

WHY DO WE DO SOUTHRIDGE THE WAY WE DO? Rev 1.1

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Many aspects of the way our SouthRidge service looks and feels are based on intentional decisions. This paper will give a quick summary of obvious components of the SouthRidge service and then dive into the theology behind it.

THE WORSHIP SERVICE

1. The band is located to the side and the pastor is only up front when she/he is preaching

This has to do with the desire to keep the focus on God. Many contemporary services struggle with being a performance where the focus becomes the performers. We want the focus to be on the words and the worship more than the folks leading it. In the same way, the pastor walks up out of the congregation and returns to it rather than sitting up front. There are also at least three people leading each week: Music Leader, Pastor, and Worship assistant and we try to have both sexes represented. The goal to communicate an emphasis on community over hierarchy.

2. The lighting is lower. Candles, rugs, and other features are added

We are very interested in acknowledging the mystery, beauty, and immanence of God. These elements help create an environment that communicates this to people with a particular aesthetic.

3. The Lord's Table is celebrated every week

We are interested in returning the Lord's Table to a center part of communal worship. It centers the worship service on the work and presence of Christ and also expands worship from just words and music to a full body experience. For people with a particular aesthetic, the movement to the table and the use of bread torn for each person in intinction is a helpful reminder of what is meant by the sacrament.

4. During Stations there are many things going on at the same time

Our desire is to worship God with all of our lives, not just our words. By offering multiple opportunities – quiet meditation in the pew, down on our knees at the prayer station, meditating on or creating art at the art station, tasting the communion bread Table, a tactile action of worship in the Reflection station¹, we allow people to worship with all of their being – thought, body, senses, etc.

5. During Stations people choose what they want to do

Our desire is for the center of action in the worship service to be in the heart of the worshipper in the pew, not what is going on up front. Stations gives people a great sense of freedom and choice and responsibility for their personal worship. No one is expected/forced to do any of the stations – they can explore and experiment as they sense God's leading. This is an analogy of the Christian life itself. We want every aspect of our service to communicate not only God's

holiness but the freedom and grace he offers to us.

6. There are times of both loud music and times of long silence. The music ranges from hard rock to Gregorian chant. In addition, while the whole community participates in the Lord's Table, Reflection Stations are only for one person at a time. Yet the service ends with us all holding hands.

We are attempting to create opportunities for both passionate communal worship and personal contemplation. Our prayer is that each person will experience "liminal" moments when they are keenly aware of the goodness and presence of God. While we try very hard not to be manipulative in any way, we view worship that allows people to experience the full range of emotions and widely different experiences as a good thing. It was God's idea that we laugh and weep, think and use our bodies. There are times to be with others as the body of Christ together, and times where our focus should be solely on God. We are seeking opportunities for "full person" worship.

7. We don't make people sign the friendship folder and you don't really need a bulletin

We try to make our service as friendly to visitors as possible. Part of this is simple – a person shouldn't need to know anything ahead of time, and should not be put in embarrassing situations because they don't know 'the right way' to do things. We lead people step by step through the service. Also, people with a particular ascetic want to experience and be surprised by what might come next rather than watching where we are in a detailed set of steps.

8. The liturgy is implicit, not explicit.

In general, the flow of a SouthRidge service moves from where people are, to Worship, to the Word, to the Table, and then out into the World. Most aspects of traditional worship such as confession of sin, assurance of pardon, great thanksgiving, etc. are involved somewhere (and often in multiple places) in the SouthRidge service – they just aren't labeled as specific steps. Worship is a self-forgetfulness in the presence of God, not the accomplishment of a particular set of steps – which could almost be viewed as works righteousness.

9. Preaching is central and multivalent.

Preaching of the Word is a significant part of the service. We view teaching of the Word, and an education/re-education in the basics of classical Christianity (catechesis) as a crucial part of what we do. In addition, we attempt to make our preaching full bodied and engaging– using body, art, video loops, music in the midst of preaching. The stations time is designed to be a response to the particular sermon preached – the video meditation, the contents of the reflection stations, and the particular introduction to the Lord's Table are all meant to tie into the message of the sermon and give people a chance to personally respond to it².

THE THEOLOGY BEHIND IT

Much of what we do is unique, but I think that SouthRidge is part of a larger, unorganized, grassroots movement arising in the church of Jesus Christ. Rather than write my own theological treatise on all the ideas behind our SouthRidge service, I would like to refer you to a

book that comes close to capturing much of what we are about. It is called **“Deep Church”** by pastor Jim Belcher³. Belcher uses two terms to describe two main kinds of churches: Traditional and Emergent. It is important to note that he uses the term “Traditional” in a different way than most PC(USA) folks would understand the term. By traditional he means traditional Evangelical which means entrepreneurial churches that have a high view of scripture but are wedded to a Modernist mindset (and often led by baby boomers). Even so, many of the concerns he describes are accurate for us.⁴ Jim puts it this way:

“Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional Church

Feel caught between the traditional church and the emerging church? Discover a third way: deep church. C. S. Lewis used the phrase "deep church" to describe the body of believers committed to mere Christianity. Unfortunately church in our postmodern era has been marked by certain shallowness. Emerging authors, fed up with contemporary pragmatism, have offered alternative visions for twenty-first-century Christianity. Traditionalist churches have reacted negatively, at times defensively. In *Deep Church*, Belcher brings the best insights of all sides to forge a third way between emerging and traditional. He offers measured appreciation and affirmation as well as balanced critique. Moving beyond reaction, Belcher provides constructive models from his own church planting experience and paints a picture of what this alternate, deep church looks like--a missional church committed to both tradition and culture, valuing innovation in worship, arts and community but also creeds and confessions.”

