

# Practical Ministry Skills: Planning the Worship Service

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## **Leader's Guide**

*How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.*

*Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources and Christianity Today International, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders*

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This special theme of BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is designed to help churches plan, implement, and evaluate the worship service. As you face this process, simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary. The handouts are designed to give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to planning the worship service. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may use them as background information as you tackle the various elements of a worship service.

To help you and your leaders develop the proper attitude toward worship, you may want to start with "How God Evaluates Worship" (p. 3). To address the staffing issues in planning a worship service, read "How to Find a Worship Leader" (p. 8). Other articles cover the steps to take in planning the services (p. 12) and how to evaluate the effectiveness of a service (pp. 15–17).

We hope you enjoy this theme as you and your church leaders benefit from this wealth of information.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).  
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## PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

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### How God Evaluates Worship

*Putting good theology into congregational practice involves more than just the mind.*

Hebrews 11:6

True worship, we are often taught, is more about the mind thinking rightly about God (using theologically correct language and liturgy) rather than the heart's hunger for him. The exercises of our enlightened minds may deduce God, but only our ignited hearts can delight him. Therefore to please God, worship must do four things:

**1. True worship treasures God's presence.** God welcomes those into his presence who want him. The quest may be one of desperation or of delight, of frantic need or of a loving hunger for fellowship, but the motivation is clear—and so is his pleasure with it.

In Exodus 33 and 34, a tender and powerful exchange takes place between God and Moses, spanning the range from an intimate face-to-face encounter to a dramatic declaration by the Almighty. Central is the cry of Moses: "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now your way, that I may know you and that I may find grace in your sight."

To which God replies, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:13–15).

Rather than tightly regimented gatherings, concerned over aesthetics, mechanics, and academic theology, we need to encourage people to fall in love with God.

**2. True worship humbles the heart.** In Isaiah 6:1–8, the abject cry of a sinful man, "Woe is me, for I am undone," was not an achievement of intellectual analysis, but of self-discovery made upon entering God's presence. Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord" with neither apology nor arrogance; it was a breakthrough of grace that produced a breakup of pride. Isaiah, a member of the cultural, educated elite of Judah, demonstrated a childlike humility and teachability. His cry reveals an unreserved availability to God.

**3. True worship sacrifices and then expects something from God.** Hebrews 11:6 puts it clearly: "Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." The text presupposes that worship always brings a sacrifice to God, that "anyone who comes," whether with praise, an offering, or by "laying down" something instructed by the Holy Spirit, is presenting something of himself to God. Simultaneously we are told that the worshiper is to believe something will be given in return by God himself—something rewarding, benevolent, and good.

Some try to defend God against human selfishness and refuse all talk of reward. But the truth is, God freely offers the reward of his blessing—and delights to do so. He doesn't grouse, "Don't you dare give me something and suppose you're manipulating me to give back!" Instead, his Word simply says, in effect, "Since you come to me, I would expect you to believe I will reward your quest." Worship is God's gift to us, intended for our blessing and benefit. He doesn't need it; we do.

**4. True worship extends God's love.** If God-pleasing worship addresses human need, it also extends God's love to others. It is thus unsurprising that the greatest commandment flows into the second, which is like it. The vertical mandate, to love and worship God, is also horizontal, to love the neighbor. This means such things as:

- ◆ Forgiving others, seeking peace and reconciliation day-by-day.
- ◆ Gracious, lifestyle evangelism in both conduct and communication, living out a believable, winsome witness.
- ◆ Unselfish, servant-minded attitude in assisting others in need, including a heart to care for victims of neglect and injustice.

What is birthed in the heart, then, finds expression in the hands—hands that rise in humble praise, give in simple expectancy, and serve with gentle grace.

With such sacrifices, God seems to be well pleased.

—JACK HAYFORD

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## Write a Congregational Worship Statement

*Help your congregation focus by clarifying why your church worships as they do.*

John 4:24

*The landscape of worship today is marked by so many new ideas, approaches, and formats that it's a good idea to clarify our understanding by developing a congregational worship statement. A good worship statement will serve three healthy purposes:*

**1. It is a formation tool.** While worship is about God first of all, it also is about the worshipers. While we worship to honor God, we are being formed in the process. Worship is shaped by our theology, and yet we must admit that the way we worship can reshape both our theology and our identity. This influence of worship takes place so subtly that those who lead worship without a carefully written statement may unintentionally be forming a false identity.

**2. It is a measurement tool.** We need a tool to provide an unambiguous set of criteria as the standard for measurement in both planning and evaluating worship services. How do planners know what to plan if the theological principles and the local implications are not identified? And how can they evaluate worship if everyone has a different set of criteria in mind? A worship statement forces the planners to state the essentials and the boundaries of what they believe true worship is. A clear worship statement would help a church know how to respond to those who like to applaud the anthems. And it would guide the planning team in evaluating the request for drama. A defined worship statement can guide the biblical virtue of discernment, the wisdom to determine what is most fitting.

