

COMMUNITY WORSHIP: DIFFERENT FROM CHURCH WORSHIP? --ELLIOTT #1894

This thinksheet's question bears not only on Sunday worship in our Craigville Community but also on "civil religion," "religion and the public schools," interfaith worship (esp. as sponsored by councils of churches), and other issues of what in these latter days we Americans have come to call "pluralism." Its occasion is that a member of Craigville's worship committee wrote me, as a fellow-member, questioning whether the present worship format (which, not by my decision, is based largely on one of my thinksheets), is legitimate for *community* worship: "we are not another church, but rather a summer-situation congregation (worshiping community) coming from many different backgrounds and places. I think some concession is needed if we are to reach all possible people and encourage them to return Sunday after Sunday."

1. The level of Christian commitment in most American congregations (understandable, considering the motivations used to form them) is so low that what happens Sunday morning in most free churches (i.e., churches that have freedom to shape their own liturgy) could better be termed **COMMUNITY** worship than **CHURCH** worship. **CHURCH** worship, when it happens, is a joyous-solemn blend of style and substance in praise of and commitment to God in Jesus Christ--its participants being (1) committed Christians (2) who are continually being educated biblically-theologically-liturgically in the personal/church/world implications of their faith. That has been the tenor and tone of my clergy-ministry, and I've not been entirely unhappy that this has had some influence on our Craigville Sunday morning worship....

2not ENTIRELY unhappy: Through the four years we've lived here, Loree and I have been uncomfortable with even having Sunday morning worship under Craigville sponsorship. Should we, a Christian community, be just one more Sunday a.m. competition for worship in churches of Cape Cod? Should we not rather have Sat.p.m. worship, a bit later than the Roman Catholic churches' Sat.p.m. mass? Or should we have Craigville worship only Sun. afternoon or evening?

3. Assuming, for the moment, that we are going to continue Craigville Sun.a.m. worship, I must (though reluctantly) agree with you that it should be **COMMUNITY** worship rather than **CHURCH** worship. So, in my opinion, before and at our next committee meeting, we should be about the prayerful-thoughtful task of designing a liturgy appropriate to this decision. Here are some relevant questions:

....What's to be its substance?

....What style is appropriate to that substance?

....Should the liturgy vary Sunday to Sun. or only year to year?

....Should variations be major or only minor?

....While all liturgy should entertain, **COMMUNITY** worship should give more attention to it than **CHURCH** worship--should it not?

....Good liturgy raises entertainment to the status of art, then raises art to the level of adoration-praise-prayer-dedication.

How, with our limited resources, provide for all this?

....The Bible's liturgical project is to persuade the creatures to "worship and serve the Creator, who is blessed forevermore" and to dissuade the worshippers from "serving the creature more than the Creator" (Ro.1.25). This is sinewy business requiring a devotional quality that might be described as the Deity and humanity voyeuring on each other; and it's even harder to achieve in **COMMUNITY** worship than in **CHURCH** worship. How can we orient the preachers, who are here only one Sunday each, to this within the whole of our liturgical purpose as we conceive it?