

**Coming to the Table**  
**Worship Grant Proposal**  
**Loop Church, Chicago, Illinois**

**Foundation and Purpose**

1. *Summarize your project in one to two concise sentences. Include what you will do and why you will do it.*

Because we are moving into a permanent worship space, we will lead a year-long study of the centrality of the Lord's Supper in worship as well as design and create a communion table, communion ware, and liturgical art to help focus worshippers' attention on God.

2. *Provide one or two brief paragraphs that expand on the needs or opportunities that this project will address and the patterns and habits of worship you hope will be visible in your congregation as a result of this project.*

After worshiping in eight different rented spaces in its twenty-three years of existence, Loop Church is very excited to be moving into a permanent worship space this spring. This move will allow us, among other things, to finally have a communion table instead of a folding table as well as to create our own liturgical art and installations instead of making do with the surroundings of our temporary spaces.

The communion table will be the center of the life of our church: At it, we gather in community and are fed by God; from it, we go forth to engage the world. As we design and create this table, we will invite our congregation into deeper reflection on the mysteries of the sacrament as well as into deeper involvement in the community. Likewise, the liturgical art and installations will be used not only to transform an industrial space into a worship space but to spark conversation within the congregation about what helps focus our attention on God during worship, specifically, how it orients us toward the communion table. As we move from a nomadic existence to rootedness in a specific community, these conversations will engage the congregation in deeper theological reflection about the meaning and practice of worship.

**Theological Reflection**

3. *How would you describe Christian worship?*

Christian worship is a communal encounter with the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that has as its goal declaring the worthiness of God in a way that brings glory to him and consequently blesses his people. Worship is dialogical: He speaks, and we respond. This pattern reflects the covenantal structure that undergirds our reality as the people of God. It is word and sacrament focused, both of which bring the gospel to us in different media. This results in a deepened relationship with God that empowers us both to seek him and to represent him in the world in which we live. The movement in liturgy expresses this covenantal relationship in dialogical form. We prepare through prayer, God invites and greets us, we respond with praise and with greeting each other and exchanging the peace of Christ. God calls us to reconciliation and we respond with confession. He pronounces forgiveness and we respond with thanksgiving and rededication. Having been purified and made able to be in his presence, we approach him with prayers of adoration and petition on behalf of the church and the world. We then ask the Spirit to open us up to the hearing and preaching of his word. We hear the word read and proclaimed and respond with thanksgiving through our offerings and dedication to ministry. We rehearse that same gospel and give thanks in the celebration of the eucharist, then go out, having

received his benediction, with praise to him and a focus on bringing his gospel into the world in which we live.

*4. Address concretely how your project draws on and carries forward your understanding of Christian worship as you described in question no. 3.*

Worship is a communal encounter with the triune God to glorify Him. How do we help worshipers focus on God during this corporate ritual? Words, music, art—all can point people to Him, and different modalities appeal to and challenge people’s varied processing/learning styles (such as visual/spatial, verbal, musical, and interpersonal). For so long, the strength of our congregational worship has been words and music, which we have carried from location to location, along with some minimal, portable liturgical art. Now we will be able to use more substantial liturgical art forms to help worshipers focus on God. Our goal is that they will enhance, not supplant, the words and music we already cherish, and so we will use a highly collaborative process in developing the objects and in crafting the final product. This process builds community and develops a deeper communal identity formed by word and sacrament, and both the process of creating this art and its actual use will help deepen our communal and individual understanding of God.

Worship has movement, stages. Likewise, worship spaces have stages. As worshipers enter the space, the banners and liturgical art will help them understand that this is a space set apart, calling them to set aside their cares to focus on God. The arrangement of the seating, with the communion table as central, will invite worshipers to encounter God throughout the service itself, culminating in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Then, as the service concludes, worshipers are sent out from the table, nourished by the Word and by the bread and wine, to serve in the world.

*5. How might scriptural texts; the wisdom and practices of Christian traditions other than your own; or global and cultural considerations inform your project and lead your congregation to fuller participation in worship?*

We will work to deepen our understanding and practice of communion through study and hands-on creation on several fronts. First, as part of our education process, we will study the story of the Last Supper in the Gospels as well as other references to communion throughout the New Testament in tandem with the books we have chosen as study guides. Second, we are asking Lisa De Boer to come lead a workshop on examining how different Christian traditions use aesthetics to enhance worship. In addition, we are adapting a communion preparation class from a Lutheran congregations for our children and their parents to be given during Lent; in the course of the class, the children will experience the Seder meal. And third (and in tandem with the second), Chicago is incredibly diverse and offers many opportunities for us to take “field trips” to see other Christian traditions, particularly those of other cultures, in the practice of worship as well as how their surroundings are used to promote worship. We expect that the study of the written word as well as seeing what others are doing will continue to inform our own understanding and thus the design of worship materials and worship services.