**3. It is a teaching tool.** Worship leaders today have a large educational task on their hands. Since most worshipers are unable to define worship, part of our task is to teach them what it is that they are engaged in each Sunday. What an excellent tool a worship statement can be. Adult education classes can use it as part of their curriculum. An attractively printed brochure can be made available for anyone to read. New-member classes can use the worship statement to introduce new members to the worship life of the congregation. Visitors can become better informed. Members can have a readily available tool to give to their inquiring neighbors who wonder what to expect when they come for worship.

### What Shall We Include?

We have spoken about the importance of such a statement, but what should it include? How extensive should it be? What subjects are musts? These five subjects should be included:

*1. Our theology of worship.* How we understand God will greatly shape our idea of how to worship. The worship life of a congregation reveals a great deal about our understanding of God. Our perception of God's character and personality will shape how we approach him. Our perception of God's grace and mercy will shape our willingness to be open. Our perception of his compassion will increase our readiness to approach him. Our perception of God's justice will create our penitence. And our perception of God's veracity will increase our trust in his Word and promises.

We worship a triune God. All three persons of the Trinity must be in focus. In your worship statement, avoid leaving a mistaken impression about the God we worship that might prevail if you neglect any reference to the Son and the Spirit. Make clear that we give praise and adoration to the Father, whom we have come to know through the mediating work of the Son, prompted by the internal working of the Holy Spirit. Make sure your statement accurately expresses your theology.



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2. *The purpose of our worship.* We don't come to worship only to hear about God but also to engage in a personal encounter with him. Anthony Robinson, a minister of the United Church of Christ, puts that issue clearly before us with an old and perhaps apocryphal story about two signs that appeared one day on the sweeping green of the Boston Common. One sign said, "This way to lectures about God." The second said, "This way to God." Robinson adds, "In the civic-faith era—and still in many mainline churches—the crowd (such as it is) is likely to follow the first sign. In the post-Christendom, postmodern era, people are increasingly inclined to the direction of the second sign. They seek God, and they seek access to the sacred." (*Transforming Congregational Culture*; Eerdmans, 2003, p. 42). Your purpose of worship must be made clear in your worship statement.

3. *The participants in worship.* For whom are we planning this worship service? Will they be committed Christians who eagerly desire an encounter with God? Will they be underchurched people who are only nominally Christian and perhaps have not been in church for months? Will they be seekers who are not committed but interested in exploring the matter further? Will we assume they are all adults? Will they be adults of primarily one age bracket? Will youth be present? Will families and children be present? How you answer these questions will shape your task of planning worship.

4. *The practices of our worship.* Each church needs to make clear how its theology shapes its practice—following a historic liturgy with a standard fourfold or fivefold pattern of worship, using the lectionary, celebrating communion monthly, and so on. We must have sound reasons for shaping worship the way we do, and we must be able to articulate those reasons to others if they are to worship with understanding. Christ Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, developed a worship statement that includes six major theses or confessions of what the congregation believes about worship, followed by a paragraph that answers the question, "What does this mean at Christ Lutheran?" The explanations are as important as the theses themselves.

5. *The process for worship planning.* How do we evaluate suggestions? How do we evaluate requests? How do we evaluate and manage change in our worship life? Who is responsible for such matters? If we clearly spell out who is ultimately responsible for our worship life, it will be more clear how to make detailed decisions.

—NORMA DEWAAL MALEFYT AND HOWARD VANDERWELL, from *Designing Worship Together* (Alban Institute, 2004). Used by permission.

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### Prime Your People to Worship

*How 5 pastors prepare their congregations for God's presence.*

Revelation 4:9–11

*Churches that worship well don't do so by accident. These pastors have found intentional ways to train people to give God what he is due.*

#### Leverage the Worship Folder

In our worship folder, we have a section titled “Preparing for Worship.” We give the text of the message for the following week and the particular attribute of God that will be the theme for the service. We hope people will read the text and begin to contemplate that particular attribute of God. We might give the page number in the pew Bible and say, “Look up this story and think about how God promised to deliver and how he came through.”

We do this so people can prepare in two ways: (1) they prepare themselves for worship, and (2) they can prepare by thinking of a neighbor or a work colleague they can invite.

Our approach to worship follows the model of Psalm 96, declaring God's praises among the nations. We want to be conscious of worshiping God in front of people who don't know Christ personally, so they can see our worship and be drawn to God.

We put our mission statement in every worship folder. It says, “As God's family we want to worship him well in all we do, develop people by building disciples, and grow by reaching people outside his family.” We say “worship well in all we do” because our mission is far more than worship services. We want to help people so meet God on a Sunday that all week long they are inspired to live for him in the way they handle an out-of-control 13-year-old, or how they handle a boss who is demeaning.

