

From Joy: A Guide for Youth Ministry.
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Worship
Dancing in the Joy of the Trinity

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As veteran youth workers, we have experienced more than the typical dose of youth worship. (Fred has the hearing loss to prove it!) Over the last decade, we have also participated in a very different pattern and style of joyful worship in a community that blends young people and adults together in all kinds of cultural worship styles following a pattern featuring word and sacrament. We'll say more about that worship below, but for now we want to share a story of worshipful anger transformed to joy.

A few years back, the first worship service in this (temporary) community included "Aaron," who was then a sixteen-year-old high school student formed to worship in a grand if

slightly starchy liturgical church. Just across the aisle was "Pete," the same age and stage as Aaron but, unlike him, formed to worship in a "happy-clappy" Pentecostal free church. From the first downbeat of the opening song of praise, Pete *praised*. He danced and shouted and sang with all his heart. Aaron (he of the grand solemnity) was aghast at Pete's seeming disrespect, to

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the point that he crossed the aisle and told him to shut up. Pete was baffled and dismayed.

The community continued to worship together over the next week. Each night featured a worship practice not often included in youth worship: there was public confession of sin, a gesture of pardon, and an invitation to share Christ's peace with one another. Through the week Aaron and Pete had discovered their common humanity. In addition the Spirit had been working on Aaron. One night at worship, when it came time for the community to confess sin and be reconciled, he crossed the aisle again, but this time he begged Pete's forgiveness for failing days before to recognize his joyous worshipful praise for what it was. Forgiveness granted (no small thing!); the two then hugged one another in great joy as they exchanged the peace of Christ.

This really happened. And while in this case things admittedly got off to a rough start, it illustrates our contention that Christian worship may become for young people a primary setting for receiving and practicing divine joy, the joy that ultimately undergirds lives of flourishing. Below, therefore, we try to describe in general terms what joyous worship rich in word and sacrament can look like when it is fully inclusive of young people and to offer some theological support for worship as a crucial delivery system for joy. In addition we highlight what kinds of attitudes, practices, and knowledge help form young people capable of receiving this amazing Spirit gift. We're aware that many theorists of adolescence describe teens as uniquely primed for joy.¹ Developmentally speaking, they are a party waiting to happen, and when invited, they bring joy to whatever they're up to. Yet we also believe Christian joy ultimately springs as a gift from worshipful encounters with the transcendent God who comes as near as our own hearts through the incarnation of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 For example, see G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: Appleton, 1915), 131.

Background

We fancy ourselves part of a new breed of youth ministry leaders, theologically savvy and serious about authentic youth discipleship. When it came time to develop our own ministry, therefore, we ruled out the tendencies of youth ministry to devolve into mere entertainment or fun. In place of Mad Libs, lock-ins, and trendy group games, we fashioned robust worship grounded in scripture and sacrament, missional outreach to the community, theological reflection on texts and contexts, mentoring for Christian leadership, and urgent discernment of baptismal vocations for ministry.² Even so, while we labored toward serious formation, our students steadfastly refused NOT to enjoy it. Passing Christ's peace in worship morphed into a nightly hug-fest; the closing hymn became a half-hour praise jam; Taizé melodies received new lyrics sometimes gently lampooning community life and its dear leaders; the Jazz Four, a "quartet" with five members, appeared to "shake up the scene, man, shake up the scene" at random moments of the day including at worship.

Until recently we regarded these and a great many similar outbursts of joy as little more than cherries on top of a most excellent sundae. At the invitation of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture and at the behest of the Templeton Fund, however, we seek to reassess our ministry, this time peering through the lens of Christian joy. Yes, joy, the gift of the Spirit to an Easter People who together with the risen Christ and the company of saints sing unending praise and thanksgiving to God for

God's unfailing embrace. How did we forget that?

2 Duke Divinity School established the Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation (DYA) in 2001. DYA is a temporary intentional Christian community composed of high school youth

and adults that meets on Duke's campus every summer. It now includes a year-long online component as well. Along with approximately fifty theological schools across North America, Duke Divinity School received a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment as part of their High School Theology Initiatives program in order to establish DYA.

