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**Booty Grabbing at Your Place of Worship?**

**By Nancy R. Fenn**

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"Many of us, however, flinch at 'the peace'. It spoils the privacy and dignity of worship, and we dread it like the onslaught of the dentist's drill." -- Letter to "The London Telegraph"

Recently I've had some interesting conversations with an introvert in the Midwest whose minister tries to grab him and hug him on the way out of church every Sunday and I got to thinking ... how prevalent is this situation? Has the recent trend toward hugging in American churches destroyed the experience of community worship for the typical introvert?

This is not an article about faith or God, or really even about booty, the humorous title. It's an article about introverts and how we relate to others in social situations. Does your church or place of worship call itself "the hugging church"? Are you "invited" to stand up and turn around half way through the service to share "the peace" with people you don't know?

My Midwestern friend has decided to speak bluntly to his minister and tell him to keep his hands to himself. I wonder that he hasn't considered changing churches. Few take offence at a soft handshake or nod, but even so, a polite "no thank you" will also suffice.

This uninvited touchy-feely stuff is not pleasing to an introvert and it's not that we're "cold" or "strange". Not at all. What we are is territorial. We're as territorial about our bodies and our body space as we are about our physical and emotional space. It's one of our strongest characteristics. If you want to know for sure whether or not you're an introvert, ask yourself one of these two questions, "Do people exhaust me?" and/or "How would I feel if someone sat down at my desk and started checking their email?"

It's our right as introverts to be territorial. We are a legitimate personality type.

Here are some comments from parishioners of churches of various denominations on this topic. As you read these statements, pay attention to how you feel.

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Remember, it's OK not to like hugging or "glad-handing" as my introverted grandfather used to call it disdainfully. This doesn't make you a bad person.

COMMENTS FROM PARISHIONERS Meta Minton, editor of "The Southern Illinoisan": "On occasion, I attend a local, holly roller, hallelujah screaming, speaking in tongues, praying until you pass out, Pentecostal church. The congregation there is very warm and loving. Any service you attend, it is guaranteed that you will get hugged by everyone at least once."

Anonymous: "We've witnessed a trend in which the new, contemporary churches — where video screens and guitars are the norm — seem to be bursting at the seams. The parking lots at those churches don't seem to be large enough for all those flocking in to hear the message. At the other end of the spectrum, many of the more traditional churches have slowly seen their numbers slide.

Churches must change or they'll die...."

From "The London Telegraph": "What is troubling is the practice of some members of the congregation of approaching the event with more gusto. These hearties do double hand-shakes like boxers at the start of a bout. Wearing moony smiles and saying 'the peace' with sappy sincerity, they leap the nave to greet strangers with full-bosomed embraces, sometimes even rendering the victim breathless for several moments. 'Turn around and say hello to one another,' would be the standard invitation from the platform, at which point arms would be flung around anyone and everyone, whether they looked like they wanted a hug or not."

Pastor Bob of Xxx Church in Michigan: "The church is a place for hugging. I see it on Sunday mornings during our time of fellowship. I see hugging in the Gold Room during coffee time. Our church is a good hugging church. In baseball, they have a DH — a designated hitter who bats instead of the pitcher. At our church, we also have a DH — a designated hugger. I don't think she's even 5 feet tall, but this little dynamo, otherwise known as Xxx, is our DH. She hugs everyone with a smile on her face and love in her heart. "Bend over, Darlin', and give me a hug."

From "The London Telegraph": Mr. Moore, in his guise as a modern British Episcopalian, may be prepared to tolerate such assaults. Many of us, however, flinch at "the peace". It spoils the privacy and dignity of worship, and we dread it like the onslaught of the dentist's drill."

Deb Matthews in "True Christian Stories": "There was just one problem with the church! At the end of the song services, the pastor would always tell the congregation, 'Turn around and shake hands with someone, or if you're a woman, give another woman a hug.' Most of the time, I would just shake hands with the people around me, or a woman next to me might just put her arm around my shoulder and give me a gentle sideways hug. But there was this one woman that went all over the place giving these big bear hugs to everyone, man or woman. I got to where I would check out where she was sitting and make sure I was a long way away from her. But it didn't seem to matter where I sat — she still seemed to end up over where I was and give me one of those smothering hugs. The church was great except for all that hugging business." [she goes on to explain how she "overcame" her dread of being hugged !]

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### IT'S NOT JUST THE HUGGING

It's not just the hugging. Merilee recently visited a friend in Alabama and was taken to a Sunday service. There was a huge video screen in the front of the room which scrolled the lyrics to the hymns, members of the congregation got up to get coffee or cold drinks whenever they wanted, there was a live band with guitar, saxophone and keyboard, and an elaborate sound system. Merilee is an infp introvert and she said it was a bombardment of sounds, lights and people which kept her separated from any sense of the spiritual. The children were elaborately dressed in expensive Victorian era clothing and, although truly adorable, their presence in the service was also a distraction to Merilee's sense of the divine.