—JOHN CASEY

#### High-Tech Inspiration

Our people are multi-ethnic young adults, and most are fairly well versed in modern technology. One of our first investments was a video projector to help us develop a contemporary worship atmosphere. Often, we use a multimedia presentation at the beginning of the service that relates to the sermon topic.

We try to use technology to simplify and communicate. We believe that computers, projectors, etc. allow us the freedom to communicate truth in creative ways. Our visual aids during worship are usually simple, symbolic images to invite people to focus on God.

During the week we inform our people of the upcoming sermon topic and events via e-mail. Recently we've added an e-mail prayer chain so our prayer team can promptly pray for prayer requests.

We teach people to come early to the worship service with a sense of reverence, to prepare their hearts for an encounter with God.

—RAY CHANG

#### Get All Excited

When I urge people to worship, I always say: “God didn't have to do it. You are not here by accident, or because you look good, or because you have money in the bank. You're here because God has divinely ordered this day for you.”

I remind people, “Who woke you up this morning? Who started you on your way? Who clothed you in your right mind? Who gave you a reasonable portion of health and strength?” After each question, they yell back, “God.”

Preparing people for worship at our church is a spiritual thing—prayer and praise. It's also a physical thing, both mind and body. The participatory nature of worship is key—the call and response.





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So we begin worship with prayer and praise. We have the congregation stand and lift their hands at appropriate times. After a general welcome, we ask all visitors to stand and tell us who they are, and we give them a round of strong applause. Then we sing an upbeat song and hug everybody. It makes the room warm up and spirits start to intermingle.

After the choir sings, we have the altar call, which first involves anointing people and then prayer. Everybody comes down and stands around the altar. Then we sing another song, and I preach the Word. We have a Bible reading program that takes our people through the Bible in a 32-week session. When people are feeding themselves all week, they can come to church *with* something rather than *for* something.

—SHERON PATTERSON

### A Seamless Worship Week

We teach that worship is something every believer should be doing all the time. For that reason, we avoid anything that would draw a sharp line between the Sunday morning service and the rest of life. If we define worship in such a way that it can only be done by the congregation together, that makes it impossible for people to consider worship as a full-time attitude.

We carefully avoid creating an artificial mood that people might come to think of as worship, something unrelated to how people live their daily lives, separating Sunday morning from the rest of the week. I don't use a call to worship, as though we were calling people to be strange, or different, or unreal. Instead, I sometimes introduce the service by relating some of the news items of the week and relating them to our Christian calling, and to the text from which I will be preaching.

My preaching is expository, which means I teach who God reveals himself to be through his Word. Worship, in my view, is acknowledging the truth about who God is and who we are. It is acknowledging his worth, and that should shape every decision we make all week.

We strongly encourage congregational Bible reading through the week, keeping the Word of God on their minds so that even if they skin their knee, they don't call the doctor first, they first talk to God.

—DONALD GREY BARNHOUSE JR.

### Prayer and the Presence

We have a network of people who pray early on Sunday in a side room. Some pray through the service. In the sanctuary we'll have someone playing a keyboard and a group singing, so after people have had a good time laughing and shaking hands in the foyer, they come into the sanctuary to transition to a more God-centered time.

Our choir is more centered on prayer than on music. In choir rehearsal about half the time is spent in prayer, asking the Lord to make them sensitive to the needs of that Sunday and the people there. When they come into the worship service, they're leading the whole flow of worship, and we're all just joining the choir. Because prayer is the center of their music, it draws others in. We want to transition from the outside to the inside.

On Communion Sunday we put our Communion altar center stage. When people come in and see the altar central, it quiets their spirits, and they began to examine their hearts. I talk frequently about repentance, so we don't come to worship encumbered by things in our lives that haven't been dealt with.

We've tried to regain the sense of coming into God's holy presence. The charismatic movement brought in a great jolt of celebration, which the church desperately needed, but after a generation of that, there's little place for a time of reverence, for treating the sanctuary as a holy place rather than just a meeting hall. So we've tried to recover some of that.

But we've been careful not to back away from spontaneity and celebration and free expression. In Communion we sing charismatic praise songs and pray the Lord's Prayer in unison and do the Apostle's Creed. Then when we conclude Communion, we usually pull out all the stops, and people dance if they want.

—DAN SCOTT

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### How to Find a Worship Leader

*5 qualities to keep in mind.*

Exodus 15:1–2

*A friend is on a search committee seeking a full-time worship leader. So far they have sifted through more than 100 names. Picky? Yes, but the committee has to satisfy five culturally defined generations that now populate most churches. Each has its own taste in worship, and each thinks the other four are a bit off-the-wall. So the search is difficult.*

#### The Good and the Bad

For many people choosing a church, worship leaders have become a more important factor than preachers. Mediocre preaching may be tolerated, but an inept worship leader can sink things fast. Worship leaders now do more to define a church's culture than anyone else on the staff.

The good things about worship leaders: they arouse our feelings and our desire to be joyful; they offer less performance-based music and more congregational singing; they realize that people need to spend more time loving God through personal and corporate expression.

