

## Module 15 **Alternative Worship** 6/2014

Alternative styles of worship are being brought back to the parish from Taizé, Iona and Christian conferences like [New Wine](#) or [Greenbelt](#). A need for quiet and a space for thought with some stimulation has directed many to exploring the experiences of devoted groups who have been creating worship that is alternative to our formal styles and forms.

Much of the material for this module appears on websites. This is in the spirit of resourcing alternative worship or 'emerging church' services. A large community of churches have grown using the internet for contact and there is much sharing of resources and ideas via many websites.

### **Internet resources for this module.**

Visit the following sites. They contain lots of very good information about Alternative Worship. Especially useful is this first site which includes an in-depth look at setting up alternative worship and what is required of those involved.

[www.alternativeworship.org](http://www.alternativeworship.org)

- a definition of alternative worship
- alternative worship and emerging church
- how to make it happen, a beginner's guide

In the last section, look out for the heading:

- music and sound

The following site is a good example of a site that features articles and ideas by people who are sharing their experiences. Again, read through the following headed sections:

[www.emergingchurch.info/index.htm](http://www.emergingchurch.info/index.htm)

- [a beginner's guide](#)
- [a transcendent vision by Sue Wallace](#)
- [transmission by Becky Garrison](#)

Hopefully, you will have been able to access all this information and will probably have found yourself exploring much more on these websites as they have a lot to offer. If you are able to experience alternative worship yourself, that would be an ideal way to complete this session.

The following material gives a good overview of the development of alternative worship. It was taken from the Church of England Diocese of Norwich website '[Worship](#)' pages.

## Alternative Worship

Alternative worship, often known as alt.worship after the fashion of internet newsgroups usually traces its roots to the Nine O'Clock Service (NOS), which started at St Thomas, Crookes in Sheffield in the mid-eighties (for more, see the account by [Roland Howard](#)). Although the Sheffield experiment ended in 1995 in distress and controversy, many other alt.worship groups flourished. Most use video and contemporary music, rely heavily on ritual and symbolism, and adopt an experiential approach to liturgy. Worshippers are not seen as passive consumers of pre-packaged predictability but rather as co-creative participants in an ongoing drama.

Indeed, one characteristic of most alt.worship groups is that liturgy is collaboratively constructed. This is because liturgy is seen as an expression of community and of that community's response to the love of God. Typically, members will get together to plan the next act of worship. The theme or topic will be decided or announced (there is no reason why alt.worship should not follow the lectionary). People will then volunteer to develop worship for that session, probably because the theme speaks to them (or the Spirit speaks to them through the theme). This collaborative aspect of worship is one of the most significant different between alt.worship and traditional worship, though a strong emphasis on creativity and an eclectic spirit, drawing resources from many traditions, are also prominent.

Jonny Baker & Doug Gay's book on [Alternative Worship](#) is a brief but good introduction to the alt.worship scene. It also contains a number of worship resources based around the church year. There is some excellent material and a CD-ROM is provided with words, images, movies and songs.

Jackie and Simon Buckingham Shum describe introducing [Alternative Worship for the 40s-90s?](#). They write to encourage folk who want to be more creative in their worship, but whose churches have never seen anything more alternative than the ASB.

The [grace](#) website has a number of articles of interest. The one by Steve Collins on [getting starting with alternative worship](#) has some useful and practical suggestions.

Paul Roberts, in his Grove Booklet [Alternative Worship in the Church of England](#) suggests that alternative worship has the following characteristics: multi-media environment resulting from intense creativity; use of visuals; use of sound; collaborative leadership; breadth of liturgical resources. He traces the history of the movement from its roots in NOS and then considers the underlying philosophy, seeing the inevitable parallels with postmodernist approaches to text and the importance of shared interpretations of the Bible. He ends with a consideration of the role of alt.worship within the more formal and regulated structures of the C of E.

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### ***finally***

After exploring all the web links above, you will now know how to go about organising some alt worship in your own church. It would be great if you could do this and provide some written material about the event with advice for others who may be thinking of doing this.

You probably feel strongly that to fully know about alt worship, you need to experience it for real. On the websites above will be contacts for local churches or groups and you will be made to feel most welcome if you go along.

## Reading

[Alternative Worship in the Church of England](#) Grove Booklet by Paul Roberts.

[Alternative Worship](#) Jonny Baker & Doug Gay'.

Compiled by Robert Fielding 2010

