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*To my parents,
who surrounded me with beauty,
and taught me the value of a liberal education*

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only issues to consider in a theology of arts ministry, but they do provide a starting point for reflection and further expansion. We now turn our attention to the practical sphere, where we will focus on the question of how to initiate and develop arts ministry in the setting of the local church.

CHAPTER NINE

The Practice of Arts Ministry

Both the church and the artist share in common a search for ways to speak the truth, to live more authentically. The church needs the help of artists to understand human life and to express the depths of truth, both human and divine. Artists need the church, a community that recognizes the importance of truth as well as the vitality of art and will provide the space and resources for interaction with it. Not only do the church and artists share a mutual goal, the embodiment of truth, but they depend on each other to accomplish it.

Janet Walton, *Art and Worship: A Vital Connection*

A Model

From 1995 to 2003 I was Organist and Minister of Arts at Crossroads Reformed Church in Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City. It is a small Reformed Church in America congregation founded by people of Dutch descent. At that time we averaged around 100 worshippers split between two Sunday services, and we had a very limited budget. One of the reasons I like talking about this particular arts ministry is that it allows me to note that successful arts ministry can happen in small churches as well as large congregations. It can flourish in denominations that have a rich history of the arts and in traditions like the Reformed tradition that have a long history of iconoclasm and reticence regarding many art forms. I'm

going to describe this ministry in some detail, because I think it is a good illustration of some of the possibilities that are available in virtually every local church today.

The arts ministry we developed in this church included the music ministry, a visual art and environment team, a resident liturgical dance company called the Miriam Dance Ensemble, and, on occasion, a drama troupe we named City of Light.¹

In regard to staff, I directed the arts ministry as a whole as well as serving in the music ministry. We had a choral conductor, a trumpeter-in-residence, and a staff choreographer. Over the years, we struggled to find someone to direct the drama ministry, with limited success. We also had an arts ministry board that met at least twice a year, including one retreat per year.

During this time the arts ministry produced three weekend arts festivals at the church and a weekend arts retreat at Conception Abbey, a Benedictine monastery near Kansas City. Programs sponsored by the arts ministry included tours of church architecture in the Kansas City area; a docent-led tour of medieval sacred art at Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, followed by a Renaissance sacred art tour the next year; several showings of sacred films with commentary by the film critic of one of our local newspapers; liturgical dance workshops; writing and journaling workshops; poetry readings; jazz services and concerts; visual arts workshops for young people; and finally, guest lecturers talking about a wide variety of topics ranging from the history of frescoes to sacred space.

In the music ministry we purchased a grand piano as well as new handbells and commissioned an anthem from K. Lee Scott entitled "A City Radiant as a Bride," which is now part of his *Requiem*.² In addition, we formed a new handbell choir and continued to develop our choral program, including sponsoring music education classes during the thirty minutes prior to many of our choir rehearsals.

The visual arts ministry produced a full set of indoor banners for the liturgical year and some additional outdoor banners for our parking lot. There were several exhibits of the work of local artists as well as a number of exhibits of creative products or collections drawn from our own congregation.

1. The ministry was called *Imago Dei*, a name later transferred to a regional sacred arts organization that continues to be active in the Midwest at the present time.

2. K. Lee Scott, *Requiem* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw Music, 2006).

I taught a series of adult education classes entitled P.A.C.T. (the "Partnership for Arts and Christian Theology") that educated the congregation about the relationship between Christianity and the arts. During this time, in addition to the classes, there were six sermons preached about various topics related to the arts.

In the literary and dramatic arts we commissioned poems from Marie Asner, a noted local poet, and sponsored regular poetry services that incorporated historic and contemporary Christian poetry. We also staged a full-scale medieval drama entitled *The Shepherds*, along with various other smaller dramatic sketches.

This was all done with a modest budget and very part-time staff. As we developed this ministry, we discovered that the real issue was not lack of money or time; it was a question of how creative we could be in our thinking and imagining.

In light of this example, I want to suggest that arts ministry is an option in virtually every congregation. The real question is not whether it is possible, but how arts ministry can grow in the soil of the church. As we consider this question, we will break it down into two parts: theory and practice. In local churches this division is especially important. There is a tendency to proceed directly to practice without prior reflection. Too often, ministries take a "ready, shoot, aim" approach to their work. They create programming without thinking through the questions that the programs are meant to address. This is particularly problematic in the area of worship. Time is devoted to planning the logistics of worship rather than thinking about the meaning and significance of what we do when we gather to offer praise, confession, lament, and thanksgiving to God.

The same temptation is present in arts ministry, with equally disastrous results. Given the various suspicions and misunderstandings about arts ministry that are prevalent among laity and clergy alike, an approach that considers only practice can kill fledgling arts programs before they have a chance to root themselves in the institutional life of the church.

Theoretical Considerations

This discussion of theory will consider three different topics: (1) basic principles, (2) potential pitfalls, and (3) key considerations of the arts minister.

**A Christian Arts Camp
Fellowship Lutheran Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma**



**Lauren Leifeste learns to play the organ
at the Christian Arts Camp**

Bible School and summer camp are a traditional part of the annual Christian education program at many churches. Fellowship Lutheran Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, has put a different twist on this idea by sponsoring summer arts camps for young people.

The camps began in 2000 with a focus on music. Two five-day camps have run parallel to one another each year: a primary camp open to five-year-olds through those entering third grade, and an advanced camp for those entering the fourth grade through those entering the eighth grade.

Over the years the musical offerings (choir, instrumental music lessons, instruction in Orff instruments and handbells) have expanded to include instruction in visual arts (quilting and crocheting, clay art, sketching, set design, banner-making, watercolor painting, calligraphy) creative writing, theatre (including the production of musicals), and liturgical dance. Students above the eighth grade are admitted into a pipe organ class. This class utilizes churches throughout the area and teachers drawn from the Tulsa chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

Students in the primary camp engage in all the camp activities: choir, bells and chimes; art; music and movement. Students in the advanced camp choose electives to pursue on a more intensive basis.

Approximately half the camp participants come from Fellowship Lutheran Church, while the other half come from the community at large. In a typical year the camp hosts roughly eighty children, split more or less evenly between the two age groups. There are three primary administrators on staff at the church, in addition to which the camp hires ten to twelve instructors and involves the services of fifty-five to sixty-five volunteers.

Vicki Smith, co-coordinator of the camp, writes, "Our purpose is to serve the children of the greater Tulsa Community by inspiring and developing children's skills for Christian service."* As has been the case so often in church history, children become arts ministers when they are treated with respect and challenged to become full participants in the church's life and witness.

*Vicki Smith, e-mail to the author, 3 November 2010.