The not-so-good things: some worship leaders don't quit a song easily and tend to take the endings into mantra-like overtimes. Many seem unaware that the over-50 crowd can physically hurt when they stand too long (pitched floors are deadly on hips, knees, and feet, while stages are flat). And many worship leaders don't seem to know that worship involves more than music. Thoughtful, sensitive prayer, provocative readings, and soul-stirring liturgies enlarge the menu.

#### Spotting a Good One

You can appreciate why my friend's search committee has a bear of a challenge on its hands. If they sought my advice, here are five things I'd tell them to look for in a new worship leader:

1. *How the worship leader prays in public.* Are the leader's prayers marked by deep reverence? Do they reflect awareness that every decade of an adult's life brings new issues and preoccupations needing intercession? Are the prayers purposed to accomplish more than just segue between songs?
2. *The dignity given to public reading of Scripture.* The people need to hear the Bible read with a quality that rivals that of a good soloist.
3. *The songs the worship leader picks.* They should be singable, so we can hum them during the workweek or sing them if we go to jail, like Paul and Silas. Realistic, not schlocky, with vocabulary we'd use outside church. Honest, not promising God things we really have no intention of being or doing. Broad, representative of the varied singing traditions of the last several centuries. Old songs with new instrumentation are a great idea. Worship music that speaks to us is both timely and timeless.
4. *The use of corporate silence and encouragement of historical reflection.* Not all worship is done to the beat of a drum. We need expressions that speak to all the senses. And we need connection to the ancient expressions of our faith. Note how the worship leader feels about the great historic traditions of creed, liturgy, and sacramental symbol that remind us that folks have been worshiping for centuries before we arrived.
5. *How the worship leader lays the carpet for a sermon to reach both heart and mind.* Are the worshipers prepared emotionally and theologically to be encouraged, challenged, or reproved?

—GORDON MACDONALD



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**How to Develop a Worship Team**

*Practical ideas for putting together a team.*

Psalm 98:1

*Keep these principles in mind when developing a worship team:*

**What Sound Are You After?**

Don't start putting a team together until you have a vision for the sort of service you are going to develop. Do you want a traditional service that focuses only on hymns? If you want a more contemporary sound, do you want soft rock or something more edgy? What kind of beat, drive, and volume do you want? Do you want to include hymns, choruses, and praise music delivered by a guitar-driven band?

Get a vision. You need a predominant sound. Are you pop, hard rock, alternative, folk, R&B? You pick. But do pick. You can't do it all.

**Assemble Your Team**

With patience, you *can* assemble a team. Unless you live in Hollywood or Nashville, though, you may have to pay, but you can do well with a team of "stipended" musicians (\$25-\$100 per week). Many musicians subsist by piecing together small gigs. Playing for free can be next to impossible. Plus, people with artistic temperaments are much easier to direct when they are paid than when they are not.

**Advertise for Talent**

Advertise for talent in church bulletins, local music magazines, or newspapers. Here's a typical ad:

Innovative Protestant church forming a worship team. Must read charts. Need guitar, bass, keys, drums, vocals. Experience is good; passion and willingness to be a team player is better. Call Randy at \_\_\_\_\_

Collect applications and begin interviewing. Look for those who are spiritually open, will take direction, and can play by ear and transpose on the fly. A band member must be a quick study.

Tall order? You bet. It takes time to build a team like this, but these criteria are essential.

Decide what you expect spiritually from your band members. Do you want most of them to be committed Christians, or is it okay for a minority to be non-converted but open spiritually? If the latter, think of it as a relational evangelism opportunity.

Develop a rhythm for the life of the band. It's important as a service grows that you try to have enough players at each instrument that no one plays more than three times per month. Without the week off, musicians may get stale, feisty, and eventually quit.

**Establish the Work Pattern**

Determine when to rehearse the band. This is harder than you might think, but notice I said *when* not *if* you rehearse. Professional musicians who can deliver what you need don't like rehearsing for free or booking rehearsals on weeknights when they might have a paying gig. Plus, you still need a set up, equipment check, and run-through on Sunday morning.

We organize our band so there is an overall bandleader who coordinates everything. A musical director calls the shots on musical technicalities. An administrator makes tapes, charts, selects each week's worship songs, and keeps records. And the worship leader leads the congregation in worship. We do all this, with outstanding musicians, for about the budget for a full-time music minister.



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### Prepare the Worship Leader

The worship leader will connect the band and the congregation with the music being offered to God as worship. This is a key role. The person must be a leader and passionate about worship. And it doesn't hurt, though not essential, if the person is musically talented. Start your team with one leader and several backup singers and then, as time goes by, develop one or more of the backup singers into a skilled worship leader.