Elle explains in her GARDEN BLOG, "When I got to the church, opened the door and saw the room full of unknown people, I remembered my usual madness. I froze. I stood at the door, surveyed the room and was overwhelmed. These were my initial observations. It was loud. Way too loud. There was singing, shouting and dancing and I made a mental note to pinch Xxx for not getting me there and seated before the hoopla began. This was a small room and a small congregation. There were musicians, a few people (not enough to be called a choir) singing and I was instantly uncomfortable.

Not that I have a problem with praise and worship, but my few experiences with church have been very different. Usually there's a very quiet service where people give 'talks' and a choir sings a celestial rendition of Onward Christian Soldiers. This was not that."

Here are critiques of three churches in Maryland by someone who identifies himself only as "Bob". I have taken out all references to denomination so, exclusively on the basis of the form of the service, which of these churches would you like to go to?

### CRITIQUES

Church 1 Excellent musical accompaniment to the service was performed by a choir of 12 men, percussion, electronic keyboard, saxophone and guitar. This first class entertainment was applauded during the service and some songs got deserved standing ovations. Hugging happy greeter. Church started late because of talking and socializing. Laughter and applause joined the energetic sermon.

Church 2 Mostly older adults. Some local families. College students. This is the church for Xxx College. Wooden pews. Small choir. Everyone sings. Flute and piano. Quiet. Everyone is attentive. Impromptu humor. No pressure to join. Educational lecture as part of service.

Church 3 The ritual to follow and the hymns to sing are printed in the handout for everyone to easily participate. All hymns from the 18th century. Folding chairs. Mostly adults. Individuals. No hand shaking during service. Easy to hear. Visitor may remain anonymous.

If you picked #2 of #3, chances are you're an introvert.

Despite the humorous title of this article, excessive friendliness during worship seems contrived and uncomfortable to many introverts and may be keeping us away from communal worship in droves. If

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this is the case with you, I encourage you to look further afield until you find a temple, church or synagogue that honors the inverted way! And don't forget to be heard. We have a voice and it's a legitimate one. How will they know if we don't tell them?

Nancy R. Fenn is The Introvert Coach. Learn more and find resources, support, humor and encouragement for introverts at [www.theintrovertcoach.com](http://www.theintrovertcoach.com)

### **the Essence of Worship**

**By Terry Dashner**

#### **the Essence of Worship by Terry Dashner**

Faith Fellowship Church...PO Box 1586...Broken Arrow, OK 74013...Pastor Terry Dashner

"Essence of Worship"

Is there a difference in the form of worship and the essence? Yes, as a matter of fact, many churches today are struggling with the proper form of worship. So widespread is this problem that many churches have divided into two services on Sunday mornings. In one service the form of worship is traditional music. Only hymns, piano, and organ are used while in the other service only contemporary music is used. One service is youthful, dressed down, loud, and "rock-and-rollish" music bursts. In the other, well you guessed it. The music is softer, older, and church hymnals are used to reflect on the words while they are being sung.

I want to speak to you today about the essence of worship. The essence of worship is imperative for "true" worship in the church, or any place you worship God. Jesus predicted the demise of worship form when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter four. You may remember the scripture, "Jesus said to her, `Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:21; and 23-24 NASB).

The New Testament reveals a stunning silence about the outward forms of corporate worship and a radical intensification of worship as an inner, Godward experience of the heart. The silence about outward forms is obvious in the fact that the gathered life of the church is never called "worship" in the New Testament. Moreover, the main Old Testament word for worship is virtually absent from the New Testament letters. Its usage clusters in the Gospels (26 times) and in the Book of Revelation (21 times). But in the Epistles of Paul it occurs only once, namely, in I Corinthians 14:25 where the unbeliever falls down at the power of prophecy and confesses God is in the assembly. It doesn't occur at all in the letters of Peter, James, or John.

The Old Testament idea, captured in the Greek word *proskuneo*, implied a physical falling down in reverence before a visible majesty. This happened as people came to the visible, incarnate Christ in the Gospels. And it happened in Revelation as the saints and angels and elders were actually in the

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presence of the visible, risen Christ. But in the age between the ascension and the second coming Christ is not visibly here to worship. Therefore, worship is radically internalized and delocalized. In Matthew 15:8–9

Jesus says, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me." Worship that does not come from the heart is vain, empty. It is not authentic worship.

Consider what Paul does to some of the other words related to Old Testament worship. For example, the next most frequent word for worship in the Old Testament (after *proskuneo*) is the word *latreuo* which is usually translated "serve" as in Exodus 23:24, "You shall not worship their gods, nor serve

them" (NASB). When Paul uses this word for Christian worship, he goes out of his way to make sure that we know he means not a localized or outward form for worship practice but a nonlocalized, spiritual experience. In fact, he takes it so far as to treat virtually all of life as worship when lived in the right spirit. Here's another example, in Romans 1:9 he says, "I serve [or worship] [God] with my spirit in the gospel of his Son." And in Philippians 3:3, Paul says that true Christians "worship" [God] in the Spirit of God...and put no confidence in the flesh" (NASB). Then again he says in Romans 12:1, for Christians to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Paul sees all of life and ministry as an expression of that inner experience of worship.

To be continued...keep the faith. Worship the Lord with everything in you, any time, any place. Pastor t.

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