Basic Principles

Among many different options, we will examine several principles as foundations of arts ministry: thoughtfulness, playfulness, and the pastoral/prophetic dialectic.

Thoughtfulness

As I said a moment ago, it is critically important to surround arts ministry with an environment of thoughtfulness. This takes three forms: study, conversation with one another, and prayer, our conversation with God. All three of these occur in the context of community. They should be pursued together, including as wide a range of potential participants as possible. In so doing, we learn and grow ourselves, and discover something of what it means to be the body of Christ. We lead by learning. The model of arts ministry that results will be fitted to the circumstances of the particular institution in which it is developed. It will have the potential to grow organically, taking into account the gifts and interests of the community of faith and the opportunities present in the local area.

Patricia O'Connell Killen points out that "Reflection is the act of deliberately slowing down our habitual meaning-making processes to take a closer look at the experience. . . ."³ This is strikingly similar to what happens in the artistic process. Art enables a detailed examination of a particular scene taken from one moment in time. Thus, process and product coalesce. Arts ministry takes on a reflective character as it exercises its own native capacity to focus attention on the minutiae of human experience.

There is, of course, a price to pay for being thoughtful, just as there is a price to pay for doing arts ministry. Reflection takes time. It requires human capital. In a society that values getting everything immediately, it is not always easy to argue in favor of reflection. Nonetheless, it is important. When a ministry has taken the time to be thoughtful in its initial planning stage, then when it needs to make decisions about issues like financing, it can do so carefully and wisely. Thoughtful planning maximizes the chance that the ministry will yield fruit and be supported by the wider community.

3. Patricia O'Connell Killen, "Assisting Adults to Think Theologically," in *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, ed. James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), p. 105.

Playfulness

Play is undervalued in the church. We have a tendency to be very serious about Christianity. The previous discussion about thoughtfulness and reflection might lead us in this direction. However well-intentioned, the tendency to take an overly solemn approach to Christian life and witness can blind us to the importance of play in the community of faith. Jesus calls us to enter the kingdom as little children. What does this mean? First of all, it means that we are free to imagine new worlds, new ways of being in our own world, new ways of being ourselves. Imagination is the raw material of play. It is faith's partner in the dance of life.

When we are at play, we delight in the object of our attention. In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, the Scottish runner Eric Liddell throws back his head and runs, fueled not so much by adrenaline (or technique, for that matter) as by pure joy. In those moments he says he can "feel God's pleasure."⁴ Arts ministry needs to be a place where we can learn the language of delight, where we can throw back our collective heads and leave reason behind for a moment, celebrating the wonder of a climactic moment in a drama, an exquisitely written line of poetry, or the whirl of a dancer twisting and turning across the floor, seemingly unfettered by space or time.

Playfulness suggests participation. We are most actively at play when we are engaged in creating art in some way. However, playfulness is not the exclusive property of those with special gifts and opportunities. As Eric Liddell runs, we can all vicariously "feel God's pleasure." That is the beauty of art and the possibility of arts ministry. On some level it communicates to everyone with ears to hear its joys and pains, its hopes and dreams, its excitement and wonder.

As we engage in arts ministry, as we work through the various administrative details and tasks associated with its formation and development, it is important to seek out opportunities to play. We should not cease our efforts to reflect, but we should recognize that, without play, thoughtfulness is sterile. It is play — existential experience with the sacred arts — that makes reflection meaningful and sets the tone for all we will do in our ministry.

4. *Chariots of Fire* (Enigma Productions, 1981).

The Dialectic of Pastoral and Prophetic Ministry

To Judeo-Christian people, the God who is pictured in Scripture is anything but a static, passive figure. God did not form the world and then leave it to its own devices. The God of Scripture is a God who embraces change, who subverts the status quo in the knowledge that history itself is moving inexorably toward its own fulfillment. The Lord of history embraces change and growth as the proper model for human formation.

Human beings are on a pilgrimage here on earth. This requires moving from place to place and adapting to each new environment, including the environment of liturgy. As Carolyn Dietering reminds us, "True ritual is *living* ritual, containing the past, embracing the present, and allowing the future to unfold. Ritual which does not grow, naturally and organically with the faith of the people who practice it, loses its claim to be ritual. It becomes ritualism. Meaningful form gives way to formalism."⁵

From a biblical perspective, it is impossible to imagine human life as standing still. We are on a journey, moving either in the direction chosen by God that results in a more abundant life, or in a direction that we ourselves choose, a direction that invariably leads to our own demise. There is no third option. Standing still, whether in worship, in arts ministry, or in the context of our lived experience, is an idolatrous myth created by people and institutions whose primary motivation is self-preservation and the preservation of the status quo. This myth is ultimately self-defeating. As you can tell, this is an unabashed advertisement for the *developmental* approach I outlined in the previous chapter.

The arts create an environment that makes change more palatable. Because the arts involve creative responses to the world, they can be catalysts to help us engage the world in a spontaneous, fresh, innovative fashion. However, when the arts themselves change (especially in the context of liturgy), people get uneasy. Michael Card says that "creative worship is one response to the heartbreaking beauty of God."⁶ This may be true, but it is not always easy for worshippers to either comprehend or embrace. Change is hard. It demands that we take risks.

There are two further challenges that make this even more difficult. First, individual people within any congregation will be at different places

5. Carolyn Dietering, *The Liturgy as Dance and the Liturgical Dancer* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 7.

6. Michael Card, *Scribbling in the Sand: Christ and Creativity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 32.

in their journey with respect to change. Some will have just come through times in their lives that were chaotic or heartbreaking. They may very well feel the need for stability in their experiences at church. Other people will need new opportunities to express their faith. New challenges will be welcomed in response to a new set of questions.

The second problem is mobility. Congregations themselves are not static. People come and go, which means that the underlying profile of a particular congregation with respect to change will alter over time.

In the face of the change required by arts ministry, we need to remember that resistance is a normal reaction from the faith community. We should expect it and not be discouraged or confounded when it appears. Instead, we should be thankful for it because it helps us to know where people are in their thinking and self-understanding. Many people will be unhappy but not express their feelings. They should be encouraged to do so, since it is much healthier for the entire ministry if people trust leadership enough to express their ideas and feelings. We should greet these expressions with pastoral sensitivity and recognize that, in the end, love demands that we help people to grow.

Artists know from their own experience that growth does not happen in a straight line. As they work with their artistic materials, there will be periods when it seems like they are moving backwards or not making any headway at all. Then, all of a sudden they will have a burst of creative energy, and new ideas will emerge. These are insights from the artistic process that should help the arts minister understand the process of growth within a congregation. There should be no expectation that growth will be constant or proceed at a regular pace. It will not. Simply knowing that should help the process go more smoothly.