What is Deep Church?⁵

What follows is part of a review of Belcher’s book that I stole from **Kevin De Young⁶**:

The heart and soul of *Deep Church* is Belcher’s dream for traditional and emerging camps to find unity in the Great Tradition and not blast each other over second-tier differences (67-68). Chapter 3, “The Quest for Mere Christianity”, is the most important chapter in the book for understanding what Belcher is aiming for with his third way. On the one hand, Belcher wants to avoid the fundamentalist error of seeing every other kind of church as heretical and suspect. On the other hand, he also wants to avoid the liberal error of seeing theology as infinitely malleable. Belcher’s vision is for the traditional church and the emerging church to find common ground in the consensual tradition summed up in the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed (54ff.). Second-tier doctrines are not unimportant. Many of them are weighty, and individual churches will come down in different places relative to these doctrines. But binding all churches together is a tradition of orthodoxy. It’s the Great Tradition, then, that matters most, not our respective traditions. For the Great Tradition unifies us and ought to arouse our greatest passion. Belcher’s book is a winsome plea for a return to Mere Christianity and the humility and unity that goes with it.

What Are the Camps

The traditional camp is not well-defined by Belcher (a weakness I'll come back to later). At times it seems to be the same as fundamentalism (61). In other places, the traditional camp refers to anyone who has critiqued the emergent movement, including John MacArthur, Ron Gleason, Kevin DeYoung, Ted Kluck, and D.A. Carson. Belcher acknowledges the traditional camp is not monolithic. But he suggests "the groups comprising traditional evangelicalism share similar views of culture, epistemology and the church" (10). Still, in the end, I'm not sure what makes someone a part of the traditional camp in Belcher's estimation, other than that they have been critical of the emergent camp. Having said that, Belcher's analysis of the emergent side is much more helpful. I won't retell his own story, but Belcher has the advantage of having been an insider in the movement at its inception. He knows the journey of the emerging church well and he knows well many of the key players. This is what makes his book unique and why the emergents have received it more warmly. Carson was a total outsider in their minds. Ted and I were at least demographically similar and culturally conversant, but still outsiders. Jim is a true insider. But also an outsider. He writes: "As much as I feel like an insider to the conversation, I also feel at times like an outsider because of some reservations I have with aspects of the emerging conversation" (28). Similar to what Ted and I said in *Why We're Not Emergent*, Belcher feels like emerging voices are raising good questions, but their answers are often disturbing. Similar to Carson, Belcher defines the emerging movement (which he makes clear is not identical to Emergent Village) as a protest movement. **The emerging church is protesting against the traditional church on seven fronts:**

- (1) Captivity to Enlightenment rationalism.
- (2) A narrow view of salvation.
- (3) Belief before belonging.
- (4) Uncontextualized worship.
- (5) Ineffective preaching.
- (6) Weak ecclesiology.
- (7) Tribalism.

Under the label "emerging" are three different camps:⁷

- **the Relevants** (e.g. Driscoll, Kimball, and some Young, Restless, and Reformed types) who are trying to contextualize ministry while still maintaining conservative theology;
- **the Reconstructionists** (e.g., Cole, Hirsch, Barna, Viola) who are experimenting with organic house churches and monastic communities; and
- **the Revisionists** (e.g., McLaren, Jones, Pagitt) who are questioning key evangelical doctrines on theology and culture (45-46). Belcher's analysis focuses mostly on the reconstructionists and the revisionists because they have gotten the most attention and faced the most push back.

The bulk of the book deals with the seven areas of protest. Each chapter follows a similar pattern. Belcher usually begins with a personal experience that led him to see a problem with the traditional approach to church. Then Belcher explores the emerging solution, often interviewing key leaders in the movement and raising some possible objections along the way. Next, Belcher looks at the response of the traditional church to the emerging answers. And finally he proposes a third way that seeks to combine the best of both camps while avoiding the worst extremes. **Here's a thumbnail sketch for each chapter/protest:**

1. Deep Truth – Emergents reject classic foundationalism, which is good. But while they are right to reject self-evident truth, they are wrong to embrace a postmodern “constructivist” epistemology. “Even though I reject classical foundationalism,” Belcher writes, “I am not comfortable adopting a relational hermeneutic. I believe that God’s revelation in the Word tells us what is real and provides the authority for Christian community. We build our metaphysics on divine revelation. It gives us confidence that we substantially know ‘ready-made reality’” (82). In short, deep church rejects foundationalism built on reason, but accepts foundations built on belief. Similarly, deep church is centered-set instead of bounded-set or relational-set. This means the church focuses on drawing people to the Well (Jesus Christ) instead of guarding all the fences (like the traditional church). It also means the church knows what it should be focusing on (the center), instead of allowing the community to determine truth for itself (like in the emerging church).

