The Good News and the Bad News for Artists in the Church
Shauna Niequist

How to Use This Tool
This Conference Classics process tool is designed to accompany an audio recording of a Willow Creek Association conference session. You can refer to the tool while listening to the session and use it afterward to dig deeper into the content, or you can use the tool to get the highlights without even listening to the session.

This tool consists of three parts:
• The PREVIEW section lists the problem that the session addresses and the recommendation that the speaker makes.
• The KEY CONCEPTS section breaks the session down into the core ideas most important for you to understand.
• The REFLECT section includes questions to help you practice, apply, and implement what you’ve learned. Although the questions are geared primarily to individuals, groups can use them as a discussion guide.
The Good News and the Bad News for Artists in the Church

Problem: Artists in the church often feel a disconnect between their artistic vision and the reality they face in the church where they serve.

Recommendation: When artists embrace responsibility for their own fulfillment as artists, they are able to be the artists they were called to be and serve the church in extraordinary ways.

Key Concepts

Needs and Thread
- The essay that Shauna read at the beginning on the session, an excerpt from her book Cold Tangerines, is available at http://shaunaniequist.com.

Taking Responsibility for Your Artistic Fulfillment
- What artists do really matters.
- Being an artist in the church is particularly challenging.
- The church is not responsible for your fulfillment as an artist.
- Many artists grow up looking for a place to exercise their creativity, and those in the church tend to think of the church as that place.
- Being an artist in the church is more complicated than simply exercising your creativity.
- Art in the church must always serve the community and never the other way around.
- The church should not be forced to serve your art.
- You can feel it in yourself when you’re pushing for an artistic element that you know deep down doesn’t really fit.
- Artists should have creative endeavors outside of the church so that the church does not become the captive audience for the thing that they’re passionate about.
- Many artists get frustrated when the church doesn’t ask of them all that they feel they can contribute.
- When you can create outside of the church, you’ll find that what you create within the church has a lot more life.

Managing Philosophical Differences
- If you’re staying in your role as an arts leader because you think that the senior pastor is just about to change all the programming values in your church because of your opinions and comments, you should think about leaving.
- If you are in that situation, you shouldn’t leave in protest but with a blessing for that great church and a commitment to find another great church that better fits your philosophy.
- In many churches, programming team meetings are consistently derailed by philosophical conversations about worship descriptors like modern, post-modern, presentational, and experiential.
- Unfortunately those conversations can degenerate into judgments and mockery of those on the other side of the debate.
- If both sides can learn to talk about these issues in ways that are respectful to everyone, we can create something more beautiful than either side could imagine.
- The devil must enjoy watching talented church artists waste time ripping each other to shreds over music styles instead of planning great services.
1. Shauna challenged the notion that the church is responsible for artistic fulfillment and encouraged artists to find other venues that allow them to use the parts of their craft that aren’t being used in the church. Take the next five minutes to reflect on your current level of fulfillment as an artist in the church, and journal your thoughts in the space below. When you finish, use the box at the bottom of the page to jot down any ideas that you have for places outside of the church where you might be able to exercise the parts of your craft that are currently underutilized.