There are two ways that the arts function in relation to change. First, they encourage an experimental approach to ministry, to worship, and to the life of faith itself. They are a means of supporting and encouraging receptivity to God's remarkable self-revelation. Janet Walton explains, "When applied to liturgical practice, originality is expressed in fresh insights, evocative images, energizing architecture and environments, spirited music, forms that are on the cutting edge of acceptability. Old answers do not satisfy new questions. . . . Worship requires beauty which anticipates a spirit of adventuresomeness and openness as a witness to the uncharted ways of God."⁷

7. Janet Walton, *Art and Worship: A Vital Connection* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 62.

Second, the arts are grounded in tradition. Art forms do not emerge out of nowhere. They are based on the creative efforts and insights developed by generations of earlier artists. As such, they foster continuity and the conservation of ideas that were successful. The great challenge is to assimilate this rich tradition into the present situation in such a way as to make it come alive again.

In the contemporary church, where there is a need both to innovate and to conserve, we are faced with the responsibility of doing arts ministry in a dialectical fashion. The dialectic is between pastoral ministry that sympathizes with the concerns and fears of people who need stability in their lives, and prophetic ministry that pushes people beyond their comfort zone to enable them to grow. It is analogous to the dialectic experienced each week in worship between the *ordinary* of the liturgy (parts that do not change from week to week) and the *propers* of the liturgy (the parts that do change).

Doing things the same way all the time, whether in worship, ministry, or living itself, can be stultifying. It has the potential to snuff out the sparks of faith that are implanted at great cost by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, constant change is distracting. It causes us to lose our focus on God and transfer it to the artworks we employ in worship and ministry. In other words, both sameness and frequent change are problems.

Marva Dawn summarizes the issue well: "A dialectical tension is required that must be carefully maintained by worship planners — to maintain a liturgical form, whatever style that might involve, that actually frees worship participants to focus on God without being distracted by either novelty or monotony."⁸ As we move between these two poles, we need both patience and persistence. We need to search for shared artistic and religious values, speak to questions that animate the entire community, and look for artistic forms and styles that are meaningful to people who inhabit the various subcultures that exist in the church. We should assume that people can learn from one another's values, sense the import of fresh questions, and be enlivened by new artistic languages, some of which require not only exposure but a modicum of education. If we practice both patience and persistence consistently, we will create the conditions in which a congregation can learn to trust us. This is critical if arts ministry is to succeed.

8. Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), p. 246.

Success in arts ministry is based on the assumption that people can grow. The assumption that growth is impossible is itself idolatrous, because it does not recognize the human condition. We are people made in the image of the God who initiated a redemptive process that embodies change and growth as fundamental principles. To say that we cannot change, that we cannot grow, is to admit that sin has won. It is to proclaim that we are a people without hope, without the means to grow, and without a future. It is utterly and completely unbiblical. It is simply not an acceptable position for the church to take.

By definition, arts ministry requires change. Sometimes this change will occur in worship, and sometimes it will happen elsewhere. In whatever setting it happens, art is all about changing perceptions by showing us the world in a new way. Arts ministry without change is a contradiction in terms. The real question is not *whether* change will happen, but *how* it will happen. It is a question of process, not product.

Theodor Seuss Geisel (more commonly known as Dr. Seuss) wrote a classic in the field of aesthetics entitled *Green Eggs and Ham*. The metamorphosis that takes place in this book is heartening for arts ministers. Sam, the hero of the story, is faced with the challenge of eating green eggs and ham, a combination he finds distasteful without having ever tried it. He opens with the exclamation "I do not like green eggs and ham!" By the end of the story, he has changed his approach: "Say! I like green eggs and ham! I do! I like them, Sam-I-am!"⁹ It turns out that simple exposure, in combination with the qualities of thoughtfulness and playfulness, changed Sam to the point where he was empowered to try something new and, in so doing, discovered that green eggs and ham were not so bad after all. Patience and persistence won the day. The same thing can happen in the church. If we are thoughtful in our approach to introducing art in the church and playful in our presentation, people can discover for themselves the delightful qualities of art that at one time might have eluded or even frightened them.

This is the delicate balance we need to achieve in arts ministry. We must be thoughtful and playful, pastoral and prophetic as we engage with others who have their own unique histories and sensitivities. This dialectical approach to arts ministry can be practiced over time just as one practices the clarinet or a pirouette. Under the guidance and direction of the Spirit, it can bear much fruit in the life of the church and beyond.

9. Theodor Seuss Geisel, *Green Eggs and Ham* (New York: Beginner Books, 1960).

Potential Pitfalls

There are many potential pitfalls to avoid in the creation and development of arts ministry. I have selected five to discuss here: (1) art as a manipulative tool; (2) relevance: acquiescing to the messages of secular culture; (3) the allure of perfection and the temptation of cheap grace; (4) the cult of personality; and (5) stressing results over faithfulness. Each of them has the potential to undermine the goals and theological foundation of arts ministry.

Art as a Manipulative Tool

The question of the appropriate use of beauty has many dimensions. One facet of this issue is the way art is misused in both the church and the wider culture when it becomes a manipulative tool.

As we have already noted, Bernard of Clairvaux believed that excesses in materials, craftsmanship, size, and quantity of art create sensory saturation that manipulates the worshipper.¹⁰ Hundreds of years after he lived, Baroque churches were designed for this very purpose. They used a combination of ostentatious architecture and visual art to overwhelm worshippers with images of the divine, in the process giving them the sense that they were actually caught up in heaven.

Harold Best points out the problem with this way of thinking: "Whenever we assume that art mediates God's presence or causes him to be tangible, we have begun the trek into idol territory."¹¹ Best suggests that this is what many church musicians do on Sunday morning. Musicians think that creating the right mood or emotional state in the worshipper will somehow cause God to be present in the service.

Rather than calling God into our midst, art often manipulates our senses, leaving us disordered and disoriented. The church may be built to make us think we are in heaven, but we are, in fact, still on earth, with all the problems and anxieties we had when we entered the door. A combination of architecture, music, paintings, and sculpture may be designed to give us the feeling that God is present, but ultimately God's presence to us

10. See Bernard's discussion of excesses in Conrad Rudolf, *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 57-70.

11. Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 166.

is a matter of divine sovereignty.¹² It is not something that is under our control. Although we cannot control God, we need to keep in mind that the manner in which we sense the divine presence in our worship life is also important. This varies with the turns and twists of our individual and corporate relationship to God. Any use of the arts as a means of channeling our relationship with God in a particular direction *could* be seen as an example of manipulation.

The question we must ask here — and it is a difficult question — is whether or not, *by definition*, almost every artistic product is not in some sense manipulative. From the Renaissance to the present, most Western art has been and is, at least in part, intended to move our affections, to impact our emotional life. It is often difficult to separate our affective response to artworks from our response to divine initiatives, particularly when both occur in the context of worship.

