

Abiding Love Lutheran Church
Summary of Worship Town Hall Discussions
Report as of July 3, 2014

Since 2010, Abiding Love Lutheran Church has held two major campaigns related to its mission of Sharing God's Love. A fairly comprehensive strategic plan was initiated under the first campaign called "Imagine" with additional work continuing through the second campaign, "Making Space for Grace." A need that was identified was an assessment of the total worship experience at Abiding Love. Subsequently, the Worship Life Board decided to hold a number of "town hall" meetings to encourage members and non-members to provide their thoughts and preferences regarding worship.

The 1st Worship Town Hall meeting was held on Sunday, June 1, immediately following the Sunday worship service with about 45 participants. To provide other opportunities for input, another town hall was scheduled for Wednesday evening, June 25th and email follow up was also encouraged for those who could not attend any of the onsite meetings. The second meeting had a much smaller attendance of five members because of the probable impact of an afternoon funeral at the church. Linda Buckley and Sue Milam facilitated both June meetings. Pastor Highum conducted some informal discussions with two of Abiding Love's youth groups to gather their opinions on this topic. Emails were also received on various specific topics raised during the town hall discussions. Every comment received has been documented for review.

The format for the first town hall was to look at 4 aspects of worship: the worship service framework, the context of the worship experience, various components of music, and the projection and bulletins used during worship. People were asked to consider each aspect as it was meaningful to them personally and then how it might be meaningful to a guest. The attendees were divided roughly into groups of 5-6 people to discuss each aspect from the two perspectives. At the end of each discussion, the groups provided their thoughts to the facilitators who wrote the comments on large newsprint sheets around the room. After all areas had been discussed and reported, each person was given 6 blue dots (for member preferences) and 6 green dots (for guest preferences). They were instructed to put blue dots on any comment on the newsprint sheets that they felt was the most important for members; they were to do the same with the green dots, using those for the items they felt would be most important to guests.

The second town hall, due to the small number of participants, was much more informal. A facilitator asked for responses to the various questions from each participant while the other facilitator recorded the comments.

To assist in tallying the results, a spreadsheet was created to count the voting preferences for each item, separating the member preferences from the guest preferences. Because the voting with the dots would not have worked with the participants of the second town hall, their comments, when different from the comments already made by the first town hall participants, were added to the existing list. What follows is a high level summary of what the participants from the town halls seem to be saying about their worship life.

Many different thoughts and ideas came forth from the various participants, and it was clear that not everyone agreed with everyone else. However, Abiding Love is committed to providing a worship experience that is meaningful to member and guest alike. The challenge will be to respect and

accommodate the needs of all who wish to worship in Abiding Love's sanctuary and as a part of our church family.

Worship: the framework and content of our worship service that includes prayers, creeds, readings, litanies.

- **Traditional or Non-traditional**

The voting on this aspect of our worship shows an almost even split between those who would prefer that Abiding Love keep and consistently use the same liturgy and verbiage that has been traditionally Lutheran in form. There is concern that we might no longer be identifiable as Lutheran and that our children will grow up not knowing the traditional forms.

On the other side, a significant number of people say that the traditional liturgy is not that important to them, that they prefer variety and more updated forms of worship. They prefer more current types of songs and melodies and different formats that keep them engaged.

From a guest's perspective, participants felt like the basic (Lutheran) elements need to be included in the service and that we should explain the communion process each time so it is understood that they are welcome.

- **Other Key Points**

Attendees supported (in lesser numbers) the following:

- Communion every Sunday
- Sermon series
- Interactive sermons from the pastors
- Use of the traditional creed
- Specifically for guests, the fact that we are family-oriented and how the children's sermon shows that children are welcome and valued

- **Other Ideas for Consideration**

- The Godly Play hour and the worship hour should support each other
- Use of Time & Talent sheets to find additional volunteers to serve as a part of worship
- Use Mixed Blessings at the early service when possible
- Have children participate in the service more often
- Do more to introduce guests, help them with the service, etc.
- Have 2 adults in the nursery for safety

Context: the use of the arts and beauty in worship, i.e. display of artwork, interactive arts, drama, interpretive dance, creative arts.

- **Use of Art**

People supported the use of artwork in the service, and especially favored artwork that has a clear connection to the sermon. They like the use of color as visual stimulation and would like to see more color and banners in the sanctuary. Many were in favor of letting people contribute their artwork.

For guests, the banners that indicate an outward look to the issues of the world were a positive. Also, art that creates warmth, greeting and a prayerful atmosphere were encouraged.

- **Other Ideas for Consideration**

- Be able to change the lighting in the sanctuary for effect
- Point our connection of the art to the sermon or theme

Music: all aspects of music within the worship service – the hymns, accompaniment, choirs or groups, styles or types of music.

- **Contemporary and Traditional**

Interestingly, the highest vote-getter was the desire to have both contemporary and traditional music available in our services. In the same vein, having at least 3 distinct music groups was also supported. The music provided by Mixed Blessings is appreciated and is considered to be a “draw” for guests.

- **Other Ideas for Consideration**

- Have blended music for the hearing-impaired
- Choose challenging hymns carefully
- Have guest musicians occasionally
- Have variety with a good mix of traditional
- Have more instrumentals
- Make it clear if only the choir is supposed to sing a song or verse
- Have a children’s song every Sunday
- Have traditional hymns with updated arrangements
- Don’t sing all the verses of songs
- Include the melody line for songs that are projected or in the bulletin

Projection and Bulletins: What is projected on the wall and printed in the bulletin that conveys the order of the service and key concepts during the service.

- **Projection**

The use of projection got strong support; however, most also warned about the lighting. Projection was also seen to be very important for guests; consequently, people advised that congregants be told explicitly how to follow along. It should be used to give instructions for communion and other processes, display children’s sermon points, display our website address, and list upcoming activities and events at the end of the service.

- **Bulletin**

Results were mixed regarding the use of the bulletin. Many liked to have it because they are accustomed to using it in the service; however, they recognize it hampers participation. Many would like to take it home because it lists activities, etc. Many would like to have both; some would like for the bulletin to be just “bare-bones.”

- **Other Ideas for Consideration**

- Include readings on projection
- Announce that large print bulletins are available
- Be consistent between the bulletin and projection
- Use more images during sermon if appropriate
- Create tri-fold brochure about Abiding Love that guests can take home
- Consider raising the projection height for small people in the back

Conclusion

Abiding Love Lutheran Church is a family of believers much like our own families. There are differences of opinion and preferences, and different ways to accomplish the same goals. Because we share the mission of "Sharing God's Love," and a common faith, we are able work through our differences by mutually respecting each other and finding ways to worship that meets the needs of members and guests alike. The Worship Life Board will process the information from the town halls and develop a plan and timeline by which to guide how we worship going forward. All are encouraged to continue to communicate with the Board regarding any issues around the worship experience so that Abiding Love can provide for the needs of all who come.