Our Context for Youth Worship and How We Create That Worship

Something like monastic life, our community begins each day with prayer then features morning theological study followed by afternoon practices focused on justice, creativity, and theological/vocational reflection. Every day culminates with evening worship.³ We follow a Word and Table pattern, meaning that worship always includes proclamation of and response to the scriptures followed by Holy Communion (known to some as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist). The heart of our Word and Table worship is preceded by a period of gathering and concludes with sending forth.

Gathering is simple shorthand for the assembly's coming together. It can be informal, a welcome into the presence of the triune God followed by songs of praise, or elaborate, as with processing behind a cross while hymning an ancient chant.

In addition to reading from the scriptures and preaching, proclamation of the **Word** and responding to it can take many other forms—singing, drama, testimony, prayer, video, or dance. Youth participate together with adults in these practices of proclaiming and responding to the Word. For example, on a day in our community featuring teachings, stories, and witnesses to the personal, relational, and social meanings of reconciliation in Christ, youths and adults together planned worship around that theme. An invited guest preached powerfully on how Jesus overcomes racial, economic, and personal divisions. Then, following a pause to meditate on Christ's reconciling mission, worshippers were first shocked then delighted when worship leaders suddenly

3 As noted, our youth ministry context is somewhat unusual, a temporary community formed at a divinity school in the summers. Nevertheless we believe that our patterns of worship and practices of formation share a great deal of overlap with the formational

practices of local congregations. We invite readers to repeatedly ask themselves: “What might this worship teaching, planning, practicing, and reflecting look like in my local community?”

crashed through paper mural “walls” hung throughout the chapel, all while dancing and chanting “Christ is reconciler, woot, woot! Christ is reconciler, woot, woot!” an acclamation taken up by the entire assembly. The

last wall to fall revealed the prepared Table of the Lord. More praise!

The **Table** may be fully participative, too. The community confesses its sin before God and neighbor out loud and in public, seeks to practice God’s reconciliation through the sharing of Christ’s peace with one another (aka the hug-fest), then sings the prayer of thanksgiving (says grace) over the gifts of bread and cup. Worshippers receive the consecrated elements at the front of the assembly from servers oozing hospitality. It is a space where they may also pray before the altar, receive laying of hands, or dip their fingers in the waters of the baptismal font.

Worship concludes with the benedictory exhortation to go forth to serve the Lord. Often this **sending forth** features worshippers processing behind the cross, dancing and singing their way out of the chapel accompanied by youth and adult musicians jamming on guitars, drums, horns, or even a string bass on wheels.

In addition to praising God through scripture and sacrament, this worship strives to acknowledge the pain and suffering borne by God’s people and all of creation. In addition to confessing sin, worship may name the travails of youth and adults while beseeching God to intervene. In 2015, at the same time of the day DYA gathered in Durham, North Carolina, nine African American worshippers who had gathered in their own sanctuary in Charleston, South Carolina, were murdered by a racially motivated killer. DYA worship the next evening voiced to God the assembly’s dismay, anger, fear, and grief. No one felt the least bit joyful. That the community voiced its sorrows and doubts in worship, however, nevertheless enacted them into the hope that God is working to overcome evil in spite of what worshippers were thinking or feeling that evening. Youths may learn, therefore, that worship does not require strapping on their Sunday smiles and pretending all is well. God meets us where we are in worship.

As readers can tell, this community stresses embodied worship.

It also seeks to elicit youths’ full participation both as members of a

unified worshipping assembly and through the contributions of their particular gifts. They sing, they dance, they dramatically interpret, they pray ancient prayers of the church, they create new prayers, they shout, they keep silence, they play instruments, they assist at the table, they decorate the space. The word “liturgy” means “work of the people,” and in our community youth and adults are fully invested in doing this work. Since worship repeats a readily discernible pattern—gathering, word, table, sending forth—worship planners quickly learn to innovate upon it through their own styles, creativity, and theological interpretations (as in the case of the wall-crashing response to the Word). It taps into youths’ disposition to joy. Sensing that they are sharing in this work together, worshippers feel the energy; some days are electric. At the same time, worship strives to be honest about the gap between God’s promises and young people’s current lived experience.