Here's what a worship leader needs to know:

- ◆ It's not about you; it's about God. Be strong, but don't let your ego, personality, or presence up front distract people from connecting with God.
- ◆ Help people know where the music is going. Give visual and verbal cues.
- ◆ Stay on the melody and make it easy for folks to sing. Keep the band accountable to deliver songs that the average 40-year-old male can sing. These are the most musically challenged attenders, and we must not lose them.
- ◆ Don't preach. The pastor will be preaching later. Worship leaders lead worship; pastors preach.
- ◆ Be non-directive. Let the music talk and the Spirit speak. Don't do the "let's all lift our hands and tell him we love him" bit. Let God do his work in individual hearts.

### Be Prepared for ...

As you assemble your team, realize that several things are going to happen.

1. Some people you pick are going to turn out to be a bad fit personality-wise, flaky in their work habits, or simply not able to grow in skill level with the worship team. If you are afraid to let people go, don't form a worship team.
2. Musicians emit some strange hormonal scent that only they can pick up from each other. If you start doing a particular music style, musicians will flock to your church.
3. You will find that many musicians have been hurt by the church because their music was viewed as evil somewhere else. One guy who sings in a famous punk band in Seattle did a special song in our church. Afterwards, he came up to me crying, hugged me, and said, "I have been in music since I was a teenager, and this is the first time any pastor ever let me do any music in church."
4. Musical excellence will increase weekly. Be patient and let it happen. Good things take time. Bands and music are organic, not mechanical. They take a growing season.

### From Band to a Community

Musicians desire community. Our band meets about once a month outside of Sunday morning to do a Bible study, pray, share needs, cover schedules and band business, and rehearse new music.

Our band also has an annual, overnight retreat to build community, do some planning, and jam. We have an annual Christmas dinner with members' families or significant others, and several spontaneous dinners at players' houses.

What commitments do we expect? A covenant or job description is helpful. Our band covenant talks about the commitment to be team players, to show up on time for band meetings and rehearsals for worship services. The church covenants to listen to band members' concerns, review their performances annually, and pay them in a fair and timely fashion.

Some closing tips: Don't be cowed by the artistic temperament. The pastor is in charge of worship. At the same time, love and cherish your pioneer band members. Be patient with mistakes without lowering expectations for continuous, quality improvement.

And finally, wear out the knees in your pants praying that God will guide your leadership, and that he will use the ragtag bunch of players you assemble to enable your congregation to offer him the worship he is due.

—RANDY L. ROWLAND

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### Multiple Worship Planning Teams

*Make the worship planning manageable by spreading the work between many teams.*

Romans 15:5–6

*Multiple planning teams are composed of members of the congregation who share responsibility for worship planning. The worship committee oversees the entire process, while the pastor serves as a key person in selecting the Scripture texts and themes for worship. These teams, which range from two to six people, work with the pastor to create the worship service. This lessens the load on the pastor and brings variety and fresh ideas to the service. These teams can be arranged in five different models:*

1. *Weekly teams.* Each week a different team of planners is responsible. The size of a congregation and the number of volunteers available to serve will determine how workable this model is. If, for instance, there are four weekly planning teams, each will be responsible for one week of the month. At Loop Christian Ministries of Chicago the members of the worship committee attend monthly meetings and discuss overall issues and advance planning, but each member takes individual responsibility for preparing and leading the service as often as every six weeks.
2. *Monthly teams.* Some believe that weekly teams do not provide enough continuity. If a different team plans the service each week, the worship services from one week to another may be very different in tone. Consequently, many churches prefer to assign an entire month to a team. When the month is finished, team members take a rest until their month comes up again.
3. *Rotating teams.* Other churches are concerned about the work that worship planning involves and don't want anyone to be overloaded or to lose freshness. So they distribute the planning among multiple teams, but not on the basis of weeks, months, or seasons. These teams are assigned their Sundays on the basis of a regular rotation for a certain number of weeks or months, depending on how many teams are available.
4. *Seasonal Teams.* Churches that pay close attention to the Christian year may prefer that a planning team focus on a season of the church year. Separate planning teams will be organized for Advent, Lent, Eastertide, and so on. This planning team will be able to focus all its research and efforts on its assigned season. Such a team will likely be composed of members who have expertise and interest in the season assigned.
5. *Sectional teams.* Instead of asking a planning team to take responsibility for an entire worship service, some congregations have chosen to designate separate planning teams for specific parts of the worship service. One team may specialize in developing the service of confession; another team focuses its efforts on writing litanies and prayers; yet another will concentrate on the role of children in the service, or the sacraments; another might focus on the music. Each of these teams should be given the themes and Scripture readings for the service so the content will be consistent in theme. One lay planner or the pastor should take all the components and integrate them into an order of service.

—NORMA DEWAAL MALEFYT AND HOWARD VANDERWELL, from *Designing Worship Together* (Alban Institute, 2004). Used by permission.

