

Planning Worship Like a Jeweler

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September 2004

Of every particular element in worship, be able to name

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| 1. <i>Love You.</i> | <i>PRAISE/ADORATION</i> |
| 2. <i>Sorry.</i> | <i>CONFESSION</i> |
| 3. <i>Why?</i> | <i>LAMENT</i> |
| 4. <i>Come again? (I'm listening)</i> | <i>HEARING THE WORD</i> |
| 5. <i>Help.</i> | <i>INTERCESSION</i> |
| 6. <i>Thank You.</i> | <i>THANKSGIVING</i> |
| 7. <i>What Can I Do?</i> | <i>DEDICATION</i> |
| 8. <i>Bless You.</i> | <i>BLESSING/DOXOLOGY</i> |

Possible cues:

1. how it is printed
2. how it is projected
3. how it is introduced
4. what precedes or follows it

PROVERB : In all aspects of worship, make sure there is a balance of familiar things and things that will stretch the congregation.

An entire service of unfamiliar music will not enable the congregation to participate. An entire service of overly familiar or often-used examples can lead worship to become cliché. It's too easy then to have worshipers go on automatic pilot. Balance is the key!

PROVERB: Start and end strong.

Every service will probably have some unfamiliar things in it. But those can be disconcerting if they are placed at the beginning or end of the service. A sturdy congregational song to start and end the service is the first step toward encouraging greater participation.

Planning Templates and Jazz Music

Worship planning—in ANY style!—requires a solid, balanced template or default pattern. Without it, congregations are subject to the whims of a single leader, to endless innovation, and to a likely imbalance of worship actions. Let spontaneity and improvisation arise out of form and discipline—just like in good jazz music. A good template: a) Features a balance of worship actions (praise, penitence, dedication, prayer, scripture, etc.), b) features a pattern that alternates between God’s words to us and our words to God (and helps us experience each for what it really is—not just as another nice song), and c) may exist in greater detail than appears in a printed bulletin.

Major “movements” in worship	<u>Worship Bulletin: Congregation A</u>	<u>Worship Bulletin Template: Congregation B (minimalist bulletin—but still with all the actions in column A)</u>
Gathering	<u>Praise</u> ↓ Call to Worship (scripture) ↑ Acts of Praise ↓ Greeting (scripture) <u>Confession</u> ↓ Call to Confession (scripture) ↑ Prayer of Confession ↓ Assurance of Pardon (scripture) ⇄ Passing of the Peace ↑ Response of Thanksgiving	Call to Worship and Songs of Praise Confession of Sin, Declaration of God’s Grace, Exuberant Thanksgiving
Proclamation	↑ Prayer for Illumination ↓ Old Testament Reading ↓ Psalm ↓ New Testament Reading ↓ Sermon	Scripture Reading and Sermon
Response to the Word	↑ Song or Hymn of Response ↑ Creed and/or Testimonials ↑ Prayers of Intercession/Pastoral Prayer ↑ Offering ↑ Offertory Prayer	Responses in Prayer, Testimony, Offering
Lord’s Supper	↓ Invitation to the Table (scripture) ↑ Great Prayer of Thanksgiving ↓ Words of Institution (scripture) ↑ Prayer of Consecration ↓ Communion ↑ Thanksgiving	Lord’s Supper
Sending	↑ Song or Hymn of Dedication ↓ Call to Service (scripture) ↓ Blessing/Benediction (scripture)	Call to Service in God’s World and Blessing

Thematic Planning

Worship planning should begin with a scripture text; therefore, worship planning begins with the preacher. But naming the text and theme are not enough. Neither is finding a hymn that refers to the text. Happy are they who involve all worship planners in textual study. We need to ask questions like: What action will sermon inspire? What act of confession is appropriate to the theme? How will we pray differently in light of this theme?

