

# A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship

## Discussion Guide Orientation Acknowledgments



Tablescape – Laurel Street Mennonite Church

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The video and the discussion guide appear on the Together in Worship website (<http://togetherinworship.net>) hosted by CommonWord, a resource center sponsored by Canadian Mennonite University and Mennonite Church Canada.

## Creative Collaborators

Rebecca Slough (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) and Jerry Holsopple (Eastern Mennonite University) served as grant project co-directors.

These co-directors put together a team of seminary and visual communication students who conducted the interviews, time logged the video recordings, and created the documentary.

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary students

Mary Ann Jacobs

Karen Martinez

Anna Ressler

Eastern Mennonite University students

Asha Beck

Mykensie Davis

Allison Shelly

## Congregational Partners

Seven congregations in Virginia and Pennsylvania were partners in creating the video. We are deeply grateful to the pastoral leaders of each congregation for their interest in this project, their efforts to coordinate interviews with key congregational leaders, and their feedback on the video in its draft form. Without these congregations, the video and this discussion guide would not exist.

Community Mennonite Church (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)

Immanuel Mennonite Church (Harrisonburg, Virginia)

Manantial de Vida Ministries (Harrisonburg, Virginia)

Laurel Street Mennonite Church (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)

New Hope Mennonite Fellowship (Alexandria, Virginia)

Oxford Circle Mennonite Church (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Whitehall Mennonite Church (Whitehall, Pennsylvania)

## Together in Worship Leadership Team

The Together in Worship website leadership team served as consultants for the development of the grant proposal and throughout the project.

Arlyn Friesen Epp, Director, CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre

Katie Graber, Co-Director US, Anabaptist Worship Network

Jerry Holsopple, Professor of Visual and Communication Arts,  
Eastern Mennonite University

Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Professor of Liturgy and Pastoral Theology,  
Saint Paul University (Ottawa), Together in Worship Team leader

Darryl Neustaeder Barg, Media Production Coordinator,  
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Carol Penner, Assistant Professor of Theological Studies,  
Conrad Grebel University College

AnaSara Rojas, Administrative Assistant,  
CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre

Rebecca Slough, Professor Emerita of Worship and the Arts,  
Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

**To All Who Have Made This Project Possible –**  
Gracias! ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါသည်, Thank you!

# A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship

## Discussion Guide Orientation Introduction



Lent 2 – Laurel Street Mennonite Church

### Together in Worship

The Together in Worship [TIW] website, launched in November 2020, provides worship resources from an Anabaptist perspective for worship planners and leaders, pastors, preachers, students, and anyone interested in the practices of Christian faith formation. The website has an abundance of written resources for congregational worship and a growing repository of music, video, drama, and visual art resources.

### The Grant Proposal

In September 2020, Rebecca Slough (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) and Jerry Holsopple (Eastern Mennonite University) submitted grant proposals to the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and the Marpeck Deans Fund to find, create, and organize visual art resources for the TIW website. The largest budget expenditure was designated for creating a video, “A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship.” The proposals were accepted, and work on the two-part project ran from June 2021 through July 2022, during ups and downs of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Covid-19 and Masks

The documentary site visits and interviews occurred after Covid vaccines were available and between waves of infection from Delta and Omicron variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. All the partner congregations had recently returned to meeting in person, following a season of virtual worship. Masks are evident in the places of worship throughout the video. We are grateful that everyone involved with this project willingly followed the mandated or advised safety protocols of their area to ensure the

health and well-being of all involved. This commitment to safety allowed the project to unfold without disruption from Covid illness.

## The Participating Congregations

The grants we received helped us move ahead in creating a video showing how congregations with worshipers from varying cultural backgrounds use visual art in their worship and other aspects of their congregational life. Given the budget caps on the grants, we needed to focus our invitations to participate to congregations within a four- or five-hour drive of the EMU campus in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where the technical resources for creating the video were lodged. The grant proposal had stipulated that we would seek Anabaptist-related congregational partners that were bicultural or multicultural.

