

How Art and Artists Can Enhance Your Ministry

What happens when Christian leaders embrace the arts, artists, and the creative process? From the moment of Creation, and continuing throughout church history, artists have served the Lord with their gifts. Art is the language of experience and the artist is designed, even called, to speak to the heart of the people. However, many struggle to understand how to incorporate their most creative people into their ministry. This workshop will discuss how the creative process is both a fully human and fully divine experience. When Christian leaders and creative people partner, everyone benefits.

Charles David Kelley is Latvian-American, citizen of both countries. Born in Los Angeles, he has lived in Oregon since 1980. His professional training is in Bible, theology, and missiology. He began ministering in Latvia in 1985. Before founding Bridge Builders International, an Oregon based mission that focuses on Latvia, in 1994, Charles served in pastoral ministry in California, Texas, and Oregon for 21 years. He is chairman and director of BBI's Latvian affiliate, "Partners." He serves as Dean of International Relations at Baltic Pastoral Institute in Riga. Charles is founder of the Imago Dei Artists Network in Latvia and co-founder of the imagiNATIONS Annual Art Festival for Estonia and Latvia. He is a member of the Arts Centre Group in London and is the LausanneARTS Advocate at Large for Europe. Charles is an author, pianist, and painter, having studied at the feet of two masters, professors both, from the Latvian Academy of the Arts. He lives in Latvia 4-5 months per year. He has been married to Nancy for 40 years and has four grown children and nine young grandchildren.

I. Introduction

II. Why do many Christian leaders avoid incorporating the arts into ministry?

A. Theological Reasons

1. The second commandment about *graven images*.
2. Underdeveloped theology of *imago dei*.

B. Visceral Reactions

1. To Roman Catholicism
2. To Eastern Orthodoxy
3. To Christianity 'light'

C. Pedagogical Reasons

1. Much Bible and theological training is left brain-oriented.
 - a. Creativity is seldom cultivated or valued.
 - b. Many right-brain people drop out.

2. Biblical interpretation focuses on content and avoids emotion.
 - a. The “Fact...Faith...Emotion” myth.
 - b. But...up to one third of the Bible is poetry.

D. Emotional Reasons

1. Fear of hyperbole and allegory.
2. Fear of straying from historic evangelical orthodoxy.
3. Fear of worldliness.
4. Fear of the culture often associated with art and artists.
5. Fear of violating regulative principles of worship.
6. Fear of the reactions of conservative members.

E. Epistemological Reasons (how we think about how we think)

1. The assumption that there must be a distinction between that which is sacred and that which is secular.
2. The assumption that spiritual gifts are ‘God-given talents given for use and service only within the church.’
3. The assumption that art in the church is limited to visual aids.

III. What does the Bible teach about Art and the Bible?

- A. Creation
- B. The Tabernacle
- C. The Temple
- D. The Psalms
- E. Poems
- F. The New Testament

IV. Why do so many artists dislike the church?

- A. They can't find their place.
- B. Their callings are not validated.
- C. Their potential as ambassadors is seldom considered.
- D. They are not equipped or encouraged for service.
- E. They are dismayed at how few Christians appreciate fine art and high culture.
- F. They don't want to be identified with "bad Christian art."

V. What can Christian leaders do to encourage the artists in their churches?

- A. Celebrate creativity.
- B. Artists can be commissioned as ambassadors in the community.
- C. Identify the creatives and bring them together.

- 1. To grow closer to God.
- 2. To grow closer to one another.
- 3. To discuss profound questions.
- 4. To create together.
- 5. To serve together.

D. Invite artists to offer creative suggestions.

E. Encourage and help artists to creatively reach the community.

F. _____

G. _____

H. _____

VI. What can happen if churches embrace art and artists?

A. Worship services can include the elements of surprise.

1. Poetry
2. Readings
3. Worship Painting
4. Wide variety of music utilizing all ages
5. Creative testimonies
6. Great art used to illustrate truth and culture – Guernica
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

B. Many more in the church can be equipped and serve.

C. Artists can help interpret the culture of the city.

D. Artists from the church can lead church members of walking tours through the art galleries and museums of the city.

E. Church facilities can be creatively used for art events.

F. Seminars for the church and community can be organized on relevant cultural topics.

G. Churches can sponsor surprisingly creative art exhibitions in public spaces.

1. Good Friday Exhibition in a Funeral Home.
2. “Secret Double” – A Major Exhibition on Depression in a Public Space.
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

VII. Conclusion

- A. What's the most creative thing you have ever experienced in a church?
- B. Who are the creatives in your church?
- C. How can you initiate time with them to discuss this topic and more?
- D. Imagine... just imagine... what could happen if the artists in your church were encouraged, equipped, mobilized, and supported by the church to practice their art in the community for the glory of God?

Suggested Readings:

Steve Turner. *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts*.

Francis Schaeffer. *Art and the Bible*.

William A. Dryness. *Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue*.