

# Creating Quality Worship in Congregations

Meadville/Lombard Theological School

January 18-21, 2011

Taught by the Rev. Dr. Barbara Wells ten Hove  
Co-Minister, Cedars UU Church, Bainbridge Island, WA

**Mission:** Quality worship services are well thought out, carefully constructed, religiously meaningful and presented with skill. This course will offer students a chance to build on the knowledge they gain in the Arts of Ministry and other preaching and worship courses by giving them tools to work with the laity to develop a worship life that is of consistent high quality. They will learn about the role of worship in liberal congregations and why it matters. Students will have the opportunity to write their own worship elements and present worship services.

**Objectives:** The course includes:

1. An exploration of why worship matters and how it is changing within the liberal church.
2. A chance to discover and practice an authentic “voice” in worship.
3. A look at various models of worship programming to see what and why they work or don’t work;
4. An opportunity for students to learn and practice skills needed for good worship leading.

**The Course:** Our time together will include lecture, small group work, experiential learning and worship. Participants are expected to attend all sessions. Because of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the course will start Tuesday morning and will include a Thursday evening session. Students are also required to attend the Wednesday night Vespers, which will be based on the content of the class.

At the close of the course, each participant will have learned the significance and purpose of liberal (UU) worship, how to work with others to create a strong congregational worship program, and will have received tools and techniques to help create quality worship in our congregations.

Student groups (see pre-course requirement #4 below) will each prepare and present one worship service during the course. Other groups will lead the book discussions (see pre-course requirement #3 below).

**Assigned Reading:**

1. *How We Seek God Together: Exploring Worship Style* by Linda J. Clark, Joanne Swenson, and Mark Stamm (available from [www.Alban.org](http://www.Alban.org))
2. *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* by Thomas G. Long (available from [www.Alban.org](http://www.Alban.org))
3. *Worship That Works* by Arnason & Rolenz (available at [www.uua.org/bookstore](http://www.uua.org/bookstore))
4. *Love Meets the Dragons* by Tom Owen-Towle (available from the author at [uutom@cox.net](mailto:uutom@cox.net))
5. *One Bread One Body*, by C. Michael Hawn (available from [www.Alban.org](http://www.Alban.org))

6. *The Worship Workshop: Creative Ways to Design Worship Together* by Marcia McFee (available from Abingdon Press or Amazon.com)

### Pre-Course Requirements:

1. Students will bring to the first session a short paper (250-400 words) to be shared with the class answering these four questions:

- a. Why does worship matter to you?
- b. When has worship touched or moved you?
- c. What are the primary strengths of UU Worship?
- d. What, in particular, challenges you about UU worship?

2. Students must attend two worship services, one in their own and one in another UU congregation, and write two papers (500-750 words -one for each service) based on the following questions:

- a. What was the overarching theme of the service? Was the theme consistent throughout the service?
- b. Who was the leader of the service? Was there more than one? Was he/she/they confident and “at home” in the service?
- c. How did the service make you feel? Why?
- d. If quality worship means services that are well thought out, carefully constructed, religiously meaningful and presented with skill, would you call this a quality worship service? If so, why? If not, why not?
- e. Did you learn anything else from this experience that impacts your understanding of liberal worship?

If the students cannot get to other UU churches due to their location, another liberal congregation may be substituted with permission from the instructor. Papers must be turned in the first day of class.

3. Students will do all the assigned reading. Choose two books to write about based on how the author or authors’ material might influence your understanding of liberal worship. Each paper should be both critical and reflective. *I really want to know what you think*. Each paper should be 500-750 words. Papers must be turned in on the first day of class. Students will be asked to lead the book discussions.

4. Students will be randomly assigned to worship teams at least six weeks in advance of the course. Each team will prepare and present one of four 30-40 minute services during the course. All the worship elements must be created by you – **YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO USE OTHER PEOPLE’S WRITING FOR THIS PROJECT!!** The service should not have a sermon (a five minute homily is OK) but must include a chalice lighting, prayer or meditation and some form of ritual. Music, which you do not have to write, may be live (preferable) or recorded. Students not in your team and students not in the class may help with music as needed. The theme of the service will be determined by the group but must be approved by the instructor no later than January 1, 2011. Some time will be given during the week of the course to prepare but students must work with their partners prior to the class to determine themes, roles, etc.

**During the Course:** Throughout the week, students will be expected to attend all sessions and participate fully in conversations and small groups. Students will write and present worship

elements to their classmates and in the pre-assigned small group, prepare and present one of the class worship services. (See above for specifics.)

**Final:** Your final project will consist of two parts: 1. A complete (and annotated) worship service (from soup to nuts) in written form.; and 2. A paper (2500-3000 words) reflecting on what insights, struggles and gifts emerged from this process. Since this is a split credit course, Part 1 is due to the instructor by Feb. 1 to be graded by February 25, 2011 (Fall Term deadline). Part 2 is due to the instructor by May 15 to be graded by June 3, 2011 (Spring Term deadline). The final project papers may be e-mailed or snail-mailed (preferable) to the instructor. It must be in her hands by the due date.

**Grades:** All students will be graded pass/fail. Grades will take into account your homework and final projects but strong emphasis will be placed on participation, activities and writing/presentation in class.

**The Instructor:** The Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove received a Master of Divinity from Meadville/Lombard in 1985, an A.M from the University of Chicago in 1985 and a Doctor of Ministry from Meadville/Lombard in 2007. She has served congregations in Seattle, WA, Denver, CO and the Washington, DC suburbs. Along with her husband (and co-minister) Jaco ten Hove, she wrote the popular UU curriculum, *Articulating Your UU Faith* and received the first Donna DiSciullo award for service to the UU Young Adult Community. She has also written chapters in two Skinner House books, and numerous essays for various UU publications. She taught this course during the January 2007 and Summer 2007 Meadville/Lombard intensives.

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