



ON PERSONAL BOUNDARIES IN WORSHIP

There are practices sometimes associated with worship that can give rise to concern as to their effect on people, especially when such worship is conducted in institutional settings.

One of these is an instruction or expectation by the worship leader that participants should join hands for prayer. For some people, this may be felt as an intrusion into one's personal space and a physical contact that is neither sought nor appreciated. It can be experienced as an unwanted level of intimacy. To be asked to do so in a public act of worship can place such a person under some considerable pressure either to conform or feel excluded, or to feel that they are the 'odd one out' who 'spoils' the unanimity of the group.

Participation in this kind of activity should not be forced or assumed, and should only proceed if there is prior, clear and unambiguous agreement amongst all taking part. Even asking the question as to whether all agree can itself create difficulty for those who may be inclined to dissent. It is a practice that is best avoided, unless there is a prior understanding to which all freely subscribe. Sensitivity and respect for each and every person are essential qualities that underline appropriate behaviour in our interactions with one another, and the setting of a worship service is no exception. They are fundamental to the expression of Christian love.

Where they are honoured, the possibility of hurt or offence is minimised, if not eliminated. Of course, they also allow that in particular contexts there can be well accepted and appreciated ways of engaging with each other that permit more physical expression of relationship without causing any offence.

In considering personal boundaries, it is grace and spirit that can best direct the manner of our meeting with each other. It is such a spirit that informs these guidelines.