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**Plan the Worship Service**

*Keep these eight steps in mind when planning a worship service.*

1 Peter 1:13

*Whatever structure we have outlined for worship will be empty unless the Holy Spirit fills it with his blessing. Worship planning should not be a totally human effort, for none of us possess sufficient wisdom and discernment within ourselves alone. With that in mind, these eight steps will be useful in planning corporate worship:*

**1. Select the Seasonal Calendar**

Will we follow a September-through-May program calendar? Or the annual January-through-December calendar? The secular calendar of national events? The Christian calendar, in which the year begins with Advent and is completed with the season after Pentecost, or “Ordinary time,” and Christ the King Sunday?

**2. Design Seasonal Units**

Whether or not you plan to follow a traditional church-year calendar, you will probably observe at least some seasons and days of the church year, for example, Advent, Holy Week, etc. Planners will want to begin by identifying those observances.

**3. Brainstorm Major Events**

Once the seasonal calendar has been established, other major events in worship must be considered. These might include mission emphasis, stewardship month, and a congregational anniversary. Identify these and begin to think of who will carry extra responsibilities to plan for them.

**4. Construct the Weekly Service**

It is advantageous to have multiple weekly services in various stages of preparation at any given time. Weekly planning requires that all information needed on the theme of each service be available, that all planners have done their homework, and that all the pieces are ready to be put together to create an integrated whole.

**5. Make Final Preparations**

At this point in the planning, others must be brought into the plan—those who direct groups, coach leaders, arrange rehearsals, prepare projection slides and other visuals, secure the necessary copyright permissions, and prepare readable and understandable printed worship folders.

**6. Do the Worship Walk-Through**

Those who lead the service will experience their share of anxiety and jitters. These normal anxieties will become exaggerated if leaders are afraid that something essential has escaped their attention. Consider a short time on Saturday morning to look for needed transitions and potential difficulties. Before the service begins on Sunday, gather all the participants for one last look at the service.

**7. Make a Post-Service Review**

Gather briefly after the time of worship to review it. Did we select songs the worshipers were able to sing well? What was the mood and spirit of the congregation? Were there any glaring omissions? What distractions did we encounter? Where did God seem to break through most clearly? These kinds of reflections can easily be lost after a few days.

**8. Conduct a Formal Evaluation**

At the next monthly worship committee meeting, conduct a more formal and objective evaluation of the worship. A healthy and vital worship life means asking hard questions so we may learn what best helps people to encounter God. Evaluation requires a willingness to learn from past mistakes so as not to repeat them.

—NORMA DEWAAL MALEFYT AND HOWARD VANDERWELL, from *Designing Worship Together* (Alban Institute, 2004). Used by permission.

## PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

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### Worship as Dialogue

*Never forget that worship is about God, not us.*

1 John 4:19

We need to always remember that the purpose of worship is to engage with God. In planning a worship service, we are not designing a concert to entertain or inspire an audience. Worship is a holy event in which God and his people converse. Our first purpose is not to “get something out of worship” but to extend to God glory and adoration. Though providing inspiration and nurture for worship is important, it is secondary.

Keep in mind the following principles as you plan your worship service and look for ways to communicate these ideas to your congregation. Until they get these things clear in their hearts and minds, they will be dissatisfied with corporate worship.

#### Principles for Worship as Dialogue

1. *Worship is a corporate conversation between God and his children.* This should always be our goal in any worship service.
2. *Worship happens at God’s gracious invitation.* We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). This drives us to worship.
3. *The major activity of worship happens on the vertical dimension.* Forget about the person next to you. Concentrate on your relationship with God.
4. *God speaks to us in the greeting, the pardon, the reading of Scripture, the sermon, and the blessing.* Teach your congregation to listen for his voice.
5. *We speak to God in prayer, confession, affirmations of faith, and song.* Encourage your people to thoughtfully speak to God during these parts of the service.
6. *Preaching, as the proclamation of God’s Word, is central to worship.* Corporate worship is not simply singing together; it includes the entire service.
7. *Christ comes to us in the celebration of the sacraments.* Help your congregation understand why we practice the sacraments.
8. *Congregational song is the voice of the people.* Singing together is a small taste of heaven.
9. *Worship engages the intellect and understanding.* We need to think about what we are singing and saying. Otherwise it will not penetrate our hearts and minds.
10. *Worship includes the whole range of emotion.* Encourage your people to respond with their whole being, heart, soul, mind, and strength.
11. *Worship reflects our oneness with the global church.* It’s encouraging to think of believers all around the world joining us in worship of our God.
12. *Obedience to God in all of life is the desired fruit of worship.* Worship should change us by making us want God’s way in our lives.

—NORMA DEWAAL MALEFYT AND HOWARD VANDERWELL, from *Designing Worship Together* (Alban Institute, 2004). Used by permission.

