



HOLY HUMOR WORSHIP

A Guide to Intergenerational, Interactive, Digital Worship

“Bright Sunday” – the Sunday following Easter – is an ancient tradition, started by the Greeks in the early centuries of Christianity. Continuing the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, the faithful held parties and picnics and played practical jokes on their pastors. They danced and sang and told jokes. The custom was rooted in the musings of early church theologians (like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom) that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. “*Risus paschalis* – the Easter laugh,” the theologians called it. Today, that custom is being revived in American churches of many different denominations with what is referred to as “Holy Humor Worship,” offering opportunity for congregations to join in the frivolity of Christ crucified and risen. (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

Learn more about the history of Holy Humor <https://www.joyfulnoiseletter.com/hhsunday.asp>

This Quicksheet will offer suggestions for ways you might hold Holy Humor Worship with your congregation digitally *any time* you feel the need to laugh in the face of darkness and celebrate the joy of God’s abiding presence with us. These suggestions focus on fun, improv and group participation which is all intended to encourage joy and spontaneous worship. It is planned with zoom and other on-line platforms in mind, which works best when using a more interactive platform, but adjustments can be made using the chat features. It is meant to be fully intergenerational and inclusive of all ages. You are encouraged to use the following ideas all in one worship service or as ideas to enhance your worship.

Order of Worship

Invite your congregation to show up to worship wearing the wackiest outfit they can put together from their closets (stripes with plaids, mismatched color schemes, two different shoes, funny hats, etc.). If your worship is on an interactive platform, take time to view the different get-ups. If not, ask for pictures to be shared in comments under posts with #holyhumorworship and #pcusa, so that everyone can enjoy their creativity. In either case, worship leaders should set an example and show up dressed for worship with serious attention to wearing fun fashion.

Gathering Song

Lord of the Dance

Sing or play a video or recording

Participants can choose to sing along with the lyrics as they are encouraged to get up where they are and *dance* to this lively song celebrating Christ’s life and resurrection with joy and thanksgiving! You can also encourage household instruments for shakers and percussion and the waving of hands. Be inclusive of all ages and mobility abilities.

Additional options include: *Come into God’s Presence; Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart; Siyahamba*

Call to Worship

In an interactive platform, send your participants into breakout rooms for five minutes where each small group should compose a cheer, complete with hand/arm motions, to share with the larger group. Possible lines for the cheer might include: “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” “Death has been swallowed up in victory! Death, O Death, where is your sting?” “Light has overcome darkness! The tomb is EMPTY! Rejoice!” Rhyme the lines and find a

cadence. One cheerleader, or a household of cheerleaders, can be unmuted to share the cheer when everyone returns to the main page. In a non-interactive platform, pause and ask for cheers to be shared in the comments. Note that there will be more cheers because people will be working independently of others outside their homes.

Prayer of Confession

One Word Sentence: Using the chat function on Zoom or the comments on a Facebook Live post, invite your participants to create a prayer of confession one word at a time. Each participant may only add one word, so who knows where it will go, but everyone should be working cooperatively to create a confessional prayer at least three sentences in length on the spot.

Fortunately, Unfortunately: Similarly, you might choose to write a prayer of confession one full sentence at a time, with alternating sentences starting with the word “Fortunately ...” or “Unfortunately ...” i.e. *Fortunately*, God has promised that the gift of grace in Jesus Christ is eternal life./ *Unfortunately*, we are testing that every single day./ ... Let the prayer go on if people are listening to each other and contributing according to pattern. As in all improv, it only works if people are intent on supporting the one who comes before as well as the one who comes after.

Assurance of God’s Grace

Make the joyous declaration: In the name of the risen Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God

Passing the “Ha Has”

Unmute everyone and offer this instruction: Put your hand on your own belly, or with permission, the belly of a person living in your household and worshiping alongside you, and together, start “ha”ing, with great force and conviction. Do it once. Then twice. Then three times. Then four. Can you even get to five without rolling with laughter? We think it isn’t likely.

Scripture Reading (with sound effects)

Lectionary Scriptures: Read through the passage and see what words/images offer opportunities for sound effects. Is someone walking? Invite participants to tap their hands on the table in front of them or to stomp their feet. Is an animal mentioned? Make the animal’s sound. Is there wind? “Whoosh” (long on the ooo and the shhhh) Or rain? Slap your thighs with your hands in varying degrees of intensity and speed. Invite children and youth to come up with the sounds for you ahead of the worship and then to teach congregants how to create the sounds before you begin.

If you choose to go rogue (and why not for a Holy Humor Worship?), here are some potential scriptures that are perfect for using sound effects: Numbers 22 (Balaam and the Talking Donkey), Noah and the Ark (Genesis 6-9), Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35-41), Psalm 100 (Make a Joyful Noise)

- Scriptures that focus on joy and laughter can use generic sound effects like shouting praise and repeating your “hahas:” Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-6, Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, Psalm 47 or 98 or 126 or 30.

Time for Children

In an intergenerational service, a time for children shouldn’t be necessary, however you may not want to interrupt your custom, or you may be using this piece as a stand-alone to talk with children about Holy Humor or JOY in difficult times.

In an on-line platform this may be “time for all ages” and encourage all to participate.

Give Me Joy in My Heart. Sometimes we forget to be joyful, to ask for joy, to unleash the joy within, especially when things are challenging or difficult. It is important to recognize that joy is different from happiness. Joy is deep and stays with us because of the knowledge that Love wins. When we think we have lost our joy, we can ask for it again. *Give Me Joy in My Heart* is one verse of the public domain song, *Give Me Oil in My Lamp*. Teach it and sing it together.

Staying mindful of copyright guidelines, here are some suggested books you might read instead: *Binkle's Time to Fly* by Sharmilla Collins (Flyaway Books), *A Very Big Problem* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Flyaway Books), *Butterflies Under Our Hats* and *God in Between* both by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, *This is the Day* by Nancy White Carlstrom

Sermon

Sermon Structures: If you preach, invite people to have tools ready for building. Toothpicks and marshmallows or Tinkertoys®, or popsicle sticks with glue or chenille stems/pipe cleaners all make great tools for building interpretations of the sermon. Take pictures of them and share them

Alternatives or additions to a sermon

- Title It: Invite participants to think of a song, book, or movie title to describe the current situation in which we find ourselves. i.e. re: COVID-19 MC Hammer's "Can't Touch This," or "I Will Survive."
- Tell Jokes: Invite people to come to worship with their best (clean of course) jokes to share
- Discussion Questions: i.e. "What has brought/is bringing you joy during this time?" "When is the last time you had a good belly laugh? How did it make you feel?" "Should we be feeling joy during these times?" You can use break-out groups if you do discussion questions or you can encourage chat/comment sections for responses.

Statement of Faith: Sing *Amazing Grace* vs. 1-3, to the tune of the ABC Song (sing it lightly and quickly)

Songs for Sending

Hallelu!, Hallelu!, Hallelu!

Designate who will stand for which part and invite participants to stand and sit as designated.

Additional options include: *Crown Him with Many Crowns*; *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*; *Song of Hope, I've Got Peace Like a River (Joy Like a Fountain)*; *We Will Go Out with Joy*

Charge and Blessing

One way in which community and joy are being represented in cities and towns around the world during COVID-19 is by howling at a specific time of day. Some are howling in appreciation for healthcare workers or just to show unity and community. What a delightfully freeing way to release pent-up energy! Close your worship with an invitation to howl in unison and in joyful thanksgiving to God!

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