Is the issue of manipulation simply one of intent? Are we freed from the charge of manipulation if we offer worship to God sincerely and without any ulterior motives? I am never comfortable with this approach. It does not recognize the unintended effects that occasionally result from our actions. Sometimes we manipulate people without ever consciously attempting to do so.

What, then, constitutes artistic manipulation? Perhaps the key to unlocking this riddle is to look at the relationship between art and reality. Art that is non-manipulative is art that assists us in the process of living in right relation with ourselves, other people, God, and creation itself. Anything that causes these various relationships to be disordered is by definition manipulative and idolatrous.



12. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (Gallagher translation) from Vatican II makes a more explicit statement about divine presence:

Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross," but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Relevance: Acquiescing to the Messages of Secular Culture

Simone Weil once said, "To be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal."¹³ The contemporary church has become saturated with a concern for relevance. This is often couched in the desire to meet "felt needs." In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with this notion. It is person-centered Christianity that takes seriously the plight of the individual believer. In a sense, this is nothing more than traditional pastoral theology and ministry at work.

The underlying question is this: What does the individual really need? This may be quite different than what they want at the moment. Finally, who will make this determination? This issue frequently arises in arts ministries that interact with popular culture. Products of popular culture are, almost by definition, what people in the congregation want, because they are popular. Does this mean that they are also what the congregation needs to further their growth and maturation process in the faith?

Speaking about music and preaching, Marva Dawn suggests some of the aesthetic and religious implications of this focus on relevance:

Most movements to attract new members emphasize an appeal to the tastes of the public, stressing that music should be like that found in the outside world and that sermons should minister to worshippers' "felt needs." . . . How will we teach Christianity's specialness if the music in our worship services imitates the superficiality and meaninglessness of the general world and our sermons talk about subjects that those in the pew can learn from psychologists, sociologists, and the local television station? . . . Our music must contain the *substance* of the faith, the heritage of the Church's uniqueness, the character-forming truths of Christianity.¹⁴

This same question could be asked of the other arts as well. In North America, much of the creative use of the arts is occurring in churches that focus on popular culture. I believe that in many cases churches have collectively forgotten about (or never realized) the way that art works. *Artistic forms and styles imply underlying theological messages.* It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of this statement. Unfortunately, we

13. Simone Weil, quoted in Os Guinness, *No God but God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 169.

14. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, p. 46.

have not learned to listen to what these forms and styles say to us. As we become sensitive to those messages through increased education in the arts and theology, the most important question becomes this: *How can we be relevant and yet avoid prostituting ourselves to the prevailing secular culture?* The answer we give will play a large part in determining the way in which our arts ministry impacts the life of the community of faith.

The Allure of Perfection and the Temptation of Cheap Grace

Artists in our society are taught to seek perfection. The culture encourages them to develop technique to the point that they avoid all errors. This becomes a virtual creed of artistic behavior for many young artists. The idea that a recording company would issue a compact disk containing wrong notes or rhythms is beyond the pale.

The modern notion of perfection is based on the exaltation of technique. Technique is a particularly seductive source of temptation to the artist. There is so much emphasis on technical perfection in the arts that technique itself often becomes a substitute for the true meaning of an artwork, or even for artistic expression itself. When we are concerned primarily with technique, we only have to ask how an artwork communicates meaning; we don't need to address the issue of what the artwork is trying to communicate.

In contemporary society, perfection is often confused with excellence. From the standpoint of Christian anthropology, perfection is an ill-fated standard in this world because it does not reflect the reality of the human person, who is out of sync with God and yet ultimately destined for union with God.

The other side of this equation is "cheap grace." This is all too prevalent in arts ministries. Here the artist is not held to any standard at all. Technical flaws are overlooked simply out of charity, especially since the artist is offering his or her gifts to God.

Once again, we find that the right course lies somewhere in between these two extremes. Artists must be held to a standard. Standards are important as a means of presenting artists with a goal, something objective against which they can judge their work. But in the world of pastoral ministry, the standard that really matters may be *growth*, growth that reflects the outer reaches of the artist's capability at the time. It is in this reaching, in this stretching to be the best that we can be, that excellence — defined as an objective standard of beauty, becomes a tantalizing possibility. Nonethe-

less, the closer we get to the goal of excellence, the more we should understand that the products of our artistry will never be "perfect." In fact, perfection is often the enemy of excellence. In the search for an abstract and disembodied perfection, we often lose sight of the very human qualities that make true excellence possible.

The notion of encouraging artists to come ever closer to a standard of excellence is particularly problematic in the case of children. There is a tendency in the church to undervalue children's capabilities. "Cute" becomes the standard, rather than teaching children and challenging them to use their abilities at full stretch. Art in the church should not just serve the needs of children. Rather, children in the church should use art to serve the needs of the community. They should be arts ministers themselves. In so doing, they are formed for lifelong praise of God. In the end this will serve children's real needs on a much more profound level.

The Cult of Personality

One of the shifts that occurred in the Western world after the eighteenth century was a change in the role and status of the artist. The Artist (with a capital "A") was put on a pedestal and worshipped by the public as a super-human figure, a modern-day version of Michelangelo's *David*.

This was bound to have an impact on the church. In recent times we have seen singers, actors, and small ensembles emerging as the central focal point of worship, often to the detriment of "full, conscious, active" congregational participation. On a larger scale, this is magnified by television and the recording industry, both of which create famous performers. In this setting, narcissism is often a problem. A celebrity-based understanding of worship and ministry engenders vicarious living and passivity on the part of the congregation. It is opposed to the biblical standard of humility and signals the death knell of true creativity.

Stressing Results over Faithfulness

At the root of many contemporary problems in the church is the issue of how to define success. Often this boils down to the question of assuring the survival and financial health of the local congregation. Numbers become a critical part of the equation of ministry, both the number of wor-

15. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, par. 14.

shippers and the number of dollars they give in the offering plate each Sunday.

In order to ensure an aura of success defined in these terms, it is important to keep the congregation comfortable. This has broad and potentially insidious implications for arts ministry. Often arts ministries start from humble beginnings. Since the ministries are new, involve unfamiliar artistic expressions, and impact worship, they have a tendency to threaten people. This conflicts directly with the need for comfort that is often expressed by church leaders who feel responsible for achieving an aura of success in their congregations. The absolute requirement to achieve comfort in the congregation means accepting the call to pastoral ministry and rejecting the need for prophetic ministry. Thus the dialectic between pastoral and prophetic ministry is broken. This can be a major roadblock for the budding arts ministry.

