

Dayspring Church of Christ
November 5, 2014

Suggestions and Guidelines for Worship Planners

I. Approach

After 30 years of the pleasure of participating in communal worship at Dayspring, we make the following observations, which may be of help to those who volunteer to plan a Sunday morning worship service.

a) Just a little background: Dayspring does not confine “worship” to what happens during a one-hour collective gathering on Sunday morning. In response to what we felt was a narrow, restrictive use of the term by some, we studied the concept of “worship” and resisted for many years even calling what we did “worship” or “the worship.” Instead, we called it “the worship assembly” or “the communion hour.” Of course, what we do at that gathering is worship, and we acknowledge that it is unique in that we together celebrate the Lord’s Supper, but we are clear that worship is something that also happens at other times and places, and we don’t want the shorthand reference to “worship” to lead to misunderstanding.

b) With that background in mind, we consider our “worship assembly” (hereinafter “Worship”) to be a time of praise to God, of celebration of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and of unifying and building up the body of Christ, the church. Thus, there’s both a vertical and a horizontal dimension to it. It is important to keep these two dimensions in view as we plan. Ideally, this assembly time aims for mutual edification, not entertainment *per se*, not personal/individual promotion or indulgence, not conflict. People come to join us for worship for various reasons and with various needs. As much as possible, those needs should be kept in mind.

Nevertheless, one of the beautiful blessings of having a variety of volunteers plan the worship is that we gain insights from one another that we would otherwise miss. We grow to love and appreciate one another more. We share our individual gifts in the Lord’s service, and we share in one another’s journey toward God, with Jesus, in the Spirit. So, there is every reason to allow worship planners freedom and creativity as they plan, so long as they do so keeping in mind how it will be received by everyone present, including Christ himself.

II. Some Specifics

Again, some Christians are more liturgical and appreciate continuity and tradition; others enjoy more free-form and spontaneous worship experiences. No single service is likely to be a mountain-top experience for everyone. Nevertheless, we trust that if we thoughtfully include the basic elements, God will bless and accept our offering, and most will be edified and will at least appreciate what the planner has put into it. Those basics include:

1. Praise to God (adoration, acknowledgement, gratitude, humility)
2. Confession of our faith
3. Confession of sin; prayer for forgiveness
4. Proclamation of the gospel through the reading of scripture
5. Intercessory prayer—for congregants, special needs, the world
6. A focus on God's love as expressed ultimately through Jesus
7. A recognition of God's providence through the continuing work of the Spirit
8. An invitation to all believers to come share the Lord at the communion feast
9. An opportunity for worshippers to contribute financially to the work of the church
10. An expression of acceptance, encouragement, and love for one another
11. A charge to the congregation answering the question, "How should we then live?"

All of the above fundamentals can be offered to and expressed by the congregation in a variety of ways—by song, by scripture, by art, drama, or video excerpts, by various kinds of responsive readings, by prayers of all sorts, by sermon, by sounds and by silence, by participatory activities. To that end, we suggest to the worship planner:

- a) Prepare a written order of service. We try to archive all the wonderful worship services we've had over the years, so please make sure Tracey also has a copy of any written comments or other supplemental readings or materials you may use in your service.
- b) Choose the scriptures you want to use, along with any readers you'd like to have read them. We do sometimes have someone present a sermon, and if that is you, you could include the scriptures in the sermon.
- c) Choose the songs (include the hymn numbers from our current hymnal in your order of service) as well as the song leader. With regard to music, it is just fine to introduce new music if you or someone of your choice can teach it to the congregation. It is also just fine to have an occasional solo, duet, small group, or to use a recorded piece. While most at Dayspring have no doctrinal objection to instrumental music in "worship," most of the congregation holds the a cappella music tradition in high esteem, for several reasons, and do not want to relinquish this tradition to a regular fare of bands or other instrumental music. Thus, any instrumental music should be used sparingly and with sensitivity, so that it blends nicely with the congregational a cappella music. The same sensitivity is called for with regard to other new or special music: not too much at any one time.

Choosing a song leader is important and should not be left to the last minute. Dayspring maintains a list of volunteers who are willing to lead singing when asked.

- d) Plan the readings. Many are willing to read when called on, but they usually appreciate having the reading ahead of time. Also, if it's a reader who is young, old, extra short or tall, or not a veteran reader, you may want to say a word about reading slowly, having the microphone at the right height for them, and projecting their voice. They need to interpret as they read, not read "Alleluia" in a mumble. Usually a brief word to readers is sufficient. If you want the reading out of a particular version, you may wish to locate it online and print it out for the reader.

- e) Call on people ahead of time to lead the congregational prayers. If you have a certain topic you wish covered in a particular prayer, let them know.
- f) Remember that we are an age-and-gender-inclusive congregation. Please consider using men and women, boys and girls, old and young, as you deem best.
- g) We usually have a brief word of welcome at the beginning, at which time we ask visitors to please sign a visitor card from the front of the hymnal and drop it into the basket during the offering.
- h) We currently have two “emcees” (Robin Acker and Cory King) who handle the announcements and prayer requests at the end. However, if you wish to do so yourself, then please let them know ahead of time and that will be fine.
- i) Please review your order of worship and consider how much time each element will take, so that you can plan accordingly. Having only two songs is probably too few; thirteen is probably too many. A good rule of thumb is about three minutes per song.
- j) Start planning early. A number of worship planners say it takes about 15-20 hours to plan a service from beginning to end, get the order of worship done, get the volunteers, and write the comments or sermon, if any. The congregation will know and appreciate how much work you’ve put into it, and you will be blessed by your time spent in preparing this gift to God.