

# ***Heartfelt worship***

*Psalm 138:1a I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart...*

*John 4:23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*

**We exalt and celebrate God for who he is, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do.**

The story of our faith is the story that reveals God our Creator. God seeks us, redeems and restores us through our Savior Christ Jesus, and sends the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us. God takes the initiative in everything, and we respond in worship by declaring God's praise and serving in Jesus name.

**Worship reflects careful preparation to help give voice to many dimensions of response to God such as adoration, praise, contrition, lament, and commitment.**

Our acts of worship focus our response to God's character. In worship, we "look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." <sup>(Heb 12.2)</sup>

A vision of God's holiness and majesty calls us to respond with adoration and praise. A revelation of God's grace and mercy brings an admission of how far we fall short, repentance and thanks for forgiveness in Christ. An experience of God's constant love and faithfulness inspire commitment and constancy in us.

Following Jesus' example, we love God first and foremost, and we love our neighbors as ourselves. In the worship service, this means that we celebrate our neighbor's testimony and share common expressions of the faith. In the community we express God's love by serving together in the name of Christ our Savior.

**People leave worship knowing something more about the heart of God and about their own hearts.**

Our worship services are centered on God's word, and they serve to center our priorities. Guided by scripture, we learn the truth about our world and ourselves; we break bread together in unity, as Jesus taught us; we pray and sing, rejoicing and lamenting, marking the times and seasons of life.

In our acts of worship, <sup>(a)</sup> we praise God and give thanks for the grace that saves us; <sup>(b)</sup> we pray together, sharing our burdens and seeking God's will; <sup>(c)</sup> we consider God's word, seeking to learn and to be obedient, and <sup>(d)</sup> we are sent out to tell the good news of the gospel.

**You are not alone...**

Christianity is ranked the largest religion in the world today. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, in 2010 there were 2.18 billion Christians around the world, nearly a third of the global population.

**In the Evangelical Covenant Church...**

There are over eight hundred worshipping churches and groups in the ECC in North America and Canada. Approximately 185,000 meet each week to worship, and our churches have a total of around 300,000 members worldwide.

**How is this marker seen in Christ's ministry?**

We worship Him. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the second Person of the Trinity. He is beloved of God and given the highest place above all creation.

**Jesus is 'Immanuel' (God with us) and is the worthy object of our worship.**

We follow His leadership. Jesus Christ is our savior and redeemer. The Epistle to the Hebrews describes him as our great High Priest and the mediator of the New Covenant, who leads us to the Throne of grace. Even our unworthy worship is perfected as he presents it;

**Jesus is the ultimate leader of worship for the church.**

Jesus shows us how to worship God. Jesus is the incarnate Word, God in a human form. As such he reveals God to the world, but he also demonstrates the perfect example of obedience and sacrifice. Jesus is the paradigm of response to God's self-revelation and self-giving.

**Jesus is the perfect worshipper.**

**John 4.23-24**

In John 4.23-24, Jesus tells us *"...true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."* From this text we see that worship is inspired by God, true worship is focused on God and is based on God's word. God is spirit (and has made us in the image of God) so worship takes place in the spiritual aspect of our lives, and is a matter of integrity and reality. God created us to worship and is looking for worshippers.

The NT Greek word used in this passage for 'worship' and 'worshippers' is *proskuneo*, which describes a posture of acknowledging, loving and obeying God. Words change their meaning over time, but many of the words used to describe worship in the Bible are about the postures of bowing down, adoration, recognizing authority, pledging allegiance and service.

In services of worship and in serving the world, worship reveals the values that are fundamental to our lives. These God-given values are visible in every action, every decision; they influence our priorities and the way we spend our time and money. These values lie behind every kindness, every act of justice, faithfulness and love, and anytime you show generosity; they show the love of God that you have received and pass on to others.

How do we become the true worshipers the Father seeks? How do you understand the phrase "in Spirit and in truth"?

How does our Sunday worship service relate to the word of God?

Society and family life encourage us to stay fit and eat healthy; do we know what that looks like in our spiritual lives? What do spiritual 'good health' and a 'balanced diet' look like?

**Deuteronomy 6.1-9**

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.*

*4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

Our worship celebrates the truth of the Gospel and expresses the values we live by. How do we pass them on to our children? How does our behavior reflect the biblical values of respect and obedience?

How do our neighbors perceive us and the God we serve? What can we do to serve people and bring glory to God in our community? Are there practical ways we can help?

Do we treat people fairly, stand for justice and care for the disadvantaged in our area?

Is the community aware that we are motivated by God's love for the world, shown in Christ Jesus?

### **Jesus leads us to worship at the Throne of God**

#### **Colossians 1.15-23**

*15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.(ESV)*

Jesus is the beginning and end of the story; he exemplifies every value and fulfils the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. He reveals the character of God, which was first reflected in the Ten Commandments, and his life among us was a perfect demonstration of God's nature. Jesus was obedient to the requirements of the Law and to His calling (Matt 3.15; Phil 2.5-11). Jesus often quoted

the scriptures to explain the truth, to correct our understanding and to demonstrate the will of God. The gospel accounts describe how Jesus life reflected the values of God's kingdom and the Savior's calling. John's gospel calls Jesus the 'exegetis' of God.

At the Last Supper, celebrating Passover, Jesus reminded us of God's saving grace and made a new covenant with His followers. He then went to the cross to complete the story and make good on every promise. Three days later, the disciples began to see proof of the resurrection, and to celebrate the total integrity of our redeemer.

### **Hebrews 12.1-2**

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NASB)*

Jesus life, death, resurrection and exaltation lie at the heart of the gospel. In fixing our eyes on him we have the perfect example of worship, in ceremony, celebration and servanthood. Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and in following him we become more like him, growing into everything we are created to be.