As Marva Dawn reminds us, "The danger to the Church is enormous and, strangely, often not obvious. Quality suffers when the main concern is quantity. . . . How destructive it is to genuine discipleship to measure the success of the Church by the numbers of people attracted rather than by the depth of faith and outreach nurtured."¹⁶

Rather than functioning in a prophetic role, the arts often become part of this program designed to achieve comfort, as Harold Best notes:

We can easily make an idol out of the results we want our art to produce. Here is where artistic action and thinned-out versions of evangelization and seeker sensitivity can be such comfortable bedfellows. But I quickly add that popular art forms and careless versions of seeker sensitivity are not the only culprits. Many "fine arts Christians," the classicists, wag their fingers at the seeker-sensitive popularists without realizing that the kind of seeker sensitivity that depends on Bach and Rembrandt rather than Graham Kendrick and Thomas Kinkade is just as flawed. Why? Because in either case, effectiveness is the intermediary. . . . anyone using any kind of art can compromise the gospel by choosing art primarily for the results it produces, rather than to glorify God.¹⁷

When results are placed ahead of faithfulness, idolatry has taken hold of a community. How should we define success in the church and in arts ministry specifically? Perhaps we need to return to fundamental theologi-

16. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, pp. 51-52.

17. Best, *Unceasing Worship*, p. 168.

cal goals such as the glorification of God and the sanctification of human beings. If this is happening, numbers should not be the issue; **praise and holiness should be our standard.**

In order to play a constructive role in the church, arts ministry must walk carefully through the minefield of this and the other potential problems we have identified. Only by naming them and taking them seriously can we avoid their pitfalls and craft a ministry based on the true beauty and creativity with which God has endowed us.

The Arts Minister: Key Things to Consider

Goals and Tasks

Before they can actively engage in their ministry, it is helpful for arts ministers to have a sense of the appropriate goals of their ministry, and how they might prepare themselves to realize those goals. Urban Holmes says, "The fundamental issue in ministry today is the recovery of a sense of enchantment and the ability to be enchanting."¹⁸ This is clearly a goal that arts ministry can adopt. Among the many possible alternatives, it is one that virtually everyone in the church can agree upon. Thus it has the potential to be a unifying goal, a source of integration and inclusiveness.

Holmes goes on to say, "The world is disenchanted, not necessarily because God has died, has withdrawn, or has been discovered to be an illusion, but because, among the large majority of people, that data which would lead us to conclude that God is present in our experience is quite unconsciously, but effectively, not seen."¹⁹

Art heightens our awareness of the divine presence that is all around us. It helps us experience the mysterious, ineffable quality of the divine through sound and light, poetry and story, gesture and dance. Praise and worship are our direct response to this revelation.

Beyond this, arts ministry has two different but related tasks. William David Spencer identifies them as "lighting the world and shepherding the flock."²⁰ Arts ministry helps us see things as they are. It illuminates the

18. Urban T. Holmes III, *Ministry and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 8.

19. Holmes, *Ministry and Imagination*, p. 56.

20. William David Spencer, *God through the Looking Glass* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 155.

meaning and significance of the events and artifacts of our collective lives and brings the light of the gospel to bear on the problems we confront on a daily basis. In its shepherding role, arts ministry works as a vehicle for the expression of compassion by providing images that combat the fragmentation and alienation of contemporary life.

I have always liked the notion that arts ministers function as the artistic shepherds of their flocks. I do not know exactly what this means or how to enact it, but the concept is important. **Rather than simply focusing on specific programs or ensembles or artistic products, arts ministers must focus on people, on the various ways that the arts impact their lives not only within the church but in every aspect of their living, be it in the home or in any of the other cultural settings in which they find themselves.**

Within this broad framework, there are many specific goals that need to be established by individual ministries in light of their own unique circumstances. The process of working these out will determine the direction and orientation of the ministry. This is important work that must be continually revisited as each ministry grows and develops.

Gifts

Gifts, or charisms, from God are the source and foundation of all arts ministries. Romans 12:4-8 reminds us that we are all members of one body and that this body has a variety of different gifts. **Arts ministry recognizes the diversity of creative gifts given to all God's people.** It celebrates the plurality of artistic genres and fosters an environment where individual gifts are encouraged and developed in the church.

The fact of our giftedness and the way we express this in ministry is not something unusual or extraordinary. It comes from our baptism and is available to all. Baptism, says Thomas Franklin O'Meara, "initiates a person into charism and evangelical action, into a community which is essentially ministerial."²¹ Our baptism is not a passive adoption that guarantees eternal life; it is an active adoption into a community that is on the path of discipleship, a path that mirrors the public ministry of Jesus. It grounds our creative gifts in the activity of God in Christ and sends us out into the world to use those gifts for the good of all.

21. Thomas Franklin O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 141.

Education

While we are born as creative people and baptized into a community of faith, we are not born knowing how to be artists or how to engage in arts ministry per se. This means that we must be educated and trained in the various tasks that will be required of us. There are several different aspects to this education.

First, we need some theological acumen. This does not mean that we need to become professional theologians. It means that we should gradually become aware of the major theological questions regarding beauty and the arts, and that we should pay attention when sources come across our path, sources like the Bible, books about Christianity and the arts, periodicals, workshops, conferences, and teachers.

Second, we need to develop our own creative potential. There is no sense in forming an arts ministry if we ourselves are not going to be growing as creative people. The challenge is for everyone directly associated with arts ministry to find a creative outlet and to be intentional about developing it. Water your artistic or creative seed by giving it regular practice, and provide the sunshine that comes from being vulnerable to the work of the Creative Spirit, so that your seed can sprout and flourish in the rich ground of the church.

Next, we need to grow in our appreciation of the arts. No one brings equal depth to their grasp of all the fine arts, to say nothing of the many other outlets for human creativity that exist in the church. Arts ministers need to be open to the diverse approaches to God and reality that are engendered by different art forms. They should help those under their care to be similarly open and receptive, to learn how to appropriate the church's artistic tradition and develop their own intuitive capacities.

The laity will need to grow in the cognitive, affective, and, on occasion, psychomotor dimensions of their lives in order to participate fully in this ministry. This should not come as a surprise. Learning is already a part of the laity's normal experience in church. There are many skills that the laity learn and take for granted as they participate in worship each week. These skills were not inborn any more than were the skills of appreciation that I am discussing now. Skills of appreciation can be taught just as naturally and become a resource that the congregation can draw on as it encounters new and unfamiliar art forms.

Finally, arts ministers need to become aware of how the church works. Ministry is not done in isolation. It happens in the context of the Christian

community. Arts ministry needs to be responsive to the different ways that the church enacts itself in its polity (governance), and in the social dynamics of the congregation. Without this awareness, arts ministry is not likely to have a long history or much of an impact on the church.