None of this happens by chance. We equip young people to interpret the themes and texts of worship through biblical and theological study, then make space for those interpretations in worship itself (think again of breaking down the walls). Youths also require mentoring and practice in the performance of worship—rehearsing lines or steps or music, learning to *e-nun-ci-ate*, cultivating a comfortable public presence, and so on. Overall DYA endeavors to equip youths with skills and knowledge for understanding theologically the basic pattern and ingredients of worship and worship leadership, involving them in the creation and practice of worship while lauding their efforts, then inviting them to ponder its outcomes. Put simply, we prepare youths for worship and engage them in the work of worship, then reflect with them upon worship. We do all this because the alternative—sidelining youths from worship, excluding their contributions, keeping them

When we worship,
we participate

**in the very joy of
God.**

clueless about what is going on, or ignoring the transformational power of Word and Sacrament upon their lives and substituting a stage show instead—amounts to a massive killing of joy, effectively denying them abundant life. To make this point a bit more

positively, faith communities may readily adapt this combination of teaching, training, creativity, performance, and reflection to their own circumstances, thereby enhancing young people's participation in the community's most important joy-delivering practices.

Theological Considerations for Christian Worship

Authentic worshipful joy ought to be attributed to more than strong formation and effective planning. We haven't forgotten that joy ultimately comes as a gift from God. This section traces the theological relationship between God, God's creatures, the human work of worship, and joy. Our account suggests that not only are youths (and the rest of us) created for joyous worship of our loving Creator, but we are also invited to participate in the joy of God as we worship. In turn this divine joy fuels young peoples' flourishing.

Created for Joy and Praise

The Psalter provides a rich source for exploring the relationship between God, human beings, joy, and worship. Take this psalm, for example:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations. (Ps. 100, NRSV)

Psalms like this one were chanted in the Jerusalem Temple, sung at the synagogue, and prayed communally every day across Israel. Jesus knew them by heart and not just because he was Jesus. They were ubiquitous, so universally practiced that they filled the religious imaginations and the hearts of those who sung them.

So what was the content of this heartfelt imagination? Psalm 100 sums it up beautifully: God made us. We belong to God. God's steadfast love endures forever. In other words the psalmists testify that life comes to us as a gift. All that we have and all that we are originate beyond ourselves, bestowed by an utterly gratuitous Creator. Awash in delight at the absolute givenness of existence, in the blessedness that fills each breath, and overcome by the sheer abundance of it all, the psalmists launch into prayers of praise. C. S. Lewis explains this propensity for praise: "We delight to praise that which we enjoy." Indeed "praise completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."⁴ In other words joy turns to worship, and worship turns to joy.

At the same time, the Psalms demand that we acknowledge the barriers to joy for youths and for all followers of God. As the psalmists confess, personal suffering and social oppression often threaten to overwhelm their faith. Instead of joy they cry out in lament. And they don't mince words. Read aloud this psalm of lament:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;

O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.

My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O Lord—how long?

Turn, O Lord, save my life;

deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.

For in death there is no remembrance of you;

in Sheol who can give you praise? (Ps. 6:1–5, NRSV)

- 4 C.S.Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 80.

Not much joy there, we admit. The psalmist even gets in a sarcastic dig at God: “Hey, Lord, how do you expect me to shout praises to you if I’m dead?” (v. 5).

That psalms of lament are found alongside psalms of joy in the Psalter means that worshipful lament keeps joy honest. Joy does not require ignoring the world’s or our own brokenness or pretending it’s all good when it is not. Instead lament expresses hope in God’s promises in spite of troubles. As biblical scholar Ellen Davis suggests, while psalms of lament typically begin with “complaint addressed to God, they move, however fitfully, in the direction of praise.”⁵ The cries of desperation at the beginning of Psalm 6 turn to affirmation of God’s protection at the conclusion. It’s not exactly joy, but it’s getting there.

Entering Jesus’s Joyful Kingdom

As a son of Israel, Jesus prayed the psalms daily. He too practiced praise and rejoicing as a way of life. His imagination was filled with the Psalter’s language and images. Unsurprisingly, therefore, joy is central to his teaching and ministry focused on the kingdom of God. Jesus taught kingdom joy through parables. In the parable of the prodigal son, for example, father and son rejoice together in the son’s return home. Jesus also delivers joy through his ministry of healing. The blind man at Jericho whose sight Jesus restores rejoices at seeing the light (Luke 18:35–43). So too the collection of sinners and tax collectors. Once excluded from Israel’s promise, they rejoice at Jesus’s inclusion of them in the kingdom he inaugurates (Luke 19:1–10). Even we Gentiles are invited into the kingdom! Joy multiplies exponentially as God’s promises to Israel are extended to the entire world.

