

Creativity Workshop for Alpine Presbytery, 28 April 2018

**Encouraging creativity**

***How to spark fresh ideas and deepen engagement  
in worship and church life.***

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90 minutes: 3.45 – 5.15pm

Resources/set-up:

people sitting at café-style tables  
with A3 paper, pens and crayons  
handout

3.45pm

Personal introduction

I am a pretty creative person, I get a buzz out of a creative flow, I love to imagine something that does not exist yet.

I am also the minister of a local church and so have a large responsibility for worship services week after week, and I'm very aware of the limitations and tensions

of having to be creative even when I don't feel creative

the limits of how much creativity my congregation can appreciate

the limits of my own energy and the crowding of time with tasks

Continuum between: enjoying creative process for its own sake

... and achieving outcomes

The heart of my ministry is the awesome privilege of inviting people into the presence of God, and for me this demands creativity ... for the God beyond time is also new every morning. It demands theological reflection, so that it is a dynamic process of seeing truth for today and drawing out of tradition depths of insight.

*Discuss: Tell the person next to you: What is something you would love to see in your church? Read through the possible 'creative outcomes' list. Choose something from that list that could enrich your church life.*

Some big ideas about creativity:

3.55pm

**“Ex-Nihilo”; Creativity is bringing into being something which does not yet exist**

This is impossible! but *All things are possible* with God

Sharing in the very being and essence of God

*Discuss Tell the person on the other side of you: When did you created something which did not exist until you created it? How does your creativity come out?*

## **Creativity in a Christian frame has 5 sources: Five Threads**

(like fingers of a hand)

1. Bible, scripture
2. Theology: ideas & claims about God
3. Life: Human experience, emotion
4. My life: Personal story
5. Context: place, culture, situation

creative theological reflection process draws on all 5 of these.

So, for example, if I am doing a children's talk, I will want to choose: one verse or story from the Bible, one big idea about God that I want the children to grasp, one feeling or something they can all relate to, one way that it makes a difference for me, and one way that it might make a difference in everyday life, maybe at school, in the world.

## **Creativity dives in to the points of tension between these**

The problem with most of our children's talks, and our prayers and sermons, is that we try too quickly to harmonise these. Trite is boring. Don't leap to easy answers. sit with contradictions and conflicts. Let them pull and tug against each other.

Draw towards real-ness and away from the surface, the taken-for-granted

Ask questions that you don't know the answer to yet.

*"Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" Psalm 10:1*

## **Creativity is fed by emotion, but suffocated by the Stress Response**

All human emotion can be expressed and transformed by creativity BUT creativity requires a basic sense of safety. Anxiety & stress lock the brain & nervous system into the Stress Response, telling us that we are not safe and closes down the brain. Fight/flight/freeze are not creative responses.

How can we create safe spaces where the brain is able to open up and explore?

How do we try new things in church without stressing people out?

*Be not afraid!*

*“Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.” Psalm 27:3*

### **Creativity values symbol and story**

- Narrative
- Metaphor
- and intangible ineffable things like music, sound, silence, colour, movement
- value silence and the spaces between
- Play!

Sharing in God’s own self-expression – revealing the Face of God that cannot be seen, the Voice of God that cannot be heard, the Hand of God that cannot be felt – requires breaking open of the obvious to discover the fragile truth that would otherwise be left unseen, unheard and unfelt. Treasure in clay jars – maybe the only way to get at the treasure is to bust the jar!

Symbol and story take us to our vulnerability. If it is doesn’t feel vulnerable you’re probably not saying anything that hasn’t already been said before a thousand times.

*“Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings”, Psalm 17:8*

### **Creativity loves beauty for its own sake**

Creative work can fulfil a function and achieve a goal, but more importantly it just ‘is’. Beauty expands the soul and draws us to God. Lovely things, evocative sounds or well chosen words are a treasure in themselves. God is extravagant beauty! (glory)

*“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork”. Psalm 19:1*

### **Creativity is a desire!**

There is a need, a longing in the human heart to create - surely a key part of being made in the image of God! The process of imagining, sparking ideas and problem solving (whether in metal under a Landrover or with notes on the piano) is a drive and a joy, essential to being human.