Practical Considerations

We now turn our attention to the birth and development of arts ministry in the church. There are other institutions that support arts ministries, including sacred arts organizations, museums, professional companies, and universities, but this discussion will be directed toward arts ministry's primary manifestation in the local faith community. I will treat this topic by looking first at how to lay the foundations for arts ministry and then by offering some thoughts about its subsequent development.

Please keep in mind that there are many different models of arts ministry. There is no privileged form or process. In a discipline that places a premium on creativity, the last thing we need is a rigid set of rules. What follows are a few thoughts based on practical experiences I have had over the years. If you find them helpful, that is all to the good. If not, feel free to be as creative as possible and invent your own model.

Before we start, it is important to address the question of the constituency for arts ministry. Who is involved with arts ministry in the local church? Thus far we have identified practitioners of the traditional fine arts, and we have talked about the creative potential of all God's people. Within this latter category I would like to turn our attention briefly to the specific issue of craftspeople.

A Preliminary Note about Craft

Since the Enlightenment there has been a division between the fine arts and craft. Craftspeople are often considered poor second cousins to artists. Often, beautiful artifacts that serve a practical purpose are not considered worthy of aesthetic contemplation. Utility is viewed as an aesthetic defect in an object. It is only when objects are no longer used for their original purpose that we stop to admire their ornamental qualities.

This division is unfortunate and certainly not biblical. Bezalel and Oholiab, the craftsmen of the tabernacle, along with all those who later

worked on the temple, belie this elitist attitude. They were highly trained and valued for their skill and insight.

The division between art and craft is especially unwarranted in the context of arts ministry. Many of the people who engage in arts ministry in the church do so through the medium of crafts. True creativity overcomes the dichotomy between art and craft. Craft is born from the life of ordinary people. It grows from human experience, serves fundamental human needs, informs our living, and helps us achieve our ends.

Indeed, the standards and level of excellence embodied in fine craftsmanship are in no way less than those in the fine arts.²² What may be different is the *higher* degree of connection with the local community (and, potentially, the community of faith) that occurs with craftspeople. Unlike artists, craftspeople have not moved further and further away from the tastes and aesthetic sensibilities of the community over the past several centuries. Craftspeople thrive in the local setting, sharing its values and mores. Cecilia Davis Cunningham elaborates:

To be a potter today is to say that plastic cups, machine-stamped utensils, and mass-produced vessels are not enough. To be a potter, or any other crafts-person, is to opt for certain basic values that have informed our common humanity and seem worth nurturing. . . . Every crafts-person deals with the basic materials of the earth, works with tools that are part of a long, common heritage, sets out criteria to establish the craft, accepts a discipline of work, and, into this fundamental framework, inserts the self as worker.²³

There is an intrinsic relationship between craftspeople, folk religion, and folk piety.²⁴ Craftspeople articulate the self-understanding of a com-

22. Thomas Aquinas says, "For a craftsman as such is commendable, not for the intention with which he does a work, but for the quality of the work." This quotation comes from Jean-Louis Cr  tien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), p. 97.

23. Cecilia Davis Cunningham, "Craft: Making and Being," in *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 8.

24. Urban Holmes writes, "There is an integrity and authenticity to folk piety, just as there is to folk tales, fairy stories, and myths. They go hand-in-hand: the story and its piety. Both have the ability to convey transcendence with an incredible freshness, not only in spite of their essentially conservative nature, but because of it." See *Ministry and Imagination*, pp. 199-200.

munity in much the same way that folk religion and piety give us a glimpse of its living religious traditions. Craftspeople take this lived tradition and embody it in the material forms of their craft. Thus, to truly know a community, it is important to know something about their crafts.

Craftspeople form the backbone of the congregations in many churches. Compared to the attention the church has given to those who work in the fine arts, the church has often ignored craftspeople, and so they do their work in the private spaces of their lives or with other craftspeople outside the context of the church. Notable exceptions include the practice in many Lutheran churches of quilting and the similar practice of needlepoint that is often associated with Episcopal congregations. Circles of quilters meet in many congregations and work throughout the year to fashion lovely quilts that are subsequently donated to charity or mission work. Likewise, needlepoint circles meet to create kneelers for communion rails and chancel furniture. This is a shining example of what can and should happen more often as craft is embraced as an integral part of arts ministry.

It is now time to look at how, in union with artists, craftspeople, and the creative genius of ordinary parishioners, we might enact an arts ministry in the setting of the local church.

Stage One: Laying the Foundations

Someone has to get the ball rolling. In order to launch a new arts ministry, a facilitator of some sort needs to be identified. In many cases this may be the Director of Music, who is, ordinarily, the only professional artist on staff. Otherwise, facilitation could fall into the hands of another artist or simply a supporter of the arts in the congregation. Let's say that this person is you.

Arts ministry is developed within an institution. This offers both opportunities and challenges. Institutions, by their very nature, have their own culture, their own mission, and their own unique personalities. Every church has a particular set of idiosyncrasies that makes it distinctive in some way.

From the outset, it is important to understand something about the characteristics that make your church what it is. This means getting to know the structure and governance of the church and also getting to know the people who set the direction for the faith and witness of this particular

congregation. Often these people will be members of the clergy, but in some instances committees or even individual parishioners may be the locus of authority and vision within a given congregation.

It is important for you to have their immediate support for whatever you are planning. Communication is a big key to the success of a new ministry. You should keep both the leadership and the congregation informed throughout the process of developing a new arts ministry.

You may or may not want to begin by launching a new ministry right away. Often it is better to plan a project of some sort and let the ministry grow out of the project rather than the other way around. This could be an adult education class on some aspect of Christianity and the arts. It could be a drama that is created for worship, a mural that is painted in the Sunday school hallway, a garden that is planted on the side lawn, a cooking class that is sponsored by the church, or a trip to hear a sacred music concert in the community. There are innumerable options.

While planning this initial event, you should get to know something about the congregation's background, tastes, and interests in regard to the arts. Often the leaders in a congregation may think they know the people's tastes and backgrounds when this is not really true. What music do parishioners listen to on their car radio or when they are relaxing at home? What paintings do they hang on their walls? Who has studied dance or taken an art appreciation course? Who has written poetry or acted in a play? In fact, in all likelihood, no one in the congregation really knows the artistic profile of the congregation as a whole.

To acquire this information efficiently and effectively, I suggest the use of a simple questionnaire, one that assesses the gifts, interests, training, and tastes of the congregation. You will see one example of an arts questionnaire in Appendix Two. It can easily be adapted to other situations. It could be included in a monthly newsletter or administered during the offering of a service. It takes only a few minutes to complete. Encourage as many parishioners as you can to participate. The information that you glean from this process will be invaluable for a long time to come. It will help you identify the artistic gifts that already exist in the congregation and provide a snapshot of their aesthetic sensibilities.

