



Preach this, tweet that

Tradition and technology promise to make worship more interactive.

BY DOMINIQUE A. ROBINSON

Christian, particularly Reformed, worship is supposed to be participatory and to recreate the drama of the gospel. But for many young adults, the experience is more like passive “pew warming.”

Either we are not living up to our theology, or culture has changed so significantly that what once made worship feel like a shared experience (through hymns and collective prayers, for example) is no longer effective.

There might be truth in both explanations.

Preaching is one part of Reformed worship that has traditionally invited congregants to sit and listen. And there’s something right about that: worship should cultivate the

capacity for listening. But many young adults want the listening to go both ways; they desire an interactive preaching moment.

Interactive preaching actually isn’t new. Many traditional black churches have long invited congregational participation in the preaching moment through the unique musicality of call and response (though let’s be clear: the diversity of liturgy among people of African descent resists generalization). This participatory element might partly explain why African American young adults are not departing from the church as much as their white counterparts. According to a 2007 Pew study, African Americans of all ages are more likely to maintain their religious affiliations than whites, and

black millennials make up 24 percent of historically black churches.

Technology and social media are now making possible new forms of call and response. Listeners can use their phones to easily verify and share what the preacher has stated. They can pose questions, invite participation from those not present, and share photos and videos relevant to the topic at hand.

Young adults want to know who they are

Young adults are bombarded at all times with endless options. They’re told they can be, wear, eat, and study anything they want. The choices are even vaster when it comes to faith. But when you can be anything, it’s difficult to know who you *are*—and are not. Many young adults, as a

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result, are experiencing a kind of identity crisis, stuck in a relatively new life stage of extended education, postponed marriage, and career hopping (if they can even find a job).

And many people believe that this identity quest explains why droves of young adults—two-thirds of people age 18 to 29—are leaving the church today: they do not feel that the church is helping them in their search for identity. They have questions but no opportunity in worship to ask them. They often encounter a congregation that offers them neither the options they have come to expect (from technology and self-expression to mission and ideas) nor the opportunity to navigate those options and figure out who they are.

How we can improve

Young adults feel no differently about the use of technology in and for church than they do about its use in classrooms. How can we wed technology, the search for identity, and a shared gospel reenactment through worship?

1. Consider including question-and-answer time after the sermon. Invite congregants to write questions on pieces of paper, later to be collected and handed to the preacher. Or set up a Twitter account and invite congregants to tweet questions during or after the sermon.
2. Organize small groups for reflection and conversation either before the sermon is preached (giving them a chance to participate in the creative process) or after. Post the sermon topic in advance on Facebook and Twitter, inviting feedback.
3. Break down a sermon into several 140-character quotes scheduled to be tweeted during the sermon, and invite congregants to retweet (share) the posts. Use tools like

Daily Prayer app

Available now on iPhone and Android smartphone devices, the highly successful PC(USA) Daily Prayer app provides simple yet rich devotional resources for morning, midday, evening, and close of day. Rising as high as no. 19 on the lifestyle list of Apple's App Store, Daily Prayer—with its customizable prayer services—has been an instant hit. For more: pcusa.org/dailyprayer

d365

With an all-new look and interface, d365—sponsored in part by the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Ministries with Youth—offers free inspirational and creative youth devotions to over 2 million users. With its new design, d365 now offers full control for music and a searchable devotion archive. It is also launching a new app for smartphones and other mobile devices. For more: d365.org

Glory to God hymnal

Glory to God, the new Presbyterian hymnal, is fully interactive. Beyond the pew and accompaniment editions, there are four electronic editions. The perfect tool for worship planning and research, the online edition offers searchable indexes, the lectionary calendar, audio samples, and much more. The iPad app and ebook editions both allow the hymnal to go where you go—from home to college to conferences. The iPad app contains the entire contents of the pew edition plus audio song samples, histories of tunes, biographies of composers, searchable indexes, and more. Finally, a projection edition (with words and music) will debut at the 221st General Assembly (2014). For more information: presbyterianleader.com (see tab "2013 Presbyterian hymnal")

Pierced

Developed by Presbyterian Media Mission, Pierced is an app that provides meaningful music, entertainment, and information for Christian youth and young adults on the go. For more: livepierced.com

HootSuite or TweetDeck to schedule tweets in advance.

4. Create a Twitter hashtag (e.g., #Easter) for a sermon and invite people to follow and use it.
5. Don't be dismayed when young adults' heads are down; this is the new posture of the tech-savvy young adult.
6. Become accustomed to listeners' ability to quickly share and verify what has been said.
7. Young adults: look up every now and then. Learn how to synthesize what is being said and share it

on Twitter. Offer to help manage some of the congregation's social media or at least get them started.

As a church, we can learn from traditions such as call and response or collective prayer, as we align our worship with our theology *and* technology. "Tweet this" can become an extension of sharing the good news beyond the pulpit and the pew. It becomes a major tool for evangelism. Sounds like a shared reenactment of the gospel, if you ask me.

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