We consulted with Mennonite Church USA denominational ministers and conference ministers in eastern Pennsylvania for names of congregations that could guide our learning. We relied on knowledge of individual congregations in Virginia. We believed the selected congregations had experiences and insights to share with the broader church about what they have been learning about creating worship places that welcome all who wish to participate.

The following congregations accepted our invitation to participate in the video.

- Emmanuel Mennonite Church (Harrisonburg, Virginia)
- Laurel Street Mennonite Church (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)
- Ministerio Manantial de Vida (Harrisonburg, Virginia)
- New Hope Mennonite Fellowship (Alexandria, Virginia)
- Oxford Circle Mennonite Church (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
- WhiteHall Mennonite Church (Whitehall, Pennsylvania)

Opportunity arose to hold a Zoom interview with participants in Community Mennonite Church (Lancaster, Pennsylvania), a congregation that has nurtured congregational artists for more than a decade. Visual art in their worship place has been nourished by work in gallery exhibits, which are open to the public.

## Opening Possibilities

The video displays a small sampling of how Anabaptist-related congregations are using visual art and visual elements of worship to enrich their shared experiences. All the congregations use visual projection technology for song lyrics. In bilingual congregations, images were used to illustrate themes or concepts presented in sermons. None of the congregations projected images for other uses. None of the interviews move into

what congregational leaders learned about the visual dimensions of virtual worship as a result of livestream, Facebook, or Zoom worship services during the Covid pandemic. More explorations are needed in these areas. Your discussions can draw directly on your congregation's experience to fill in these gaps.

We trust that the video and the discussion guide will stimulate your worshiping community to consider how the visual dimensions of worship might expand your relationships with God and with each other.

# A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship

## Discussion Guide Orientation Key Learnings from the Video



Peaceable Kingdom Mosaic—  
Laurel Street Mennonite Church

### What We Learned through Creating the Video

As you watch *A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship*, we encourage you to notice the presence of these key learnings.

- The visual art and visual elements of congregational life are tangible. They engage our bodies in some way and create a shared storied place.
- Images, symbols, and colors that have cultural significance communicate respect and a feeling of belonging for people of that cultural identity.
- People on the edges of the church have opportunities to contribute to the worship life of the congregation.
- Congregational practices are enhanced, enriched, and changed through the presence and use of familiar images and artifacts from cultures represented in the congregation.
- Congregational art projects provide means for building relationships among congregational participants and create work that can be contemplated. These artworks help congregations see who they are and what they are becoming.
- Visual arts in congregational worship create pathways to God.

- While there is appreciation for artwork that is created by skilled artists in their places of worship, congregations also value visual art that is made collaboratively by all who want to participate.

## Your Learning

After watching the video, invite your discussion groups to add their key learnings to this list.



# A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship



Workspace – Community Mennonite Church

## Discussion Guide Orientation

### Purpose and Hopeful Discussion Outcomes

#### Purpose of Group Discussions

Everyone who has participated in the *A Creative God* video project hopes this discussion guide will get artists, leaders in worshiping communities, and people with a spirit of artful curiosity talking with each other about worship and art.

#### Hopeful Group Discussion Outcomes

Specifically, we hope that these group discussions will lead to

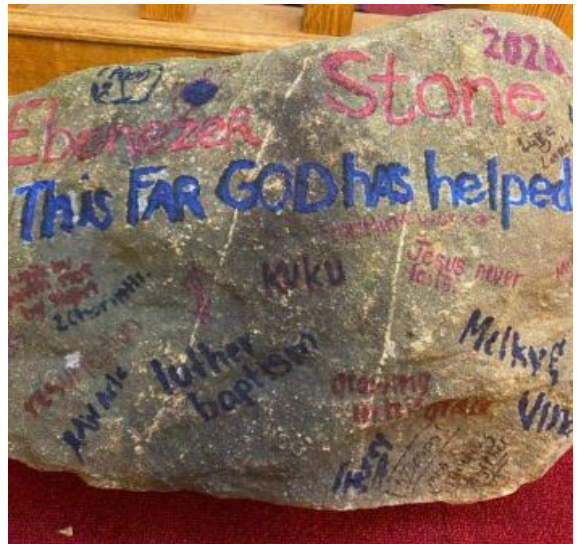
- More formal and informal, serious and whimsical artmaking in the worshiping community
- More projects, practices, ongoing conversations, and artmaking that will encourage a richer worship environment and enhanced worship practices
- More intentional conversations between artists and worship planners about the visual environment of their worship place and what it communicates about their worshiping community
- More intentional visual expressions of intercultural and multicultural identity
- More informed and intentional ways of selecting and using visual art that is appropriate to the worshiping community
- More recognition of the gifts and perspectives that artists offer for life in the worshiping community and more respect for the resources required for creating artwork
- More imagination for connecting visual art, craft, and design with corporate and individual spiritual practices

