

Artfully Done: A Workshop on the Arts in Congregational Life

by Rina Shere

A workshop design and training article to enhance your leaders' use of the arts in *The Inviting Word*.

This workshop offers *The Inviting Word* leaders the opportunity to discover art resources in their own settings and incorporate additional experiences into the life of the congregation.

You Will Need

- ! Leader's and learner's guides for various age levels
- ! Bibles and copies of the article "Artfully Done" (page 6.5.3 and 6.5.4), which follows the workshop outline
- ! Low table, blue or purple cloth, candle, and matches
- ! *Whaling Wall VI: Hawaiian Humpbacks* and accompanying meditation and poem in *Imaging the Word*, volume two
- ! "Heaven, Earth Rejoice: A Christmas Meditation" on the *The Inviting Word Audiocassette*, Year Two
- ! Cassette player

Getting Ready

Make copies of the article "Artfully Done," which accompanies this workshop outline, and distribute it in advance to the leaders who will be attending the workshop. Ask them to read it in preparation for the event. Also ask them to bring a copy of their leader's guide and a learner's guide for the age level they lead.

Prepare the Meeting Space

Arrange chairs in a circle around a low table and cover it with the cloth. Light the candle and open a Bible to Psalm 148. Place a Bible on each chair and have extra copies of the article "Artfully Done" within reach. Cue the cassette tape to the selection "Heaven, Earth Rejoice: A Christmas Meditation."

As the Group Arrives

Invite the group into the circle. Make introductions if necessary, then ask if anyone has had anything unexpected happen to them this past week. Any surprises or mysteries? This season is full of them! Allow the group to think for a few minutes and then ask them to share their experiences. Next ask them to think about the differences between the Advent and Christmas seasons. How is the period of waiting and gestation symbolized by Advent different than the jubilation of Christmas? Use the cassette selection "Heaven, Earth Rejoice: A Christmas Meditation" to help the group think about this concept through sound. After listening to the tape quietly, ask questions to stimulate discussion. What did they hear? What were all the sounds? What does the selection symbolize? How does the concept of the unexpected fit with the music that was just played? Encourage participants to share their reactions. Talk about the music – it is mysterious and builds up to a wonderful climax. How did they feel when they were listening to the sounds?

Scripture and Art

Ask one person to read Psalm 148, the focus scripture for Christmas 1 from *The Inviting Word*, and invite the group to follow along in their Bibles. Then invite the group to look at the photograph by Mark Wyland called *Whaling Wall IV: Hawaiian Humpbacks* as you read the same verses from Psalm 148. After a brief silence ask the group about the artwork. Ask why they suppose it was chosen to illustrate this scripture. Is it a choice that they expected? Why or why not? How does the sight of the whale engender feelings of the unexpected? of exaltation? The whale is a magnificent creature glad to be alive in God's world. How does its majestic beauty symbolize the exaltation that we feel about the birth of Jesus, and how does the artwork depict all of God's creatures?

Discussing the Article

Ask the group how the music, art, and scripture fit together to help us embody the message of Christmas in new ways. What did they find helpful? What would they have changed or adapted for the age level with which they work?

Explain that in the rest of the time together you will use the leader's and learner's guide (choosing one or more lessons to review) and the article "Artfully Done" as you consider some questions that will help you discover ways to use art resources more effectively with your age level and in the congregation.

Questions

- ! Where are the arts – music, poetry, art – used in this lesson (including additional experiences)?
- ! How do they function?
- ! In what ways might you incorporate other uses of the arts into the liturgy of learning for your age level as suggested in the article?
- ! How might two or more age groups work together on some common experience or activity?
- ! How can your congregation use the resources you have available locally to enhance the use of the arts in your own setting?

Thank the group for their efforts and close the workshop with a prayer.

Artfully Done

by Rina Shere

Throughout time the arts have been used to link worship, reflection, and devotion. Church leaders and educators can use the arts to help youth and adults make new connections to devotional texts. Incorporating music, drama, dance, and visual images will add another dimension to the faith experience, enriching both thinking and worship.

The first step in using the arts is to understand that you do not need to be an art expert. However, it can be helpful to know how to access art resources in your community and be comfortable experimenting with different art forms. As a group leader you will also want to use questions that help your group members become aware of how they can use the arts to deepen their understanding of the lesson. The following examples illustrate how you can expand the use of the arts with all ages and at different points in the liturgy of learning for the group. When planning for each lesson begin by working with the art that is suggested and consider using the additional experience(s). Then, as you gain confidence, include the suggestions in this article.