	<u>Sample 1</u>	<u>Sample 2</u>
Text	Genesis 1	John 15
Theme	The power and imagination of divine creation	Sending of the Spirit
Related Texts: Psalms	8	104
Related Texts: Texts from other testaments	Hebrews 1: 1-4, John 1:1-4	Ezekiel 36, 37
Other texts the sermon will refer to	Proverbs 8	Romans 8
<u>Particular Approaches to Aspects of Worship</u>		
Praise/Thanksgiving	God as creative, all-powerful	God as triune
Penitence	Confess our spoiling of the environment	Confess our presumption, our seeking to live on our own power
Intercession	Prayers for the restoration of all creation	Prayers for the sending of the Spirit
Dedication (action to which the sermon calls us)	Praise—a deep awareness of the immensity and pervasiveness of God’s created power	Discernment—learning ways of discerning the spirits of the age; refusal to limit our vision of what the Spirit might be doing
Lord’s Supper	Highlight notion that bread and wine are gifts of creation that bear spiritual blessing	Highlight notion that the Spirit is the main agent in our communion with Christ—not our own power of imagination or the strength of our own piety

Transitions

Worship leaders are the main guides that lead the congregation on their journey through the service. The words that lead from one part of the service to the next are key tools that help in this task. To be honest, many worship leaders don't spend much time at all considering the words they will use. Some refuse to because they react against anything too planned or canned. Some have simply never thought about doing it.

But the words we speak have the power to inspire or frustrate. They can make a visitor feel welcome or unwelcome. They can lead the congregation to focus on the purpose of worship, or get everyone bogged down in mechanics. Many times, when we don't think about the words we say, we end up communicating some inaccurate, dangerous, or hurtful messages. The following are actual lines spoken by worship leaders.

- "Men and women sing the first line together. Men sing the second with the children. Women sing the first and the third. Then everyone finishes it up."
- "Well I guess that now we have to have the confession of sin."
- "Well, I didn't really prepare for this next part of the service."
- "We really haven't had time to rehearse this, but oh well."
- "Ok? Let's see what is next. Well, next we will say the creed."
- "Isn't this more fun than in a traditional worship service?"
- "Wasn't that song great? I'll bet they don't sing that way at the church across the street!"
- "Well, our secretary messed up again, and the song number in the bulletin for this part of the service is wrong."

Often, without intending it, worship leaders say something very different than what they mean. They are utterly confusing. They suggest that worship is routine. They mock another church. They signal that worship is not all that important. They blame someone else for a mistake. None of these comments focuses on the meaning or purpose of what is happening. They are barriers rather than enablers of worship.

To avoid transitions like these, ask the following questions: Are my instructions about the mechanics as concise and clear as possible? Does the transition link two acts of worship, showing how they are related? Does the transition avoid being pedantic or preachy? Is the tone of the transition warm and inviting or cold and inhospitable? Are there especially poignant lines in a song or hymn that you could highlight in your introduction?

Consider these examples:

- "Some of us gather for worship this morning with great joy. Some of us gather with tears. Our opening song is based on a Psalm that expresses both joy and honest pain."
- "Next, we state precisely what we believe, using the words of the Apostles' Creed. These words are printed in your worship folder. If you are visiting with us today, we would be happy to explain the joy we have because of these statements. Simply ask one of the greeters at the door at the end of the service."
- "The sermon ended with a call to confession. Our song of response enables us to just that."

Consider writing out your transitions ahead of time—even if you don't refer to your notes in the service. Even if you speak extemporaneously, you'll do better if you've worked out a written version ahead of time. Then after the service, go back and listen to a recording of what you said. Work together with other worship leaders in your congregation to think about ways to improve the hospitality in your spoken transitions.

THE LAST PROVERB: The nuts and bolts are a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

Hone the ability to work hard, and then to set aside worry, to engage in worship, to enjoy and glorify God:

"We have stuck to founding, building singing, ringing, to vestments, incense burning, and to all the additional preparations for divine worship up to the point that we consider this preparation the real, main divine worship and do not know how to speak of any other. And we are acting as wisely as the man who wants to build a house and spends all his goods on the scaffolding and never, as long as he lives, gets far enough along to lay one stone of his house."

—Martin Luther (E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, Concordia, 1959, vol. 1, p. 302).

"We have stuck to Powerpoint, sound systems, children's messages, drama skits, and seekerfriendliness up to the point that we consider this all the real divine worship, and we do not know how to speak of any other. We are acting as wisely as the one who wants to surf the internet, but spends all available resources on a big monitor, and so has none left over for internet service, and thus never has the chance to actually get online."

—anonymous, January 2001