- More opportunities for worshipers to share their experiences of worship in a visually rich environment
- More curiosity about different forms of visual art and more efforts to experience a variety of visual art forms
- More understanding of how virtual worship experiences are shaped and expressed visually

## Your Purposes and Hopes

What are your group's purposes and hopes for your discussions?

# A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship



## Discussion Guide Orientation

### Ways to Use This Guide

Ebenezer Stone – Whitehall Mennonite Church

## Who This Guide is For

This guide is for people who want to explore the power of visual art to enliven, enrich, and expand Christian worship practices.

## Various Settings to Use This Guide

- Congregational or community worship planning groups
- Sunday school or Christian education classes, youth through older adult
- Discipleship or spiritual formation groups
- Artist groups
- Interest groups that gather around specific topics
- Pastoral teams
- Congregational leaders who are exploring how to be interculturally welcoming
- Planning groups for special celebrations
- Groups tasked with worship space renovation
- Intergenerational groups gathered for making art
- Any group interested in visual arts

## Group Size for Meaningful Discussion

A group size of four to eight participants allows people to sit in a circle with space to converse easily. If the number of interested participants is more than eight, creating smaller circles with fewer participants will help everyone stay engaged in the discussion.

## Ideal Meeting Time

An ideal meeting time is 45-60 minutes.

If the discussion is planned as part of a longer meeting, shorter discussion times might be necessary.

## Needed Equipment

Equipment needed for using this guide includes the following:

- Stable and reliable internet access
- A computer that can access the internet and has enough capacity to show a video and download PowerPoint slideshows
- A screen or wall space suited to video projection
- Means for projecting the video and slideshows at a size that enables all discussion participants to see the images and words
- Sound equipment to hear the video interviews or audio adaptations for hearing-impaired participants
- (Optional) A small low table set in the center of the discussion circle with a display of art pieces that provide a focal presence
- (Optional) A table and paper of various colors and textures, colored pens or pencils, markers, scissors, glue, clay/playdough, etc., for participants to create artful responses from the discussion

## How the Discussion Guide is Organized

The *A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship* YouTube video is available on the Together in Worship website (<https://togetherinworship.net/Home>) by typing *A Creative God* in the search bar. Ideally, the discussion group will watch the video in its entirety at its first meeting. At the following sessions, discussions are focused on specific video segments.

Each video segment has an accompanying PowerPoint slideshow that can be downloaded for projection or for viewing on iPad, smartphone, or other devices during the discussion. Downloads can also be printed for distribution in the discussion group. Video time marks are given in the lower right corner of the title slide of each slideshow; the discussion coordinator can easily find the video segment for the current discussion. These pdf slideshow files can be accessed at <https://togetherinworship.net/Home> and typing *Discussion Guide -A Creative God* in the search bar.

The slideshows include quotes from the video, comments that are intended to expand on something said by the quoted speaker, and a question or two related to the quote to stimulate discussion. The first and last questions are the same in each slideshow. Dis-

cussion participants should decide which questions are of most interest or relevance to their worshipping community.