It would also be appropriate to teach an adult education course on the arts. Allow the class to help you lay the groundwork for arts ministry. For instance, you might teach about creativity and beauty. Identify areas of life in which people are already being creative, and have them present these to the class. Help people learn how to dream. Give them a blank piece of pa-

per and encourage them to create their ideal job or their perfect vacation. Ask them to talk about and present examples of things they have collected in their lives — be it pottery or coins or chess sets or knickknacks or dolls. Have them envision possibilities for creative work in the church. Take the class to an art gallery or a concert or a dance recital. Bring music and visual art and poetry and movement into the classroom via recordings, slides, picture books, and so on. Have guest lecturers present the creative dimension of their lives or art forms. Engage the class in writing their own poetry or making their own drawings. Let them share their recipes and bring examples to pass, show off their woodworking or their knitting or the way they tie their own fishing flies. Help them learn to play again, to rediscover what it means to wonder at the world. The possibilities are virtually endless. What's more, these classes are enjoyable for the teacher and the students. It is easy to engender enthusiasm for this kind of a class, which in turn makes it a good springboard for a fledgling arts ministry.

In the process of experiencing the creative dimension of living, introduce the participants to a few basic theological notions like the ones we have already discussed: holistic living, along with the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and eschatology. Show them transcendent and immanent examples of sacred art. Help them see how art functions as a prophetic form. Slowly integrate their own artistic experiences and understanding into a coherent vision of how creativity and beauty can be used appropriately in the church and in their homes. This necessarily involves giving them some sense of the limits of art and the power of art to work for good or evil in the world depending on how it is used. Finally, help them understand that they are all artists in their own right and that the liturgy itself is an art form in which they are co-participants.

When you administer the questionnaire and teach the first class, you will begin to identify a group of people who have a particular interest and/or background in one or another of the arts or crafts. Bring these people together to sound them out about their interest in creating an arts ministry at the church. This will be the core of your arts committee. I would follow this up with a more extended meeting, perhaps in a retreat setting where they are not worried about picking up the kids from baseball practice or sending the next fax. The purpose of this retreat would be to iron out many of the details of what the initial arts ministry might look like.

Each time this group gets together, engage in prayer, include one concrete experience with sacred art, and hold an efficient organizational and planning session. If you can find copies, a very good resource to employ

with this group is the book *Full Circle* by Nena Bryans, the book that initially inspired the current study.²⁵ Bryans not only provides ideas about arts ministry but also presents quotations from significant theologians and artists who discuss the relationship between art and faith.

It is also important to identify and catalog the work in arts ministry that has been done at this church in the past and the work that is ongoing in the present. Virtually every congregation has a history of arts ministry whether they know it or not. Uncovering and naming these activities helps to legitimize the notion of arts ministry in the initial stages of the discussion. While identifying these ministries is important, the participants in existing ministries should be welcomed as partners with the new arts ministry that is forming, not forced to see themselves under its umbrella.

At some point the time will be right to make initial decisions about the direction you would like the ministry to take. This requires identifying and discussing different models of arts ministry. One key decision that needs to be made early in the process involves whether or not your arts ministry will restrict itself to presenting sacred art or simply present any art as part of its mission. Both models are possible, but they make different assumptions and travel in very different directions over time. Another decision involves work within liturgy and work outside of formal worship. A mission and vision statement should be written that address these and related issues.

Based on the decisions you make, you should begin considering a name for the new ministry. Naming is a highly creative activity whose significance should not be underestimated. While naming is not absolutely necessary, I have found that a name gives a sense of identity and belonging to those whose commitment is still fragile. It helps solidify their own connection to the ministry and energizes them for the work that follows. It also helps to identify the ministry to others in the congregation and beyond who may not see it as a distinct offering of the church simply because they are unaccustomed to the idea of arts ministry in the first place.

As the seeds of an idea are planted and a direction begins to emerge, programming will be a natural part of the discussion. Although this may seem counter-intuitive, I would suggest starting outside of worship for the first year's programs. Worship is an area that is near and dear to the hearts of the faithful. Introducing new creative and artistic elements into worship

25. Nena Bryans, *Full Circle: A Proposal to the Church for an Arts Ministry* (San Carlos, Calif.: Schuyler Institute for Worship and the Arts, 1988).

at the beginning can be inflammatory. Parishioners need to be prepared for what will happen in worship through education and through establishment of an environment in the wider ministry of the church that is open to the arts. Look for opportunities to enhance the artistic quality of current ministries within the church, whether or not they currently focus on the arts. Sometimes hidden connections will emerge. The parish nurse and the spiritual life committee are both concerned with aspects of holistic living. So is arts ministry. How might these ministries relate to one another in the context of encouraging holistic life in the parish? What about the religious education program? Could there be units involving the arts that are integrated into the Sunday school or youth group activities? Simply raising these questions often leads to creative ideas on the part of the committee.

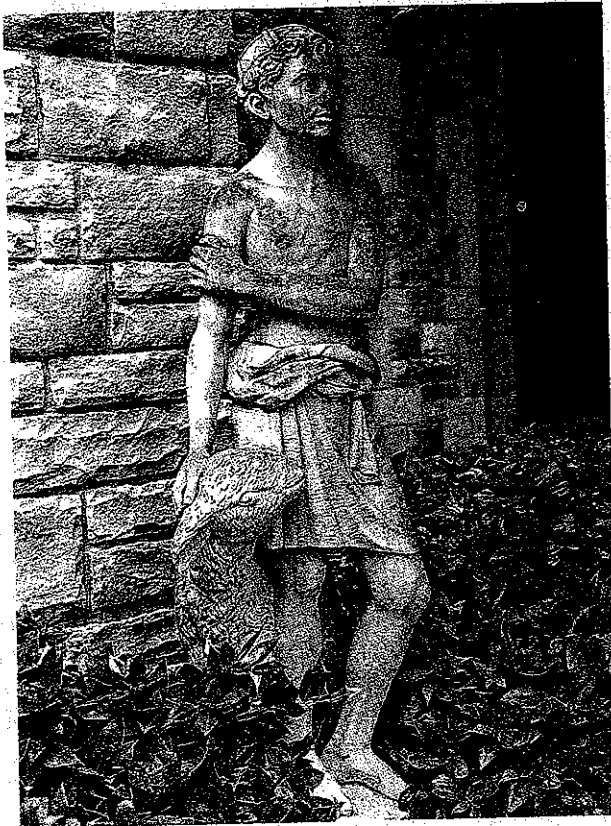
Sometimes monthly programs are a good way to begin. These might include showing a religious film and having a discussion period that follows, taking a trip to a local museum where a docent leads a tour of sacred art, sponsoring a concert of sacred choral music sung by the choir of a local college or university, planning a tour of local church architecture, presenting a class with a fine chef who demonstrates how to make creative desserts, planning an evening of poetry reading, or holding a church square dance. Once again, there are almost no limits to the possibilities once you begin to examine the options available in your area. Often you will find that the only things holding you back are the limits of your own imagination.

