

Leading Worship Services

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1. Worship is a communal action

God is the focus and the people, not the worship leader, play the primary role. The task of the leader is not to control worship or to be the centre of attention. Rather, it is to facilitate the communal engagement of the people with God. The worship leader must be sensitive and responsive to those who are present so that the service can speak its message in a way that is heard, felt, and understood.

2. Participation

Worshippers need to be able to see and hear clearly if they are to fully participate in the service. Is the lighting good enough for people to read a Prayer Book. Is the data projector bright enough and text large enough to be clearly visible throughout the Church? Is there a backup plan for when technology inevitably fails? What about those with hearing difficulties? Is the PA system/hearing aid loop working and properly adjusted? Are leaders/readers using the microphones correctly and to best effect?

3. Distractions

Are there outside noises, flickering lights... that might cause people to lose focus? Being too hot or too cold are distractions. Is the heating or air conditioning/fans adequate for the space? Are they turned on early enough to have an effect?

4. Expectations

Participants need to know what is expected of them (when to stand/sit, listen/respond, how to take communion and who can take it...). This is especially true for visitors and is a cause of anxiety. Every Church has its own way of doing things. Assume nothing and give clear directions. Anticipate people's concerns and be proactive in addressing them.

5. Practical advice

A number of the above are infrastructure matters and may need to be raised with the Parish Council. However, others can be addressed, or at least

minimised, by the way we conduct ourselves when leading services. Consider the following:

- Welcome everyone and introduce yourself. Not everyone will know who you are. Assume that there will be visitors and behave accordingly. Be careful not to single out individuals/visitors without prior consent.
- Be warm, confident, and relaxed. We set the tone with our opening words. Realise you might feel nervous and plan for it. Write out your introduction or at least the key points you want to make. Be aware that nerves make us speak/read more quickly than usual, so deliberately pause after key sentences or phrases. If you breathe from your diaphragm as you read, this will help you read calmly because your breathing pattern won't physically allow you to rush your words.
- Prepare the service. Leading God's people in worship deserves our very best so don't just turn up and wing it. A run sheet will ensure that you know who is doing what, whether they have turned up, and that nothing important is missed. It's ok to leave things out or add things into Prayer Book services. Variety is good. You may have a verse or prayer that is appropriate to topical events or a particular occasion. However, be mindful of how your changes might affect both the logical progression and the theology of the service. If in doubt, ask.
- Practice. It takes work to make things seem natural and flow effortlessly. Work out what words or ideas you want to emphasise in each section, where the pauses should be, and where the tempo should change. Practice by reading out loud.
- Manage the flow of the service. Intentional pauses and times of quiet are important but the awkward wait when a bible reader starts to squeeze out of their seat after the reading has been announced or when musicians only begin to look up the music after the song has been announced are embarrassing and make us look unprepared and unprofessional. Let everyone know when they are on (give them a copy of the run sheet for the service) and ask them to be in place and ready when they are introduced.
- If using the Prayer Book, give the page number often. If announcing a song or hymn from a song book, repeat the number several times. People can easily miss it the first time.
- Without seeming like you're giving a running commentary, give thought to how each element of the service is linked and whether a word of explanation might encourage engaged, reflective, and reverent worship? Sometimes a

short sentence commenting on the words of the song can be very helpful to remind the congregation that our songs are chosen intentionally and communicate a message.

- When assisting with distributing the elements during Holy Communion, don't rush. It is a very profound and significant moment to look someone in the eye and tell them that Jesus died for them. Don't detract from that. Memorise the words, don't read them. If you know people's names, consider using them.
- An important way of engaging with people is by making eye contact. The more nervous or self-conscious we feel, the less we do it. Be intentional and try to make eye contact at the beginning and end of each prayer or bible reading. No matter how long the reading is, we can usually memorise the first and last couple of words.
- Consider using some basic vocal warm up exercises before the service. Professional public speakers and those working in television and radio all do this. It helps prevent them from stumbling over words or getting tongue-tied.
- Notices are part of the service. As with everything else, they should honour God and edify his people. Give thought to where they will best fit within the service. Consider the sequence of announcements so there is a logical flow into the next element of the service.
 - Don't call for unsolicited announcements from the floor but ask people to speak to you before the service if there is something they need to announce. Otherwise, all your planning goes out the window.
 - Announcements should be brief but clear. Give the essential details and where to go for more information.
 - Avoid 'insider language'.
 - Don't have a time for announcements just for the sake of it. If there is nothing significant that needs to be brought to people's attention, and if no one has specifically requested permission to announce something, don't have them.
- When preparing PowerPoint presentations...
 - Keep the slide design consistent across the entire presentation (font, colour, style, background...).
 - Keep the layout clean and uncluttered.
 - Flashy transitions and animations distract the audience and detract from the message.

- Use contrasting colours for text and background (light text on a dark background or dark text on a light background).
- Avoid patterned backgrounds as they reduce readability.
- Limit each slide to five lines of text.
- Empty space enhances readability.
- Ensure that text is large enough to be read from the back row.
- Use sans-serif fonts like Arial or Helvetica and avoid serif fonts like Times New Roman or Palatino as these are more difficult to read.
- Don't use more than two different fonts on a slide.
- Avoid italics as they are difficult to read quickly.
- Limit punctuation and avoid words in all-capital letters.
- Left justified text is easier to read than centred text.
- Use only high-quality images that reinforce and complement the message.
- Don't use lo-res clipart.
- Test the presentation before the service.
- Have a Plan B in case of technical difficulties.