## Theme Segments in the Video

These segments can be viewed and discussed in any order

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| ➤ Introduction (5 minutes)                           | Time 0:00-5:07   |
| ➤ Creating Space (2 minutes)                         | Time 5:07-6:43   |
| ➤ Creating Healing (4 minutes)                       | Time 6:42-10:57  |
| ➤ Creating Holistic Worship (3 minutes)              | Time 11:05-14:03 |
| ➤ Creating Belonging (3 minutes)                     | Time 14:06-17:25 |
| ➤ Creating Beyond Words (11 minutes)                 | Time 17:27-28:18 |
| ➤ Creating Intergenerational Connections (8 minutes) | Time 28:13-36:34 |
| ➤ Creating Possibilities (7 minutes)                 | Time 36:34-43:52 |
| ➤ Closing: Co-creating with God (3 minutes)          | Time 43:54-end   |

# A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship



## Discussion Guide Orientation Suggested Discussion Process

It Takes a Village– Laurel Street Mennonite Church

### Suggested Way of Facilitating Discussions

This discussion guide was created for group interaction and personal reflection. A good discussion can happen between two or three people or in a group as large as eight. A small discussion group is preferable to a group of more than eight.

A 45- to 60-minute discussion period is ideal for building relationships of freedom and trust in the group, but this time commitment may be unrealistic in your situation. Adapt this suggested discussion process to fit your needs.

Ideally, the first group meeting will be a showing of the entire video *A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship*, which runs 45 minutes. This viewing will introduce discussion participants to the various worshipping communities and speakers who participated in the video project.

### Role of the Discussion Coordinator

One person can serve as the overall communication and logistics coordinator for the discussion group or groups. This person:

- Identifies dates, times, and locations for discussions
- Announces the discussion topic for the meeting
- Identifies a discussion facilitator for each group
- Works with technology to access the video *A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship*, the appropriate time mark, and the PowerPoint discussion slideshows for each session on the Together in Worship website <https://togetherinworship.net/Home>

- Works on room arrangements, seating, and logistics required for video and audio projection
- Helps discussion facilitators keep track of agreed-on ending time

## Discussion Facilitator

The discussion coordinator may also serve as a discussion facilitator or may identify other discussion facilitators.

Facilitators help guide the group's movement through the suggested discussion process, recognizing that flexibility will be needed to sense how each session can unfold well. They will monitor the discussion to ensure that all participants have opportunities to share their perspectives.

## Suggested Discussion Process (45-minute discussion model)

### Gather the group (7-10 minutes)

Welcome everyone to the discussion group. If it is the first meeting, make introductions so that all participants feel acknowledged and welcomed.

Open with sharing an image or object (for example, a photo, painting, work of fabric art, sculpture, ceramic piece, food arrangement, etc.) that a volunteer from the group has brought to the gathering. If the work is of the right proportion, place it on a center table. If it is not, find a way for those present to come close to the work.

The volunteer will talk briefly about the origins of the work and what they find interesting, pleasing, challenging, or moving about the work.

Take one to three minutes for the group to sit or stand close to the work and engage with it.

Share what the work evokes in the participants and what it feels like to be in its presence.

### View the video segment (2-11 minutes)

The facilitator can provide a brief introduction to the discussion theme.

View the video segment from *A Creative God*, starting at the time mark indicated in the PowerPoint slideshow for that segment.

### Open the discussion (10-20 minutes)

Discuss the opening question "What caught your attention in this video segment?" Responses to this question can help the group participants decide which

other questions from the discussion guide they would like to address, or they can identify other questions of interest. (Groups can return to questions they were not able to discuss in future gatherings.)

### **Share reflections from the discussion (5-7 minutes)**

Close the discussion with the final question from the PowerPoint slideshow: “What in your discussion has stirred your imagination?” Allow each participant to name a new insight, feeling, thought, hope, or possibility that has emerged from the discussion. If all participants agree, this sharing could be written down by the facilitator and serve as a testimony to what the group experienced. These reflections might also be captured in artful responses like sketches, colorful collages, short poems, etc., instead of words. These records could provide seeds of possibility for ways that visual arts might inspire and enrich the congregation’s or community’s worship.

### **Close with housekeeping details and silence (2-3 minutes)**

Review details related to the next meeting—date, time, place, and theme. Ask for a volunteer to bring artwork that is significant to them.

After so many words, discussion participants might be glad for one or two minutes of silence, time to look again at the artwork the volunteer brought, to sit and breathe, or to remember what they experienced during the group’s time together.