To cultivate a relationship with Jesus is to share in this kingdom joy. Being worshipful means encountering Christ as living Word in the scriptures and participating in his death and resurrected life through the sacraments.

- 5 Ellen Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 17.

Joining the Joy of the Trinity

Early theologians used scripture and their experiences in worship to formulate what we today call the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. They knew from Genesis 1 and from John 1 that Spirit and Son (the latter in the form of creative “Word”) were present with God the “Father” at creation. They sensed this threefold presence when gathering for worship. In the effort to come to terms with this mystery, theologians described a relationality, the “three-in-one-ness” we profess about God today.

The glue of this triune relational unity is divine love. Indeed one church father describes the Trinity as a loving “dance,” a pas de trois of mutual joy and delight.⁶ In this dance each triune member steps in loving synchrony with the others so perfectly as to accomplish unity. Their mutual love for one another makes them one. At the same time, divine love allows each member to leap and twirl consistently with its creative, redemptive, and sanctifying mission. Perfect love and therefore perfect union between members of the trinity goes hand in hand with each triune person’s freedom to attend to its unique divine role.

Mutual loving relations between the Trinity amounted to a “surplus of love,” which set in motion the original act of creation.⁷ All creation, therefore, becomes an expression of God’s love. Trinitarian theology further explains what the Psalms mandate: that humans created out of this abundance of love exist to praise their Maker.

As second person of the Trinity, Jesus puts flesh and blood on God. Through his incarnation Jesus also redeems the material world. That is how Jesus becomes present to worshippers through otherwise ordinary signs, symbols, and words. Worshippers may taste, touch, see, and hear Jesus through sacraments, ritual performances, and even the gathered

6 John of Damascus (7th c.) was the first to speak this way of the Trinity. See Frederic Chase Jr., trans., *The Orthodox Faith* 1.14:11–18, found in *Saint John of Damascus, Writings*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 202.

7 Christoph Schonborn, *YOUCAT: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), 14.

assembly itself. They share in his Word through scripture, prayer, testimony, and songs of praise. The means of graced relationship with Jesus are available everywhere in the space and time of Christian worship.

God is also present to the assembly as Holy Spirit. The Spirit is what transforms human offerings into holy sacrament and divine Word. Without the Spirit a sermon is mere words and sharing the peace of Christ amounts to “How ya’ doin’?” Through the Spirit the assembly manifests the kingdom of God. Christians are transformed into the body in Christ. Peace and glory reign. Joy in the Spirit propels worshippers out of worship and sends them into the world for service.

In summary the love of each triune member is present and offered in worship. Worshippers may rejoice in God’s love poured into creation (including themselves) for their redemption and re-creation in Jesus and for the Spirit’s transformation of the assembly into an expression of God’s Kingdom.

Yet liturgical theologian Kimberly Belcher, speaking in this case of sacramental worship, proposes that worship intends even more. “The Trinitarian God,” she suggests, “through the missions of the incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit [in worship], invites and enables human persons *to participate* in the eternal happiness of the Godhead.”⁸ The joy expressed in worship is more than just a human response to God’s love. It also entails worshippers sharing in the transcendent joy of the Trinity itself; it is manifested through their worshipful absorption into the life and mission of God. More than testimony, more than response to good news, more than imitation, worship *incorporates* worshippers into the Trinity’s mission of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Worship sweeps the assembly into the Holy Trinity’s transcendent dance of joy. This is awesome!

This transformation partly explains why worship is often described as a glimpse of heaven and Holy Communion as a foretaste of the heavenly feast. As a special zone of grace, sacramental worship of the Trinity

- 8 Kimberly Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement: Sacramental Participation in the Triune Mystery* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), 2.

transforms the assembly into a living, breathing revelation of God's kingdom. The assembly's worship reveals and performs the "really real," flourishing life as God intends it. Through word, song, symbol, and gesture, it enacts the transcendent kingdom reality of grace, peace, compassion, and joyful praise that powerfully counters the broken existence that seeks to snare youth and the rest of us.

