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“What if we consider the possibility that a primary way we can experience the revelation of God’s mystery is through the process of our own creative expression?”

~Betsey Beckman,
“Art as a Mediator of the Sacred”

Proposal for Implementation of Visual Worship Arts at Cannon Chapel

The implementation of visual worship arts will enrich the worship experience, training and personal practice of the Candler School of Theology. In a culture that has become rapidly more visual in comprehension and communication, the church must also attempt to reach out and capture the imagination through the arts.

This practice is not just for those blessed with artistic abilities, but in understanding a Theology of Creativity we are created in the image of a God who has manifested in forms that all express creativity. God the creator of everything that is good. The spirit endowing people since the first artisans of the tabernacle. And finally we see Jesus the storytelling artist. Artists have been characterized as persons with heightened sensitivity to the ordinary experience, and is this not a picture of the ideal character of our future ministerial leaders?

The practice of visual arts in worship can be approached like language acquisition. In the first stage, the receptive stage, the recipient observes the practice of art-making for spiritual worship. This stage will begin in worship on September 15 with graphic recording in worship, as well as November 9 with a live worship painting. These two examples of worship arts to be done by me, will provide observation. Due to the nature of society, many people might view these examples and find them interesting, but never picture themselves as potential participants in this type of worship. This self-disqualification will be the biggest hurdle for the dispersion of visual worship arts.

In order to get to stage two of language acquisition, early production, this hurdle of categorization of self as either “creative” or not, needs to be addressed. This can be overcome with training around visual creative art worship. Many find this worship acceptable for children’s and youth ministry, but it stops being viable as an adult. I have developed and administered several seminars to address this problem and move people toward early production of the new language of visual worship arts.

The third stage is speech emergence and this can be accomplished and encouraged through participation in the newest group at Candler, the Candler Arts Collective. This group will serve as a training ground and provide many opportunities for those in stage three.

The last stages are phases of fluency and these will flow naturally once a regular devotional and worship practice becomes habitual. These dates of visual worship arts at Chapel service will evolve organically and not be centered on one artist’s work, but instead could showcase many forms of art inspired by the Spirit in the moment of devotion.

Barth in the book *Ethics* describes the act of creation as “giving shape to the impossible.” It is this creative envisioning of the world that is possible with revelation that is so necessary in this world. Candler School of Theology has an opportunity to move into the innovative space of creative ministry and to become a leader in this growing field. Let’s not miss this opportunity and I would love to be there to facilitate this development.