**Tips for Worship Observation[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. For at least part of the service, try to “suspend belief” and experience the service as if you are an outsider. Can you as an outsider make any sense of it at all? Why or why not?
2. For at least part of the service, attend to the messages the building itself is sending. Does the space focus the attention of the worshipers on the action of the service, the decorative elements of the church building, other worshipers, the worship leaders, something else? Where is the “center” of this space? Who occupies the “center”?
3. For at least part of the service, attend to the ways in which the community functions. What are the boundaries to participation and how does a newcomer negotiate them? For example, do you need to be sighted, well dressed, mobile, extroverted, and intelligent, in order to feel comfortable here?
4. For at least part of the service, attend to the model of Christian ministry (ordained and lay) that is being communicated by the service. Who are the worship leaders? Do they coordinate well? Who controls the action? Are there changes in the locus of control during the service? Most often these messages are unintentional, carried by such things as the assignment of roles, variations in dress, and in the spaces people occupy, so read and interpret these nonverbal elements carefully.
5. For at least part of the service, focus your attention on “Who is the God to be met in this space?” For example, is this the transcendent “God of mystery dwelling in inaccessible light”? Or, is it the near God who befriends us and suffers alongside us? What is the operative theology expressed in this service, and how (by what media and/or ritual objects) is it expressed?
6. For at least part of the service, how is the theological nature of Christian worship (e.g., doxology, an eschatological banquet, an affirmation of discipleship, communion/fellowship, proclamation, the arena of transcendence, etc.) communicated? Do they intersect? How?

1. Based on Susan White, *Foundations of Christian Worship*, pp. 206-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)