Joy That Lasts

Youth workers, including us, have observed young people who totally "have church" (they really, *really* get into it) and, like King David, completely abandon themselves to the joy of the Lord . . . only to do stupid stuff an hour later. (David is also instructive on this point.) As to why joy seems not to last, there are any number of possible explanations—the possibility that joy is not really invited into worship in their communities in the first place, the fact that youth remain unable to sense the connections between their worship and their lives outside the sanctuary, the fact that the human body only ladles out oxytocin (the "happy" hormone) in short-lived doses or that some young people face joy busters upon leaving church and returning to home, to school, or even to the street leading to these destinations.

Viewing worship as a Christian practice of formation—as something Christians do together over time in the presence of God in the effort to become more God-like, in other words—offers a helpful perspective on making joy last. It encourages taking the long view on Christian joy. An analogy can help here. Suppose Alaina wants to take up the ukulele. Learning to play will require her to practice chord fingering positions and strumming patterns for weeks and months. Over time her practice will ingrain these complex actions as habits in her body. Soon enough she'll be plucking out the tune to "Shine on Harvest Moon" with great finesse. Notice what else happens. Playing the ukulele gradually characterizes Alaina. She is no longer just Alaina the fab youth worker; she becomes Alaina the fab youth worker and accomplished

ukulele strummer. Playing the ukulele has become part of her identity.

The same dynamics are at work for the practice of Christian worship. Over time—we're most likely talking years—Christians who practice praise and delight at sharing in the joy of the Trinity can hope not only to take up joy for an hour or two on Sunday morning but also to live joyous lives. Persons who pattern their lives by singing "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (including the hip-hop version) may, by grace, become characterized by their practice. They grow to resemble the One whom they adore. They become joyful creatures of a joyful God.

In this case we seek to describe joy as more than a feeling. We are casting it as a lasting disposition, an affection of the heart that colors all other interactions with the world. Joy of this kind may get its start as a feeling, but gradually it becomes an orienting posture toward life.

Forming youth into dispositional joy is more than pie-in-the-sky Pollyannaism; it is profoundly practical. Youth workers recognize how young people are at greater risk for violence, poverty, and other threats to flourishing than adults. Racial minority and LGBTQ children face even greater risks. We envision dispositional joy, therefore, including the kind young people are formed to practice and receive in worship, as a crucial antidote to these threats. This is more than the power of positive thinking at work. Through their mysterious participation in the life of the Trinity and their worshipful performance of the Kingdom (really real life as God intends it), youths are provided with a vital source of resilience. When available in sufficient reserves, joy in companionship with hope can make the difference between perceiving a challenge as just an obstacle to get around or an unclimbable wall. Dispositional joy serves as the embodied reminder that God is on a mission culminating in a kingdom of flourishing. Cultivating lasting joy through worship is critical to enabling young people to keep on keeping on through life's valleys. Theologian Willie James Jennings puts this claim in even bolder terms. He suggests that joy becomes an "act of resistance" against forces of despair,

which we take to include the power of sin, both personal and

systemic.⁹ According to Jennings, oppressed persons and communities who are aware of injustices inflicted upon them but practice joy anyway witness to their freedom from sinful principalities and powers. The Apostle Paul's professions of joy even while incarcerated exemplify what Jennings is describing (Phil. 1). Christian Joy witnesses to faith and hope in God in the midst of present oppression. Even more than resilience, joy constitutes an expression of liberation from sin.

To reprise just a bit, Christians believe that joy is part of the DNA of creatures to rejoice in their Creator through worship; joy is also offered as a divine gift to Christians especially as they worship through their (admittedly mysterious) participation in the joyous triune relationships of the Godhead. Keeping joy honest, the practice of lament invites Christians to cry out in worship over their suffering and the sufferings of others and, through confession, to acknowledge their own complicity in sin that leads to suffering—while yet obeying the divine imperative to make a joyful noise to the Lord. Joy that endures suffering may be described as a disposition (habit) of the heart, body, and mind causing Christians to rejoice in God's promise of the coming kingdom even when darkness threatens. Young people who participate in joyous worship build vital reserves of joy, enabling them to persevere through difficult circumstances.

