



*The Next Worship: Glorifying
God in a Diverse World*

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Participating in Crosscultural Worship – Even When It’s Uncomfortable

Humans are prone to do things that are comfortable. We either like things that come easy or that feel authentic to who we are and organic to our community. Learning to speak a language, playing new rhythms and praying in new ways are not at the top of our list of things to get excited about. I am sure you have heard people say that participating in diverse worship feels inauthentic to them. It’s not natural to who they are, they don’t want to dance or clap, or they don’t want to sit still or cry the entire service. In cultures that value individualism we are more likely to hear that we should feel free to sit, stand or worship as we like.

Often, authenticity in worship is more desirable than being formed in worship. This attitude won’t work if we are trying to create spaces where we intentionally introduce crosscultural worship.

Let’s face it, my Mandarin stinks! I’d rather sing in Spanish. I’d prefer to pray in English. I really like to move during worship, which would likely be a distraction in many of the churches or college chapels I visit. Crosscultural worship is just what it sounds like: we are crossing over (a bridge) to another way of doing things, which creatures of habit rarely like to do. As Spencer Perkins, the late reconciliation leader and coauthor of *More Than Equals*, used to say, “Bridge building hurts!” Not only are we crossing a bridge, we are also acting as a bridge for other people to cross, which means we are always getting stepped on. It takes commitment and intentionality; it’s a decision to act. . . .

Whether we come from a diverse or monocultural context, there are two primary reasons why we should engage in other cultural forms of worship. First, we experience a fuller picture of God. Not only is the variety and range of God’s creativity seen and expressed in the vast artistic range of human approaches to worship (music, instruments, words, songs), but a variety of themes are also represented.

Some churches would rather sing, shout and dance about God’s victory to remind us that because he is powerful we can make it through another week! Others see worship as a space where we can cry out to God in our angst because he allows us to come as we are: weak and broken. Sharing these moments with one another broadens our perspective of God; he is my Rock and Deliverer and my Comforter and Healer.

The second reason is that diverse worship leads to personal transformation. Our understanding of the church is transformed. As we worship crossculturally, we better understand our own worship as one piece of a larger community. It’s like discovering we



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have an accent when we are around people from other parts of the country. As we experience our differences, we can more fully enjoy what it means to connect to the global church. Then we realize we are a part of a bigger family. This helps connect us to the hearts of our brothers and sisters whose lives are radically different from ours.

— Taken from chapter two, “Is PB&J Ethnic Food?”



Sandra Maria Van Opstal, author of *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*

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Worship Leader Prompts Churches to Develop Multiethnic Worship

Leading practitioner of multiethnic worship, Sandra Maria Van Opstal, delivers a compelling look at the need for crosscultural worship in our churches in her latest book, *The Next Worship*. Sandra is a Chicago-born, second-generation Latina and a preacher, trainer, liturgist and activist passionate about creating atmospheres that mobilize people for reconciliation and justice.

In *The Next Worship*, Sandra expels common misgivings about multiethnic worship and explains the value of participating in other cultures' worship styles. She is a perceptive mentor, giving churches guidance for beginning the challenging task of developing crosscultural worship. Addressing music, Scripture reading, prayer, order of service and more, Sandra leaves her readers well-equipped for the task. She also provides direction for building up worship leaders and a truly diverse worship team.

"What Sandra Van Opstal does so importantly here is to help make the arc of this worship transformation clear and practicable," says Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Theological Seminary. "Out of her life experience and rich ministry background, Sandra does for us here what she has done over the years for many of those she has led as worship teams and as worshipers. This book is a vital gift for a changing church that needs to reflect the God of all the nations."

Sandra has a deep background in ministry and worship. She previously served as the worship director for the Urbana Student Missions Conference and has led worship for the Willow Creek Association, the Christian Community Development Association, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Evangelical Covenant Church and the Evangelical Immigration Table. She has also served students as director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Chicago Urban Program and as a campus minister at Northwestern University with InterVarsity's Multiethnic, Latino and Black student fellowships.

Currently, Sandra regularly consults as both a worship leader and a mission trainer with Christian colleges, conferences and local churches and serves on the board of Evangelicals 4 Justice. She and her husband Karl minister at Grace and Peace Community in Chicago.