*6. Provide a list of books, articles, and other resources that have guided the development of your proposal and that you expect will inform your work. Choose two or three and briefly describe what you have learned from this book, person, or other resource.*

Tom Wright's *The Meal That Jesus Gave Us* is a highly accessible overview that provides a strong, foundational picture of what takes place in the eucharist. We will use it both in small group settings and circulate it within every household in the congregation. The goal is twofold: first, to achieve some foundational understanding of the sacrament, and second, to create a common vocabulary and frame of reference for ongoing conversations within the community.

Paul Galbreath's *Leading from the Table* helps us to see the connections between having been in the presence of Christ around the communion table and our participation in the ongoing ministry of Christ in which we engage having been fed at the table. Our goal in utilizing this book is to see the connection between the Lord's Supper and what we do in the Lord's name. The idea of preparing our monthly donation of sack lunches to our homeless shelter at the communion table is an outgrowth of the orientation that Galbreath advocates. We intend to make this book available to all but expect it to be used primarily in a specific small group and in the worship planning team.

James K. A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation (Cultural Liturgies)* will also be used in a smaller, more focused context, including, again, the worship planning team and another small group that focuses more on worldview discussions. The latter group used Jamie's *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism* to great effect and incorporated some of his ideas from the closing pages about what "church" should look like into the worship life of the church. As a congregation that invests a great deal in worship and worldview, we look forward to working through this latest offering.

## **Community**

*Question 7: How does your project express and strengthen your congregation's or organization's mission and grow out of its unique history?*

Our church's mission is to connect people to God, God's people, and God's work in the world. Through our history, we have done that in a situated and intentional way in the community of Chicago's South Loop. While our church has always been connected closely to the South Loop, we have had within that location a very nomadic existence. As we move into a permanent space, we will be intentional in education and process moving from "tabernacle" to "temple" worship.

In addition to our connection to the South Loop, the people of our congregation are also uniquely equipped and prepared for undertaking this project. As a congregation of people diverse in age and ethnic background, we are unified in our vision for creating a reformed institution in the South Loop, an area that has historically struggled with integrating economically, racially, and socially. We are also a congregation of people that are highly motivated and driven, demonstrated by high involvement in church ministries, even in view of demanding urban lifestyles. Though our overall numbers are small (between 50–75 regularly attending), we are able to have vibrant social, educational, and spiritual small group ministries that take full advantage of the gifts of our members and the opportunities in Chicago. Our members are also involved in worship-related ministries: configuring our current, temporary space; planning our services; and developing worship experiences for children.

*8. How will this project nourish healthy congregational life?*

Our vision is that all congregational activities will be centered in the sacraments. The communion table will be the center of the life of our church: at it, we gather in community and are fed by God; from it, we go forth to engage the world. Just as eating a meal together creates a

bond among those at the table, sharing the Eucharist around the communion table creates a bond among worshipers as it leads them toward encountering God.

Our goal is to nourish a congregational life that connects our practice of communion with our day-to-day practices. At the table, we are nourished by Jesus, who ate with sinners and spent time with the outcast; we are equipped and called by the Holy Spirit to do the same. We hope to cultivate the concept of table as the place to which we invite people, expanding our idea of who belongs at the table and of what we become at the table: transformation into broken bread for a broken world.

*Question 9: Describe the process that created this proposal.*

This proposal was born out of the identified need for providing a transition from the smaller, temporary space currently used for worship to a larger, more permanent space for our growing congregation. Our church leadership and worship planning committee appointed a task force of individuals to chart out a plan for implementation, including applying for the Calvin Institute for Worship grant. Early conversations focused on the centrality of communion to our worship and community life. As we looked forward to our more permanent space, it seemed natural for us to plan how to make that transition centering on the table as a symbol of our sharing the body of Christ and nourishment for feeding and serving others.

Since these meetings often included food shared around a table, it helped us focus on the sense of community that we hope the project will foster in our congregation. The task force grew to recognize the importance not only for the physical elements of table, liturgical art, and communion pieces, but also the need for education for the entire congregation as we embark on this journey of creating our own permanent worship space. As the team grew to know one another better, we worked to include our variety of gifts, as well as our connections to others outside the community of our congregation. We realized that many of the questions we had about creating a worship space are being addressed by friends of our church, who can aid us in navigating our worship transition.

*10. What are the gifts and credentials of your implementation team? How will they be accountable to each other and to church leadership?*

Worship grant committee members include:

Lisa Stracks, organization and administration

Wendy Will, congregational education and encouragement

Joanna Wigboldy, theology of worship and shepherding

Yvana Mols, theology/philosophy and discernment

Julie Mullins, Christian visual arts and hospitality

Tim Douma, *ex officio*, pastor, theology/philosophy and catalyzing

In addition, we expect to involve the majority of our members in study as well as the hands-on creation of the communion table, communion ware, and liturgical banners. For example, Erica Monroe is a fabric artist. Paul Kamp's uncle farms timber, which we hope to use for the table itself. Kevin VanKanegan is very interested in architecture and design. And so on.

