



GROWING  
VITALITY...  
...BY  
INCREASING  
PARTICIPATION

Fall Theological Conference 2024

## WHAT IS “PARTICIPATION?”

An aesthetic of participation “allows for the active participation of worshipers. It offers a different kind of excellence: a collaborative creation from the actual contributions of ordinary folks—not experts—with a flexible, up-for-grabs script...Worshipers are treated as active co-creators. The result is monkey-wrench friendly. With an atmosphere that more easily welcomes local mess, vernacular, and difference.”

--Stewart, Teresa. *The Small Church Advantage* (pp. 32-33)



Participation  
is messy!

## MARKS OF THE PARTICIPATORY CHURCH

- Worshipers are “co-creators”
- Worship is flexible, even improvisational
- Church life has lots of clear entry points
  - What are some good entry points for participation in your context?



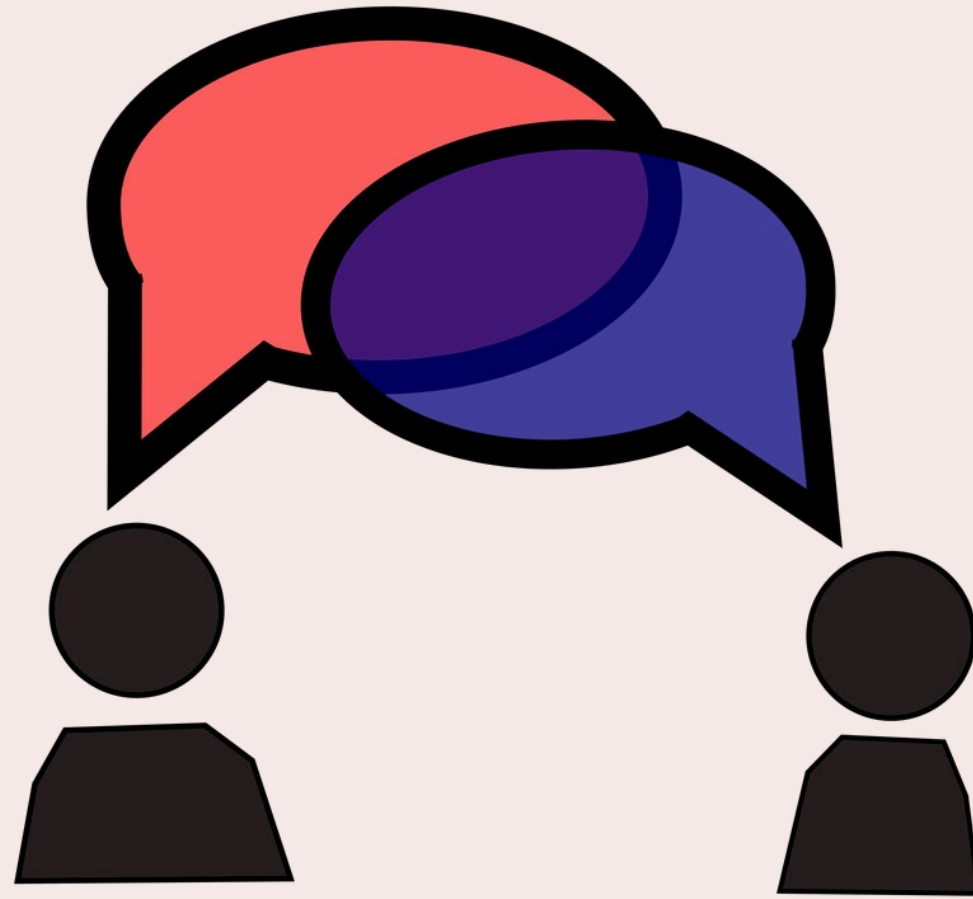
EVERY CHURCH HAS ROOM TO GROW  
PARTICIPATION

## “STONE SOUP” WORSHIP

*Stone Soup is a way of populating any order of worship with local gifts. (SCA, 58)*

- Participants invited to add their “local gifts” to worship.
- Leader *curates*, rather than planning and executing everything.

# ADD CONVERSATION



## CONVERSATION PRACTICES

- Start with a question. Wait for the answer.
- Make a question the Call to Worship. (Or the start to a council meeting.)
  - “Where has God shown up this week?”
  - “How has God surprised you today?”
- Allow participants to wrestle with scripture, theology, tradition.



ADD CONVERSATION

# MAKE ROOM FOR DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

- Use written response sometimes.
- Host small group conversation.
- Create a safe space for everyone. Use a microphone if people are offering responses out loud. Invite quiet people to respond, but give them lots of space to say “no.”

# EMPLOY LOCAL SIGNS AND SYMBOLS





→ What are your some signs local to your context?

→ How might you incorporate them into church life?

WHAT IS IN THE WAY? WHAT MAKES THIS HARD?

→ What are the people challenges?

→ What are the architectural challenges?

→ What else might create a challenge?

# PARTICIPATING CONGREGATIONS INITIATIVE

The **purpose** of the Central States Synod's Participating Congregations Initiative (PCI) is to encourage congregations to experiment with participation, inspired by the techniques and practices outlined in Teresa Stewart's book, *The Small Church Advantage*. Through a two year engagement, congregations will become so proficient at participation that they begin to develop their own organic, indigenous practices. These practices will enliven worship and encourage members to step into an incarnational relationship with God, whom they discover in worship, through outreach to their neighborhoods, and around the tables where they gather to participate as church together.

1. The congregation/ministry signs the Covenant of Participation and joins a cohort of other congregations which meet regularly to discuss what they're doing. Each congregation chooses a Guiding Team of 4-6 people who will oversee the ministry's engagement in the PCI process. The Guiding Team chooses a convener.

2. The Guiding Team decides on practices, in concert with all other leadership bodies and the pastoral leader, and after consultation with at least half (and preferably all) regularly attending members. The Small Church Advantage includes many suggestions for practices which can increase participation. We suggest beginning with practices from the book, then experimenting on your own.



3. The Guiding Team can apply to the Central States Synod for matching funds of up to \$300 each year for any needed supplies.

4. Cohorts meet at least quarterly to discuss what they are trying and what they've learned. The Director for Evangelical Mission will provide a form for making a short report.

5. All of the Cohorts will gather together at the end of years one and two to celebrate.