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# Leading Worship Leaders

*4 ways to guide artists.*

Psalm 100

*Those who provide leadership to arts ministries have two primary goals: to lead artists in creating meaningful moments in church and to lead artists to become more like Jesus. This two-fold goal is a huge challenge. Single-mindedly devoted to their craft, artists can slip into self-absorption and lose sight of the big picture. It's rare to have a simple conversation with artists or a simple decision about approach and ministry. Artists often see the world in shades of gray rather than black and white, and they resist quick or simplistic conclusions. The following four areas can help you lead this talented group of people.*

**1. Keep the vision clear.** Even the most devoted volunteer artists can grow fuzzy about why we are doing this. It is essential for leaders of artists to err on the side of over-communicating the purpose for serving and the church mission rather than assuming everyone just gets it and will always get it. With so many rehearsals and services, how do we make time to communicate our foundation?

Experiment with different strategies to keep vision clear. Gather arts-ministry volunteers a few times each year for this purpose. Highlight core values and inspire your teams by showing them examples of changed lives. Let them know that you expect your leaders to consistently reinforce both the church vision and values through individual conversations and prayer times in smaller rehearsal settings.

**2. Lead up effectively.** Artists in every church need a bridge to those who make the major decisions—including the pastor and leadership bodies with influence over the artists. Leading up involves communicating clearly to leaders what artists need to flourish. For example, few church boards comprehend why the arts ministry needs certain equipment—and certainly won't believe what some of this equipment costs.

Artists also need a fuller picture of all the departments competing for limited church resources. Otherwise they develop tunnel vision and ignore other significant ministry areas. Teach them to never be abrasive or demanding. Model how to truly listen to others and then to communicate in a clear and compelling way.

**3. Be realistic about creative output.** Try to pace your key artists' creative output. Protect them from excessive pace and potential burnout. Church artists are given both the blessing and the curse of frequent deadlines—every seven days! Artists are not machines, and there is a limit to how much they can produce with innovation, joy, and health.

Too many church leaders don't understand that the artists who create services need quiet fueling to do their best work. If we try to hook them up to a constant milking machine 50 weeks a year, we will suffocate their best ideas, possibly damage their souls, and most likely lose them for long-term ministry.

Every artist is unique, with a different capacity for creative output. The key to leading them effectively is to understand their rhythms and provide a pace that allows them to stop their relentless output and restore themselves.

**4. Confront character issues immediately.** Pay attention to your instincts and have the courage to ask questions and speak truth. Don't assume that the individual is aware of his or her behavior, or that it's not your place to hold the person accountable. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, discern when it is necessary to lovingly inquire about a pattern you have seen. This includes times when you observe hints of pride, jealousy, a critical spirit, bitterness, laziness, loose talk, or any other behaviors that do not reflect the character of Jesus Christ. It's scary to engage in these difficult conversations—but our team members' lives and churches' spiritual vitality are at stake.

—NANCY BEACH. Reprinted by permission from *An Hour on Sunday* (Zondervan, 2004).



## PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

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### Was It Worship?

*A diagnostic tool for evaluating your service.*

1 Chronicles 16:23–29

*Though church leaders spend extraordinary energy preparing for worship, many do not evaluate whether the energy was well spent. Part of this reluctance comes from the (correct) belief that worship is a spiritual activity and that God's role in it ultimately is a mystery. Who can say, after all, whether people really worshiped, whether God was encountered, or whether God was truly glorified?*

*Yet if we've been given the ability to plan worship, we can evaluate at some level what we've done. The following tool, prepared by LEADERSHIP's editors and advisers, can help. It does not cover all the bases (for example, sermon evaluation is left out), and not all questions fit every congregation. Feel free to customize it for your congregation.*

### The Essentials

These elements have historically been part of worship. These are objective questions: Did our service include this element? If so, in what way? If not, why?

#### Preparation and prayer

- ◆ Did we help people prepare for worship?
- ◆ Were people prayed for before and during the service?
- ◆ Did prayer in the service include: Adoration? Thanksgiving? Confession (with assurance of pardon)? Supplication for personal and church needs? Intercession for others outside the church?
- ◆ Was God invoked as a Trinity?
- ◆ Were people in the congregation given an opportunity to pray aloud? Silently? Together in small groups?

#### Praise and song

- ◆ Were people given opportunity to sing?
- ◆ Were there other opportunities for the congregation to participate: kneeling, reading, reciting, clapping, etc.?

#### Word and theology

- ◆ Of the major parts of Scripture, which were read aloud: Old Testament? Psalms? Epistles? Gospels?
- ◆ Did the service in some way retell the saving deeds of biblical history?
- ◆ Did the service tie in with the theme of the Christian year?

#### Sacraments/ordinances

- ◆ Was Baptism or Communion observed?



## PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

### Congregational responses

- ◆ Was the offering set as part of worship?
- ◆ Was there opportunity for people to dedicate themselves more fully to Christ?
- ◆ Were people invited to become Christians?
- ◆ Were people able to minister to one another in the service (pray for one another, testify to God's goodness, exercise spiritual gifts)?

### The Approach

This includes more subjective judgments, so it is good to get input from a variety of people, both leaders and participants.