Preparing for the Lesson

To prepare yourself as a leader, read over the scripture lesson and take note of your immediate sensory reactions to the words and message. How could art experiences be used to convey the ideas in a different way or to stimulate new discussion? What kind of music, movement, or art could be used to help others more fully experience the same scripture? Think creatively about what you need to set the tone of the session. Jot down your ideas and add them to your plan.

Gathering for the Word

There are many ways that you can incorporate the arts as people gather together. Ask yourself these questions in preparation: What can you do to the environment to prepare for the study of the selected text? Should you use a small and intimate space or large and open space? What physical aspects of your gathering space will put the group

in a reflective and responsive frame of mind? What are the art resources that you made note of earlier, and do you have access to them? Music can always be used to set the tone of the workshop and awaken the senses. You don't need to stick to the *The Inviting Word* tapes or hymns; pop, jazz, classical, and meditative music can be used appropriately for all lessons. Photographs, paintings, or wall hangings can be placed around the meeting space to convey certain feelings. If possible, ask members of your group before you meet what kind of music they feel represents the scripture readings for the day and invite them to share their choices with the rest of the group.

Engaging the Word

The arts provide a different way to encounter scripture. Try using conversations about an artwork to stimulate some new ideas to engage the group in the lesson. The artworks found in *Imaging the Word* can be used to begin this kind of dialogue. Other images that can be found in the church or community include stained-glass windows, public sculptures, small carvings, pottery, jewelry, and photographs. Musical and literary selections can be used for the same purpose. The key is not to use the arts as a direct illustration of the lesson but as a starting point for the discussion of personal responses to scripture.

Responding to the Word

The arts offer opportunities to respond actively to God's Word. Scripture messages can be interpreted by movement, song, visual arts, and literature. Physically involve your group in a response by asking them individually to create a movement they feel interpret one portion of the reading for that week. What emotion are they trying to portray? What kind of movement embodies that emotion, and how do our bodies feel? It is important to encourage everyone to participate and get them involved immediately. Give people five minutes to create a movement. Ask people to share their gesture and explain how it developed in response to their interpretation of

the scripture. The sharing process unifies the group and encourages people to participate even more fully. Ask everyone to respond together with their movement as one person reads the passage aloud. Some questions to ask the group could be: How did it feel to move together and engage the Word physically? How did that interaction change the worship experience? In what ways did their response reflect the scripture?

Going with the Word

The arts can help dedicate new discoveries in concrete ways. Creative movement, singing, or saying together a song, poem, or dialogue from a play can be a shared experience that celebrates the time together and reinforces new insights as learners go with the Word.

It is not important that there be a distinct art "activity" to accompany each of the four movements. Rather, think about how art experiences might open the group to new ways of gathering, engaging, responding, and going with the scripture reading. The arts are cross-generational and are helpful in encouraging discussions of scripture readings among the ages. Scents, music, movement, text, and visual stimuli can be used together to deepen the lesson you are preparing. As leaders, the arts help you make connections with people who might respond strongly to nontraditional modes of thinking and feeling.

Discovering the Arts in Your Community

The selections included in *Imaging the Word* are a solid starting point for arts resources. However, using congregation and community resources expands the choice of available arts and will add richness to the use of *The Inviting Word* in congregational life. Encourage people in the group to talk about art events that they have attended or participated in recently. The first step in using community art resources is to find out what kinds of art interests your group. Ask them for ideas and start with their suggestions and experiences. The more your teaching draws from the background of the group members, the more meaningful their learning experience will be.

Leaders can help spark creativity in each other. For instance, they may choose to attend a performance or exhibit together, and then discuss how it might fit into an upcoming lesson. Contact your local arts council for listings of events, particularly those that are free. Call community arts organizations and ask if they have educational packets or workshops for teachers. Most museums, theaters, dance and music companies now have education departments. Many of these group have docents or teaching artists that may be available to help you. Call and ask for schedules of events and teaching aids. Colleges and universities also abound with arts resources and students who may be able to collaborate with your groups. Start a bulletin board or a resource file in the church office for upcoming arts events, community exhibits, performances, and so on. Invite artists and performers from your congregation to share their gifts and understanding of their art.

Used effectively, the arts can enrich scripture study for children, youth, and adults, and become an important part of your education and worship life.

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