Jesus is the Way to God, the Truth personified and the Life of resurrection power. We have access to the throne of grace by the blood of Jesus, who points us to God the Father and sends us the Spirit to be our guide and helper.

People see you as you worship God in church and in everyday life. What can they tell from your life, and the life of your church, about:

- a) the love of God,
- b) the significance of Jesus Christ and
- c) the Good News of the Gospel?

### **Prayer**

O Lord God Almighty, we praise you for your glory and thank you for your saving grace. Give us a new vision of your glory and a deeper understanding of what it means to be holy. Teach us to love you more and serve you faithfully. Send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we may show your love and forgiveness to those around us. Help us to appreciate the privilege of knowing and serving you, to honor you in everything we do, and to worship you in Spirit and truth; so that together we may be the Body of Christ, representing you in the world. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, who brought us back to you when we were lost and alone.

### **Church history**

From the earliest days, followers of Christ have met in houses and (later) churches to worship God together. They would meet on Sundays to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus; in worship services the believers would study the scriptures together, using songs to rejoice or lament and remind one another

of the truth, telling the story of salvation and gathering at the table to celebrate communion. Sharing their resources, Christians would support the less fortunate and help those in need, serving the community in the name of Christ.

Christ's followers have always tried to meet together, even (where necessary, in secret) during times of persecution. From the fourth century, when Christianity was made the state religion of Rome, the faith became widely adopted and associated with culture, art and good education. The three main branches of the world church are Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and the Protestant churches, which separated from the Catholics in the sixteenth century. As Protestants, Covenant congregations still use hymns and prayers that date back to the early centuries of the church; we adapt to the culture, but the good news of Jesus Christ remains the same.

### **Covenant history**

The Evangelical Covenant Church has its roots in a pietist (renewal) movement based in the Lutheran Church in Sweden. Small groups of devoted 'Mission Friends' would meet to study the Bible and worship together; they were encouraged by a Methodist 'awakening' in Stockholm and the joyful example of the Moravian Brethren, who were also very active in sending missionaries far and wide. The Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America was formed in 1885, and their revival meetings and church plants were well attended among the immigrant community.

Our foundations in this history and theology give us firm roots and strong principles. Together we affirm six factors that are significant to our church and have always guided our worship. We believe in the centrality of scripture, that it's necessary to be born again and that the church has a mission to which we're all committed. As a church we are a fellowship of believers who consciously depend on the Holy Spirit, and we live in the freedom that Christ brings to those he has redeemed.

**Ten suggestions** to move forward in this marker (attached)

### **Five to seven challenges to address**

- Our church needs a clear understanding of what we're seeking to achieve in our worship, individually, in small groups and in our worship services. Who's in charge of making and communicating those decisions?
- How do we share the vision and values that guide our worship life and characterize our services?
- What is our church's position on the different calendars that drive our lives today? Do we celebrate church seasons and festivals? (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and so on.) Why?
- What about Hallowe'en? Is it a) the day before All Saints Day, b) a day to have a church family event, or c) a day to get out and meet the neighbors?
- How can we open our doors to our community in a way that serves Christ and shows God's love?

### **Relationship to other markers**

Worship is the community's expression of its devotional life, the storefront for the church and the weekly opportunity to celebrate and communicate our core values.

As we meet together, let's intentionally reinforce the eternal truths of the gospel, that unite us; and let's agree together to find the best ways of demonstrating and explaining these truths to the ever-changing culture around us.

### **Case Study (attached)**

Coaches/expert practitioners to advance this marker (provide 3 to 5 coaches with contact information each) **To be confirmed:**

*Geoff Twigg*

*Chris Logan*

*David Bjorlin*

*Randall Wilkens*

*Paul Burger*

### **Resources**

ECC story Webcast archive link (each marker will have its own one hour long webcast)

The Covenant Hymnal: A worshipbook

The Covenant Book of Worship

Gerardo Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*

[http://www.amazon.com/Worship-across-Racial-Divide-Congregation/dp/0195392973/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777579&sr=8-1&keywords=Gerardo+Marti](http://www.amazon.com/Worship-across-Racial-Divide-Congregation/dp/0195392973/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777579&sr=8-1&keywords=Gerardo+Marti)

Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice*

[http://www.amazon.com/The-Dangerous-Act-Worship-Justice/dp/0830834141/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777646&sr=8-2&keywords=Mark+labberton](http://www.amazon.com/The-Dangerous-Act-Worship-Justice/dp/0830834141/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777646&sr=8-2&keywords=Mark+labberton)

D.A.Carson *Worship by the Book*

[http://www.amazon.com/Worship-Book-R-Kent-Hughes/dp/0310216257/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777714&sr=8-1&keywords=D.A.Carson+Worship+by+the+book](http://www.amazon.com/Worship-Book-R-Kent-Hughes/dp/0310216257/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777714&sr=8-1&keywords=D.A.Carson+Worship+by+the+book)

Living Worship DVD set: Todd Johnson, et al *Living Worship: A Multimedia Resource for Students and Leaders*

[http://www.amazon.com/Living-Worship-Multimedia-Resource-Students/dp/1587432951/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777866&sr=8-1&keywords=Living+Worship+DVD](http://www.amazon.com/Living-Worship-Multimedia-Resource-Students/dp/1587432951/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1388777866&sr=8-1&keywords=Living+Worship+DVD)

WorshipArts workshops; details to be announced soon

### **Conclusion**

In our worship we serve Christ, by

- 1) Letting the word of God do the work of God in the people of God.
- 2) Letting the people of God respond to the revelation of God.
- 3) Letting the Spirit of God lead the people of God to build the kingdom of God.