2. Deep Evangelism – The traditional church insists that belief must precede belonging. This has the effect of slamming the door on spiritual seekers. The emerging church insists on belonging before belief. But every community must have some standards and everyone in the church must be challenged to repentance, faith, and obedience at some point. So is there a third way? According to Belcher the third way understands that there are two circles around Jesus. There is an outer circle of seekers and an inner circle of

committed disciples. Deep church welcomes everyone into the outer circle, regardless of their beliefs, but challenges them to become a part of the inner circle.

3. Deep Gospel - The traditional church has made salvation too personalized, too much like fire insurance. The message of individual salvation is important, but it must be balanced with Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. We must avoid reductionist gospels and remember the gospel has a public dimension. We must not shrink the gospel to the forgiveness of sins. But, Belcher adds, penal substitution and justification must form the foundation for everything else we say about the gospel. The kingdom cannot be ignored, but it must be linked to the doctrines of atonement, justification, union with Christ, and our need to be forgiven (118).

4. Deep Worship – The emerging church tries to contextualize its worship, but in so doing it sometimes becomes untethered to history and too much a product of the culture around it. What is needed is not just a sampling of tradition, but a return to the Great Tradition. Belcher's third way looks like this: "worship that embodies a genuine encounter with God, had depth and substance, included more frequent and meaningful Communion, was participatory, read more Scripture in worship, creatively used the senses provided more time for contemplation, and focused on the transcendence and otherness of God" (124).

5. Deep Preaching – Traditional preaching is often boring and uninspired. There is little drama to it. Most sermons boil down to two things: you suck; try harder (142). The emerging church tries to suggest a better way. In practice their "sermons" sound like sermons, except with a little more interaction from the congregation. But underneath the emergent view of preaching (at least that espoused by Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones) is a radical shift, a hermeneutic of community that says nothing is privileged, not even the Bible, over the community in discovering and living out truth (145). Belcher rejects this hermeneutic, seeing that it leads to a rejection of classical orthodoxy. So neither traditional nor emergent preaching will work. We need a third way that is not deductive and legalistic like traditional preaching, nor open-ended like emergent preaching. Instead, those who belong to deep church "preach Christ in every text, laying out and analyzing the human condition through Scriptures and experience, and exposing the radical, shocking grace of God that enters our situation, transforms us and empowers us to live differently" (157).

6. Deep Ecclesiology – Traditional church gets bogged down in meetings, paperwork, and organizational bureaucracy. This is bad. So the emerging church calls for a more organic, open-source model for church. But even organic churches cannot survive long without structure and accountability. What we need is a third way that calls the church to be both institution and organism, respects the offices of elder and deacon, celebrates worship as a means of grace, and cultivates and learns from tradition.

7. Deep Culture – The third way between traditional and emerging approaches to culture

accepts Abraham Kuypers distinction between the church as institution and the church as organism. The church as an institution focuses primarily on preaching, sacraments, worship, and caring for the body. The church as organism works to train secret agents who go out into the world, work for the shalom of the city, and create culture. With this institution/organism approach, our churches can have a deep culture, one that is neither a copy-cat of culture nor irrelevant to it.

In summary, I love talking about these things! If you have any questions about what we do at our second service, or why we do it, please do give me a call!

² For an example of a Reflection Station designed as a response to a particular sermon see <http://www.southridgeworship.com/SRSR002.htm>

³ <http://www.thedeepchurch.com/>

⁴ Imagine that Jesus is standing in the center and each denomination/non-denomination has wandered off in a different direction – away from him. To get back to Jesus you need to pull towards him which means people in different denominations will need to pull in different directions. Because of our PC(USA) heritage, to some degree we need to pull in the OPPOSITE direction of people coming out of traditional evangelical churches. – Langdon)

⁵ What follows is written for theology wonks like me and uses a lot of specialized jargon. The key thing to understand is that seven weaknesses of the “traditional” church that have been identified by newer churches in the “emerging” movements, but these newer movements have their own problems. The Deep Church book is an attempt to find a balanced third way that remains anchored to the historic church of Jesus Christ across the ages while being open to new ways of doing things – without being overly enamored by either the past or the progressive – striving to remain enamored only by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Robert Webber described this as “Ancient-Future” faith.

⁶ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2009/10/01/deep-church-third-way/>

⁷ (Note: about 10 years ago the term “Emerging” was like the wild west – no one was in control or had the official voice. It meant all kinds of experimentation was going on – there was no one type of “emerging church.” At the beginning we called SouthRidge emerging, but because of the radical differences in the three camps described above, we no longer use that term, and “Deep Church” seems to be the best label if one is going to use a label.)