The project coordinator will hold monthly meetings with the pastor and other church staff to update them on the progress of the implementation of the grant. In addition, our church holds monthly Unity Meetings, at which representatives from each committee of the church exchange updates on their respective work to facilitate coordination of all the work of the church. The project coordinator would give updates as well and coordinate with all other committees.

11. Write a month-by-month timeline that describes how the implementation of your project will unfold.

**May:** Grants awarded; grant implementation team begins reading and meeting monthly.

**June:** Worship Renewal Grant Project Development Event.

**July:** Grant implementation team makes arrangements for speakers, begins advertising the year's project in the congregation and community, and orders books.

**August:** First book, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*, by N.T. Wright, distributed to congregation.

**September:** First Saturday workshop, kicking off project. (Lisa DeBoer on liturgical art in different traditions.)

**October:** Adult Sunday school discussions on *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*.

**November:** Second book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, by Jamie Smith, distributed to small group.

**January:** Sunday school discussions on *Desiring the Kingdom*. Second Saturday workshop, focused on liturgy (Jamie Smith).

**February:** Groups continue taking classes and developing communion table, communion vessels, and baptismal font, report learnings and progress in worship. Third book, *Leading from the Table*, by Paul Galbreath, distributed to small group. Third Saturday workshop: Practical liturgical fabrics with Jo Alberda.

**March:** Small group discussions on *Leading from the Table*. Begin implementation of learnings from Jo Alberda workshop. Lenten Sunday school series for children of the congregation and their parents on communion.

**April:** Fourth Saturday workshop: liturgical aesthetics (Nicholas Wolterstorff).

**May:** Unveiling of new communion table and communion ware in space now adorned with liturgical art and fabrics directing us toward the communion table. Our first common meal gathered around the new table. Each of the groups that constructed a project shares their learning and theological reflection with the congregation.

**June:** Worship Renewal Grant Colloquium.

**July:** Final report.

### **Beyond the Project**

12. In what ways might project participants be changed and renewed by their involvement in this project?

The project will allow participants to engage with the meaning of worship more deeply—intellectually, spiritually, and also corporally. By learning through readings, discussion, and attending workshops about how visual elements encourage an encounter with God, congregants and their families will be able to enter into the liturgical space with a fuller understanding of the presence and communion offered by Him through a sensory participation in worship, culminating at the table. Worshippers will also come away from the project with a more profound sense of community. Working together to apply the insights and talents of the community, of all ages, to produce the communion table and other pieces of liturgical art, the congregation will become more tangibly and aesthetically attuned to a common understanding of its worship practices as the body of Christ.

That knowledge, acquired in study together and carried out through the creative act, will continue to deepen as the participants worship together week after week. The material media of fabric, wood, clay, and varnish will take on significance through the ongoing liturgical practices of word and sacrament, which the congregation can continue to reflect upon in conversation with each other and with their families at home. That deepening of communion with God and each

other will equip the community to bring his presence to the world in a spirit of service and authenticity.

*13. Describe a process (other than a survey) for assessing your project. How will you know if you have met your goals?*

The goal of the project is to involve the community in an engagement with the meaning of communion and liturgical art in such a way that they are better able to enter into relationship with God, each other, and the world. Successfully meeting those goals will mean both providing a variety of teaching opportunities and chances for the congregation to contribute creatively, and inviting regular participation across the community.

To assess those two things, the project director will ensure that lectures, workshops, and field trips are offered at several times throughout the year so that there are many options that families with children and people at all stages of life can choose from in the midst of busy schedules. She will also develop a system of communication to explain the vision of the project to the congregation, communicate ongoing opportunities to learn about and participate in the project, and suggest ways families can make the project personal by continuing to engage with it in creative ways at home. Tracking attendance at events will be considered a helpful benchmark, less as a quantitative measurement than an indication of which particular area of the community may appreciate a personalized invitation to participate in the project according to its needs and gifts. It is our hope that attendance will demonstrate that a broad swath of the community, and perhaps even those outside of or new to the community, is able to bring its gifts to the project.

*Question 14: How will the results of your project, and the learning and growth it brings about, be celebrated in your congregation and communicated to a larger community? How might your project provide help, inspiration, and resources to other congregations and communities?*

The purpose of our project is to foster more meaningful worship by empowering congregants to go from the table where they are fed to go and serve others. In this sense, we hope that the positive effect on the larger community will be a natural outgrowth of what we learn and work on as part of our grant. Initially, we intend to communicate the lessons learned from this project to the South Loop community in which we find ourselves a part. After inviting members of the community to the consecration of our new permanent space, we intend to plan outreach programs that are specifically focused around the table, the sustenance it provides, and the ways in which it empowers us to provide for others.

We also intend to engage the other emerging South Loop churches by proposing a symposium where we can share our church's discoveries about worship and communion and also learn from them. Furthermore, some members of our team are involved in planning the Church Connection Initiative at Trinity (CCIT). These individuals will propose that the following year's CCIT theme be communion, allowing members of our church to share the ways in which this project has fostered our congregation's deepened appreciation of communion as well as ways in which other churches might implement similar programs.