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Shaping Worship During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Multicultural Community at Proskuneo Ministries, Clarkston, Georgia

In this edited conversation, Jaewoo "Jay" Kim says that Proskuneo Ministries "deeply holds to theological convictions and practices of embodied worship." Stay-at-home pandemic orders have upended their typical worship gatherings, but virtual worship doesn't fit who they are as a multicultural worshipping community.

By: [Jaewoo Kim](#), [Joan Huyser-Honig](#)

Tags: [coronavirus](#), [covid-19](#), [covid-19 series](#), [multicultural](#), [trauma](#), [worship planning](#)

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shaping worship during
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Jaewoo "Jay" Kim: Serves at [Proskuneo Ministries](#) in public relations, ministry development, multicultural worship, and songwriting.

Current city: Clarkston, Georgia (metro Atlanta)

Denominational context: [Nondenominational](#)

Worship roles: I'm on the leadership team and am responsible for planning and leading worship for cultivating multicultural worshipping community.

COVID-19 situation (as of March 27, 2020): The Proskuneo Ministries worshipping community has been meeting weekly for three years. We alternate meeting at two houses every other month. Our diverse group has people from many countries and of different ethnicities, ages, and abilities.

Our weekly gathering starts with a potluck dinner with plenty of food from different cultures, such as South Korea, Argentina, and Syria. After dinner, we sing songs in many languages followed by teaching of the Word in creative ways, such as storytelling or interactive discussion. We continue with prayer and blessing. Overall, the service order includes worship elements described in Acts 2, but we add many cultural and creative elements in our worship, so our gatherings look different each time. We often remind ourselves that our worship should look like “nations bringing their glory” (Rev. 21:24).

Imagine thirty to fifty people inside a packed house, eating and sitting shoulder to shoulder. There are joyful noises and laughter, people sharing food while getting to know one another, some engaging in deep conversations, singing, and sometimes dancing together.

I never expected we’d need to practice social distancing or not be able to meet physically. Yes, COVID-19 restrictions drastically changed how we connect as a community. As of now, social gatherings are limited to ten people, and people must strictly practice social distancing. This forced our worshiping community to pay attention to what we hold tightly and consider what we will miss most if we discontinue our gatherings. We’ve come to realize that our community deeply holds to theological convictions and practices of *embodied worship*. We believe we can only be fully present when we are together with our physical bodies. Often we greet one another with gentle handshakes or passionate hugs; we hold hands when we pray together; and we lay our hands on the shoulders of the people we pray for.

What’s working well—or not: For our community, online worship, especially when directed from platform to congregation, was not ideal. As a ministry team, Proskuneo hosts many online meetings and trainings. For our worshiping community, we tried—once—to combine online and offline gatherings. It didn’t go as well as we expected. So we decided not to meet online as a large group.

Typically our gathering is never one-directional because there’s no one worship leader or preacher on the stage. Yes, we always have songs and teaching of the Word, but it’s done by various people participating, interacting, and involving each other in different activities.

Since our multicultural community has different generations, from infants to the elderly, online worship raised many problems for us. How do we bring all ages together in one online service? How do we handle cultural tensions such as time-versus-event orientation? For example, what if people keep showing up at different times, and it’s expected that we greet one another throughout the entire online meeting? What about people from oral cultures or people who prefer less structured worship with more freedom for spontaneity? What about people who feel safe when an online service is open to total strangers versus people who feel safe with only trusted individuals within the exclusive community?

After community prayer and listening, we decided to decentralize our gathering for a while. We encouraged people to meet in smaller units. It could be a family unit or singles inviting a few other singles while maintaining all measures of safety and regulations. No online streaming nor sermon notes are given. Each unit is pretty much on their own to figure out what they do when they gather, and smaller units have freedom to meet online.

Saturday, March 28, 2020: Our city and county now have stricter "stay at home" restrictions'. A "no more than 10 people gathering" is no longer permitted, so singles may not invite other singles to worship together. We need to be creative while fulfilling civil duties, but I don't have the answer yet.

For us, maintaining embodied worship is vital even in dispersed smaller units. We trust that the Holy Spirit can empower people with imagination and creativity. Decentralizing can be empowering, and limitations can unleash creativity like never before.

Most helpful worship resources: Some of our immigrants and refugees have already dealt with different types of trauma, so some are more alarmed, and others are calmer. But we're intentionally allowing our members to bring honest questions stirred within from fear, doubt, and uncertainty. We try to create spaces for such questions even if we don't have answers. Helping people grieve and lament for what they're going through has been one of the essential and intentional parts of our worship planning.

Resources we've found most helpful include:

- [*Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help*](#), by Harriet Hill, Margaret Hill, Dick Baggé, and Pat Miersma
- [*Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*](#), by Diane Langberg
- [*Make Arts for a Better Life: A Guide for Working with Communities*](#), by Brian Schrag and Kathleen J. Van Buren
- [*Multicultural Worship Resources*](#) by Proskuneo Ministries

Needs, questions, or insights to share: By worshiping with the vulnerable, I've been learning that we still lack the space, songs, and liturgy for lament. People carry much more pain and suffering than the small spaces for lament we create in our worship gatherings. We need to provide more spaces for people to ask honest and difficult questions. We need more songs and words that can help people grieve the trauma they've been facing in the world as followers of Christ. We can give permission and even say it's good to wrestle with God.

How can we create safe space for doubt, fear, and tears without forcing people to change or get healed faster than God's timing? Unprecedentedly, this global pandemic has made us realize we are more connected to one another than ever before in human history. Then how can we let the global body of Christ know that we are more connected through pain and suffering of one another? How can we *embody* our sorrow in our worship—whether or not it's online—without diminishing the hope for a future that is real but seems far from where we are now?

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Learn more about [Proskuneo Ministries](#) and buy their downloadable album of [multicultural music for congregational singing](#). Listen to "[Through Pain to Freedom](#)", a Refugia podcast hosted by Debra Rienstra with John D. Witvliet on creating space in worship for lament.

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Radica Samuel-moonoo

Great thought and wisdom...I am actually grappling with the same questions

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Jaewoo Kim

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[Jaewoo Kim on Making Room for Multicultural Worship](#)

To worship in line with the Lord's Prayer—on earth as it is in heaven—requires making room in worship for stories, songs, and gifts from many cultures. Doing so depends in part on how churches form their views about refugees and immigrants.

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[Trauma-Informed Care in Church Worship and Life](#)

This topic showcase highlights resources to help churches use trauma-informed practices in church worship and congregational life. Faith communities are more effective when they become more aware of adverse

childhood experiences, collective trauma, and other tragedy.

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COVID-19 and Worship: Resources for Churches Adapting to Social Isolation

As containment of COVID-19 forces your worshiping community to implement shelter-in-place worship and practice social isolation, we offer these resources to help you plan and cope in ways that encourage and support your community. These resources were initially created from events and in response to different situations and can be adapted for worship that encourages prayer and Christian community during this time of social distancing necessary to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

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