chorus there. The styles vary, and music from all eras of the church's history — from ancient Jewish chants to Latin American rhythms — is employed."⁴
- **The creative adaptation of worship space:** "The space of worship vibrates with the potential of an encounter between God and humanity, an engagement that will break out in song and movement, praise and devotion, surrender and service."⁵
- **A connection between worship and local mission:** "If a congregation is praying the people in the community be adequately housed, then it ought to be flowing out the door to build Habitat for Humanity houses. Conversely, if the congregation is building Habitat for Humanity houses, then it should be flowing in the door to pray for and to preach about fair housing."⁶
- **A repertoire of worship responses** where "The events of worship are not just actions — standing, sitting, bowing, kneeling. They are also words — singing, saying, confessing, preaching — and in the vital churches many of these spoken parts were also known from memory."⁷
- **The movement of the close of worship toward a joyous festival;** "... the good news has been proclaimed, the dead have come to life, the lost have been found, and, as the father of the prodigal son put it, 'We had to celebrate and rejoice.'"⁸
- **Strong, charismatic pastors:** "There is a joyfulness at the heart of healthy worship leadership, a deep and abiding cheer that grows out of freedom and faith and is itself a communication of the Gospel."⁹

The Round Table group is an ecumenical, interfaith group whose goal for this event was to learn how to create within each tradition a worship service that is vital in its ability to connect the worshipers to the experience of the Divine, as well as faithful in its incorporation of historical worship forms from each tradition. Together, the Round Table group and laity explored the qualities of worship that are vital and shared insights within each tradition represented. At the end of the sessions one pastor wrote, "Dr. Long was great. He was approachable, seemed to enjoy our group, and our group certainly enjoyed him. We lingered over lunch for a few hours talking about the role of worship in contemporary church life. I was deeply pleased to see him so hopeful about the place of traditions in worship."

¹Dr. Thomas G. Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars, Building Vital and Faithful Worship*, page 110; ²page 41; ³page 52; ⁴page 64; ⁵page 76; ⁶page 81; ⁷page 89; ⁸page 96; ⁹page 106; published by The Alban Institute, Copyright © 2001 by the Alban Institute, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.