Faith shapes this; we experience this as *inspiration* from the Holy Spirit.

*“Delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”*  
*Psalm 37:4*

## **Creativity demands space**

Time to doodle, be unproductive

empty space for the mind and heart

natural spaces allow the human soul to expand outwards

What kind of physical environment releases your creativity? –  
cluttered/clear? comfortable/formal?

*“He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.” Psalm 23:2*

Discuss

## **Creativity is deeply personal**

(Personality type)

What works for someone else won't work for you.

By definition creativity is about opening up something within yourself.

*Know Thyself.*

Listen to your body clock: What times of the day/week are you most creative?

Do you work better alone or with others?

Listen to your emotions – draw them out as your raw material

God's Spirit in partnership with your spirit

*“My heart became hot within me. While I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue” Psalm 39:3*

Discuss

## **Push it out ...                      ... and pull it in**

Creativity requires two directions ... first, **an outward flow into the possibilities**: (anything goes, brainstorming)

Grab an idea and hold onto its tail for all your life! See where it takes you.

Push it out ... what if ...? what if I made it bigger? or further out in this direction?

tip it upside down. change colour. change perspective. try something new. Experiment!

... second, **tough choices, lean and mean**

pull it in, trim it back. Choose just the best bit. Out of all these possibilities what really works? What is most effective? most evocative? Key skill in writing is knowing what NOT to say. Every word must fight for its right to be there.

Discuss: Take one big idea about God. Take one context: a 10-minute all-age time in a worship service.

Brainstorm '**push it out**'

add colour, music, action, metaphor, interaction, fun, object, suspense .. then '**bring it in**': of all these fun ideas what is one thing that might just work in your context? Nail it down: what specifically does this communicate? what practicalities would be needed to make this work?

### **Creativity expressed in the real world ... courage!**

For me this is the hardest part, exposing my creative process to others who may love it or dislike it, or be quite disinterested! The transition from idea to completion can be oddly harsh on the soul.

Sadly many creative people come to strongly dislike their own creations, despite other people highly appreciating them. We can be our own worst critic.

stay gracious with yourself. ... gain objectivity and distance  
spiritual discipline of surrender – it is done, let it go. It will now be whatever it is. It is no longer truly mine. Gift.

*"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul!" Psalm 108:1*

4.30

Isaiah 51:9-11 (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> Awake, awake, put on strength,  
O arm of the LORD!

Awake, as in days of old,  
the generations of long ago!

Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,  
who pierced the dragon?

<sup>10</sup> Was it not you who dried up the sea,  
the waters of the great deep;  
who made the depths of the sea a way  
for the redeemed to cross over?

<sup>11</sup> So the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

## **Creativity in church**

Practical outcomes that greatly enrich the church's life:

**Children's stories and involvement** in worship ... traditional 'Kids Talk', craft activities, all-age interaction, games

**Colour and symbol** ... objects & object-lessons, things to hold or place or give, fabric, painting

**Written prayers** ... for worship, poems for funerals & weddings, litany & response, Communion liturgy, prayers on specific themes e.g. refugee Sunday or seasons

**Movement and music** in worship

**Story** ... Dramatic readings, different voices, props or costumes to enhance a character ... bring people and events in scripture to life

**Photography and image** ... powerpoint, printed ... words and pictures together enhancing prayer and worship

**Written comment** ... 'blog', sermon, opinion piece for newspaper, article on a topic

Settings can include 'church' worship space, other church facilities/spaces, home groups, children's or youth programmes, Rest Home services, pastoral visits, schools ... as well as social media and websites.

## **Bible reflection**

Work through the 5 Threads – creative theological reflection – with a biblical passage that includes a metaphor. Isaiah 51 verse 9-11 or 22  
5 sheets of paper

## **Creative time**

20 minutes to begin a creative project  
could be bounced off the theological reflection process, or something else you are working on or interested in  
Choose one of the possible avenues/outcomes to work towards