Misdirected Love, False Worship, Fake Joy (and Their Antidotes)

Like all human beings, youth are created by God to exercise their passions (their loves) for worship. They are engineered for seeking transcendence (connection to a greater reality that consists of more than just themselves). That propensity to worship can take many forms, however.

9 "Theology of Joy: Willie James Jennings with Miraslov Volf," posted by Yale Center for Faith and Culture, 19 Sept. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com>

[/watch?v=1fKD4Msh3rE.](#)

It can fasten on Lady Gaga as readily as the biblical word, on throwing down gang signs instead of gesturing Christ's peace, on engaging mystery through opioids in place of Three in One. Humans are worshipping creatures—they just don't always worship the real God.

Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith explains how the passion intended for creaturely praise of God gets coopted by lesser gods. Smith paints a portrait of all human beings (not just youth) as desiring (passionate) beings, as “lovers” more than thinkers.¹⁰ He also describes how this loving passion is drawn toward particular ends. He suggests that we learn who or what to love by way of “cultural liturgies,” public rituals or symbolic events that recruit our loves often without our noticing.¹¹ Smith describes sporting events (think Super Bowl plus pregame and the all-important halftime show), nationalistic spectacles (celebrating American Independence Day on the Washington Mall with fireworks, military jet flyovers, and patriotic music), and even shopping at the mall (or “temple,” as Smith calls it) as examples of cultural liturgies. Similarly, Friday night high school football often constitutes a form of cultural liturgy targeted to recruit young loves. All of these liturgies (forms of worship) offer spine-tingling experiences of transcendence plus the joy of being part of something far bigger than one's self.

The problem, of course, is that some cultural liturgies invite the worship of false gods. Christians who participate in them risk unconscious conversion to varieties of nationalism, tribalism, and consumerism that, Trojan horse-like, sneak in and distort love's faithful intent. Their loves coopted, young people find themselves worshipping and rejoicing in the wrong gods.

Christian worship, therefore, needs to become what Smith calls a Christian “counter-liturgy.”¹² Obviously we can't compete with fighter jets, but we ought to give everything we've got (and everything God

10 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), chap. 1.

11 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 19–27. See also chap. 2.

12 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88.

has given us) to praising the one true God revealed in Christ by the power of the Spirit. That is key to receiving the transcendent, transformative joy that only the triune God can give. We must invite youth to bring all the passion they can summon to their encounter with divine passion. We trust that our best efforts will be met by divine transcendence and by grace.

A counter-liturgy also must be sufficiently robust not only to reveal God's transcendent presence but also to awaken loving devotion to the one true God. Two-word praise choruses directed to some vague deity won't suffice. The need to focus not only the presence but also the identity of God is one reason we advocate frequent practice of the liturgical meal. Participation in this rite enacts worshippers into the story of God as revealed in and through Jesus. Holy Communion performs worshippers into stories of God's creation; they are made into church as they gather around the table sharing common bread and cup; they renew their covenant rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ; they rediscover their calling to meet the world's hungers just as Christ meets theirs in the meal; and they taste of the kingdom where all may feast together with God. Rather than tiring of the repetition, we have witnessed with our own eyes how repeated participation in this meal makes God's threefold love present to youth with special intensity. One of its gifts is pure joy. Perhaps for this reason, DYA alums report that they develop a hunger (a passion? a love?) to return to this table and to eat the sustenance only it can offer. Once worshippers taste divine love bursting with the flavor of joy, lesser foods will no longer suffice. They seek out communities where this feast, a portal to loving transcendence, is shared again and again.

Conclusion

God's grace abounds for young people. It is available everywhere. Nevertheless corporate worship can become a special zone of grace where

God's love is palpably present. When youths are invited to participate

fully in the ancient treasures of Christian worship (Word and Sacrament) and given the freedom to shape and respond to their encounters with loving transcendence, joy breaks in and then *breaks out*. Worshipful joy leads to joyous living. Only the triune God present to and acting in the worshipping church can give this transformative gift. So this is our plea: equip the kids for this joyous work.