### Flow

- ◆ Tone: Was the mood reverent? Joyful? Appropriate for the theme of the service?
- ◆ Focus: Was the service directed toward the people or directed toward God?
- ◆ Intent: Was the purpose of each part of the service clear? Did people understand its relation to the rest of the service? Were transitions clear? Too quick? Awkward?
- ◆ Style: Was the service conducted too formally or too casually for this congregation?
- ◆ Tempo: Did the service drag? Move too quickly? Where did we bog or rush?

### Community life

- ◆ Did announcements represent healthy congregational life?
- ◆ Did we make guests feel welcome?
- ◆ Were both staff and laity visible up front?
- ◆ What demographic groups did the up-front leadership reflect (gender, age, marital status, etc.)?

### Congregational participation

- ◆ Was the bulletin easy to follow?
- ◆ Did we confuse people in any way?
- ◆ Did the congregation understand what it was supposed to do (especially if it was new)? Was it a meaningful act of worship?
- ◆ Did the congregation participate in the way the worship planners hoped? Why or why not?

### Readers, presenters, and pray-ers

- ◆ Were these participants well prepared?
- ◆ Did they communicate with sincerity and feeling?
- ◆ Any distracting mannerisms?
- ◆ Did the prayers seem meaningful or clichéd?

## PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

### Singing

- ◆ Was the ratio of meditative to joyful songs appropriate for the theme of the service?
- ◆ How many new/unfamiliar songs was the congregation asked to sing?
- ◆ Did the accompanist(s) help the congregation sing well—in tempo, volume?
- ◆ Did the congregation know what to do: which verses to sing, when to start/stop, etc.?

### Special Music

- ◆ Were the words clear?
- ◆ Did the quality of presentation fit the occasion?
- ◆ Did the style and message of the music fit the service?

### Invitation

- ◆ Was the invitation (for prayer, rededication, or conversion) clear?
- ◆ Was the tone sincere, personal, and non-threatening?

### The Spiritual Aspect

Though God ultimately works in mysterious ways, this is the most important dimension of worship.

- ◆ Heart: Where in the service were people's affections/emotions most touched?
- ◆ Soul: In what ways did the service allow people to meet God? Did anyone report such an experience, however subtle?
- ◆ Mind: What spiritual truth was the service trying to convey? Was it understood?
- ◆ Strength: What action did the service point people to? How were they encouraged to serve Christ?

—LEADERSHIP, Spring 1999, Vol.XX, No. 2, Page 62

## PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

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### Further Exploration

*Resources for planning the worship service.*

**Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship** by *Thomas G. Long*. Thomas Long discusses nine characteristics of vital and faithful worship practiced by a wide range of congregations (The Alban Institute, 2001; ISBN 1566992400).

**Building Church Leaders** *training resources* by *Christianity Today International*. “Worship,” “Knowing God,” and “Prayer and Awakening” will help church members develop good attitudes toward the corporate and private worship of God (BuildingChurchLeaders.com; click on “Worship”).

**Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning** by *Norma deWaal Malefyt, Howard Vanderwell*. Much of the material in this training packet came from this book. It is full of practical information in planning the worship service (The Alban Institute, 2005; ISBN 1566992966).

**The Early Church** *Bible studies* by *Christianity Today International*. This 6-session course looks at what the early church has to teach us, including in the area of worship (ChristianBibleStudies.com; click on “Christian History”). Other studies concerning worship at this site include “David’s Dance Across the Line,” “Worshipping Well,” “Faith Application,” and “Eyes Wide Open.”

**Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations** by *Dan Kimball, David Crowder, Sally Morgenthaler*. In a conversational, narrative style, this book guides church leaders on how to create alternative services from start to finish (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 0310256445).

**Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views (Counterpoints)** by *Paul Basden*. This book provides a forum for presentation, critique, and defense of six prominent worship styles: • Formal-Liturgical • Traditional Hymn-Based • Contemporary Music-Driven • Charismatic • Blended • Emerging (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 0310247594).

**The Heart of the Artist** by *Rory Noland*. Written for artists by an artist, this frank, knowledgeable book deals head-on with issues every person in an arts ministry faces (Zondervan, 1999; ISBN 0310224713).

**Here I Am to Worship: Never Lose the Wonder of Worshiping the Savior (Worship Series)** by *Tim Hughes, Mike Pilavachi*. This book addresses such issues as heart-attitude, maintaining a freshness in your relationship with the Lord, and leading others through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Regal Books, 2004; ISBN 0830733221).

**An Hour on Sunday: Creating Moments of Transformation and Wonder** by *Nancy Beach*. This includes ten foundational principles that unite artists and ministry leaders around a common language and empower artists and pastors to work effectively together (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 0310252962).

**LeadershipJournal.net**. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

**Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts** by *Harold M. Best*. Harold Best casts a holistic vision for worship as continuous outpouring in all settings and contexts. Best addresses popular misunderstandings about the use of music and offers correctives toward a more biblically consistent practice of artistic action (InterVarsity, 2003; ISBN 0830832297).