

Worship Renewal at Monroe Community Church

By Pastor Amy Schenkel

Monroe Community church began with two pastors (myself and my husband, Henry) and a small group of people who were new to the Christian faith and to corporate worship. This small group wanted to start worshipping together, but didn't know where to begin. Our worship leader was passionate about his love for Jesus Christ, but had never been taught how to lead worship. The first few months of worship left us scrambling on Thursday to put a worship service for Sunday (sound familiar?).

Although we didn't really know what we were doing when we became involved with the worship renewal grant, it has thoroughly changed our worship planning process, allowing for more people to get involved, multi-sensory worship, and meaningful worship series.

One of the requirements of a worship grant is a timeline that shows what you're planning to do over the next few months. This required thinking beyond the next few days! As our worship planning team sat down together, we prayed about how God wanted us to spend the upcoming months, which just happened to include Lent. God showed us that our new church had a passion to understand ancient worship, and the roots of Christian worship are found in Judaism. Since many of the Jewish festivals have meaning for the Christian holidays we celebrate in Lent, we decided to develop a worship series during which we would look at the correlations between the Jewish feasts and festivals and our Christian celebrations.

Planning a four-month worship series in advance enabled us to get other people involved. We invited people from a local Jewish-Christian ministry to lead a Seder meal for us. We took a trip to a local ministry that had recreated scenes from Israel in their building. One of the artists in our church painted Hebrew words on sack cloth, which were hung along with a description of their meanings and relevance in Scripture.

Advanced planning also allowed us to incorporate other experiences into worship. One weekend we were looking at the festival of Sukkot, during which the Jews would build temporary structures to remember God's faithfulness to them during their time in the wilderness. We asked people to camp out in our church on Saturday night, and when we awoke for worship on Sunday morning we could testify to what it is like to sleep somewhere other than your comfy bed and in your own house. We could relate that to what God was teaching the Israelites about his provision for them.

The worship planning process has continued in various forms at MCC over the past few years. Each time we invite a brainstorming group of people together (we strive for a cross-section of people at church, even including people on the fringe), we spend time praying and listening to God, and we share what God is saying to us. We also spend time brainstorming about different multi-sensory experiences that would help us understand God's Word in a new way. After the pastors flush the topic out at home and organize it into a sermon series, we invite other people to strengthen it with their own gifts and talents.

This month we are trying something new at MCC, in an effort to teach our congregation about worship and the planning process. We are spending five weeks teaching about worship, followed by an experiential time in our service where the whole congregation is actually helping us plan our next worship series. It is our hope that they will learn about worship and they will be able to contribute even more in the future.