Finally, in this initial stage, take the results from the questionnaire and bring people with similar interests together just to see what happens. Often they will not know that others share their passions, and it will not have occurred to them that there is any role for their creative work in the church. One of the results of this can be the creation of interest groups or clubs: book clubs, cooking clubs, woodworking clubs, gardening clubs, and so on. The result of this work will be an enhanced atmosphere that is supportive of human creativity and open to new possibilities for ministry. In any case, simply becoming aware of people's artistic profiles and histories will develop their sense of community with one another by opening up new avenues of interaction within the congregation.

Stage Two: Development

As you emerge from the first year of activity, it is important to evaluate what you've done in light of your goals. It is also time to begin working to-

Religious Arts Festival **Independent Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama**



The Boy Jesus by Vincent Palumbo, Master Carver at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C. The sculpture was begun at Independent Presbyterian Church in Birmingham during the 1981 Religious Arts Festival. At this festival, children helped Palumbo chip away at the limestone. Palumbo then took the limestone back to Washington, completed the work the next year, and returned to Birmingham, where it was dedicated during the 1982 Religious Arts Festival.

A religious arts festival is a time for the church to bring together the various sacred arts in a setting where both the local church and the community at large can experience the full panoply of the Judeo-Christian artistic tradition. The religious arts festival at Independent Presbyterian Church in Birmingham is one of the most well-known festivals in the United States. The festival began in 1972 as a week-long event whose purpose is "to glorify God through the rich spectrum of the arts."^{*} The intent of the Fine Arts Committee of the church is to provide the festival as a gift to the city of Birmingham. Indeed, the festival attracts its audience from the community as much as it does from the church. The festival is administered each year by the Director of Music and Fine Arts in conjunction with approximately fifteen volunteers.

During the years of its operation, the festival has included a wide spectrum of guest speakers and artists with expertise in drama, music, dance, architecture, literature, and the visual arts. A few traditions have gradually developed. Typically, Friday night is "early music night," and Thursday night features a banquet with either a lecture or a theatre work presented afterwards. There have been concerts, special liturgies, visual art shows, dramatic presentations, lectures, readings, and dance presentations. In addition, the festival has been responsible for commissioning visual artworks, many of which are retained and displayed throughout the church and its retirement community facility. Anthems and other music have also been commissioned by the festival and are incorporated into the church's music library and worship life.

^{*}Jeff McLelland, e-mail to the author, 30 June 2009.

ward embedding the new arts ministry in the institutional fabric of the church. This means two things: staff and budget.

By staff, I mean creating the position of arts minister. In recent years, published job descriptions for the music minister have often expanded to read "minister of music and the arts." This is one logical route to take. However, there is no guarantee that the music minister will have either the time or the interest in arts ministry needed to take on these new responsibilities. In this case the position could be independent of the music ministry, held either by a volunteer who coordinates the arts ministry or by a paid staff person.

The arts minister should be someone who can lead by listening, who can foster conversation with the goal of reaching consensus. She or he should be able to generate options that make sense for this particular congregation, and be accountable for the choices that have been made and the various tasks that need to be accomplished.

In addition to finding an arts minister, establishing a budget is another important priority. Creating a budget says to a church that this ministry is valuable. It acknowledges that paying for beauty and creative work is a legitimate part of the church's business alongside other staff positions and ministries. However small the amount may be at first, there should be a regular budget line established for this ministry early on. This will also help the ministry to have a concrete presence in the minds of the parishioners and the church leadership.

Programming during the second and subsequent years may very well enter the arena of worship. As it does this, education will be required. This should come in as many different forms as possible. An adult education class on worship and the arts could be offered; newsletter columns and bulletin notes could be written; sermons on beauty and the arts could be preached. Every opportunity should be explored to help the people understand what is being done and why it is being done.

At the outset, arts ministry might simply focus on existing liturgical ministries, with the goal of helping them perform their own functions in as artful a fashion as possible. Helping the lectors, the cantors, and the servers do their jobs well has the potential to make a real difference in the aesthetic quality of the liturgy.

In conjunction with this, focusing attention on the environment of worship is also a good way to begin. There are many creative options that could enhance worship beyond simply another banner. Using fabric itself in innovative ways, employing materials from nature like large stones and vines, and paying attention to the individual character of the seasons of the church year all make a big difference in the way the architecture of the church interacts with the liturgy.

One other dimension of arts ministry that impacts worship is the potential for the creation of new ensembles. These might include liturgical dance companies, drama troupes, or new musical ensembles. They can be intergenerational or focus on one particular segment of the congregation. Whatever their make-up, the choice of director is critical. The success or failure of the ensemble is largely a result of the background and gifts of the director. In many instances sincerity and willingness to serve are the only

qualifications considered. While these are undoubtedly important, training and artistic competence should be weighted heavily when making a new hire. Students or faculty from local colleges and universities often provide good options to fill these positions.

The culmination of the program year for an arts ministry is often an arts festival. These come in a variety of different forms. Often they occur over the course of a weekend and include a variety of programs. Workshops, lectures, creative worship services, tours, concerts, and films are just some of the options for such a festival. One of the advantages of arts festivals is that they provide an easily articulated rationale for introducing creative worship to a congregation. Parishioners are likely to be more open to creative ventures when they occur on special occasions like this. This enables them to be exposed to new art forms like dance, to which they might not otherwise be so receptive.

Conclusion

Arts ministry represents an exciting opportunity for the church and for Christian people everywhere. It offers the hope of deepening the affinity between human reason, intuition, affection, spirituality, and the life of the body. It gives parishioners a new vantage point from which to view their own lives, other people, the world around them, and God, a view that is based in reality yet emanates in some mysterious way from a transcendent realm that is beyond our ability to fully conceive or replicate. Arts ministry promises a more tangible communion with the Christian community and with nature, and a heightened sense of life lived as creative people made in the image of a Creator God.

Finally, arts ministry provides a foretaste of the feast to come, a brief hint of our future existence in the City of Light, a place where beauty and celebration will be our chief goal and delight. It offers a range of tools we need to continue on our journey toward this glorious end. As we take up the challenge and opportunity of arts ministry, let us lay claim to the gift of beauty and walk with passion and wonder through the paths and contours of God's rose garden. Let us join the General Dance.