

Worship Committee, January 22, 2021

Present: John Sampson, Bernie Webb, Linda Bogardus, Susie Allen, Annie Scavo, Karen Glass, Anne Hurd, Martha Gallagher

Bernie wanted to open the meeting by discussing the Offertory. He agreed with its new position after the Reflection and likes bringing in people to express how they give. But he feels that there is a problem with the Offertory's being back-to-back with the Reflection. He wondered if an interlude could occur between the two. This would give time to think about the sermon before going on to another verbal piece. He also felt that the Offertory was too long and should be only a few sentences.

The group agreed that they liked getting to know people in their spiritual context when they gave the Offertory. Some interest was expressed in having a musical interlude between the Reflection and the Offertory, and Martha said that she could provide this music. But in fact, most felt that John's sermons were so powerful that they, not the Offertory, should be the final message of the service. This would allow congregants time to pause and think about the sermon, even taking their thoughts outside the service time. Going to the Offertory immediately after the sermon prevents that. A possible solution is to move the Offertory back to where it had been. John thanked the committee for the feedback.

John moved on to discuss Advent and Epiphany. He was eager to know how it went while it was still fresh in our minds, and he wanted to hear any suggestions for next year. He hopes that there will be a hybrid online-in person setup if we are in the church building next year. It was wonderful to see the diversity of people from all over the country logging on.

The build-up to Christmas felt like a pilgrimage, many said: week after week, the sermons developed the story, and we saw the additions of the wreaths on the doors, the poinsettias, and the single bare tree. People especially liked the final image of the Christmas Eve service, which was of the tree lit and the star. Also powerful were the empty crèche visible on the altar and Henri's adding to her own crèche at home each week. Susie felt that the energy surrounding the candles and John's sermon on Christmas Eve were transformative. A special highlight was the Christmas Day service with its collective creating of a poem.

John asked whether there was enough Christ in Advent and Christmas. He had allowed other voices to be heard during the Advent weeks building up to Christ at the end. The general opinion was that no one noticed the lack of Christ, or that everything was so well integrated, no one felt the absence.

Last year the centerpiece was rituals rather than sermons. This year the opposite was true, in part because of Zoom. John tried to make the rituals feel more personal: for example, by having a particular family come on Zoom to light the Advent candle each week. Susie stated that she did not feel any loss: indeed, the way it was structured, being able to see inside homes, made it more intimate. Bernie felt that the online Bonfire Vespers was immensely powerful. John said that these Bonfire Vespers would be repeated on the Quarter Days in the coming months.

John stated that planning is already underway for Easter, which is early this year, April 4. Ash Wednesday occurs on February 17. He asked whether Lent is meaningful for us. Many opinions were expressed: Lent, meant to be a process of spiritual growth and clarity, resonates with some and not others. John suggested that Lent has a different spiritual connotation. The external message is the invitation to love, serve, and recognize the beauty of living in this creation. God is very much present in everything, even suffering. We should never forget that even if God is silent in our suffering, He has not abandoned us.

John finds the period between Lent and Easter to be the most difficult and is not sure how he wants to move through it.

Next meeting: February 12, 10–12 AM

Submitted by Linda Bogardus