

# preparing the assembly's worship

A HANDBOOK FOR  
WORSHIP PLANNING

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# Introduction



It is our duty and delight as the baptized people of God to gather for worship. Each assembly varies in size and community context. Those who plan and prepare liturgies are charged with this challenge: to seek a balance between that which is local and yet connected to the wider church, is rooted in tradition as well as contemporary experience, and is familiar yet creative.

Serving with a group of worship planners is one of the most rewarding and engaging opportunities in congregational life. The Sunday assembly is the very heart of a congregation's identity and mission. Divine grace flows to us as we gather around word and sacrament, and the liturgy forms us to be the people of God in the world.

This resource is not meant to be a one-size-fits-all manual for every community. Rather than being prescriptive, it is an invitation to look with new eyes at the process of preparing liturgies in your congregation. Some ideas may not fit your context. Others you may be able to incorporate immediately. Still others may be introduced gradually over the coming years.

Christian liturgy celebrates the paradox that the reign of God is already among us in Jesus Christ, yet we await the day when God's promises will be fulfilled for all creation. Through word, meal, and assembly we see the signs of Christ's coming among us, yet we cry out for the day when all the earth will know the fullness of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

May God bless your endeavors as you prepare liturgies that will renew, strengthen, and inspire the assembly in your local context.

# Who is involved in worship preparation?

## Models for planning

The ultimate responsibility for preparing worship varies from place to place. The pastor is the primary person called to oversee the planning and conducting of worship, yet musicians, deacons, and others trained in liturgy also have significant voices in this process. The congregation council may delegate to a worship committee or team the important responsibility of overseeing the details of a congregation's worship life. How a committee is formed varies according to a congregation's size, staff, structure, and needs.

In some contexts, a pastor and a musician are the primary leaders who plan congregational song and make decisions regarding the various liturgical options for each service. In these settings there may be no functioning worship committee, or the worship committee may address more general

concerns such as the training of worship leaders or the introduction of new liturgical practices. In other congregations the worship committee or a team will consider most of the details for each specific service.

The interests and gifts of the pastor, deacons, musicians, and other leaders will necessitate variation and adaptation in each context. While it is helpful to include a cross section of the congregation in preparing and reviewing congregational worship, it is also important that those with experience and training in matters pertaining to worship assume primary responsibility.

When a worship committee is formed to oversee the liturgical life of an assembly, many congregations choose to include several or many of the following:

- pastor(s)
- deacon(s)
- musician(s)
- directors of choirs and other musical ensembles
- altar guild coordinator or representative
- acolyte coordinator or representative
- minister of hospitality (ushers and greeters) coordinator or representative
- coordinator of assisting ministers/readers
- members with a background or interest in liturgy
- members representing a cross section of the congregation

## Recruiting and recognizing gifts

Sometimes we are eager to fill roles in worship without first considering the genuine gifts among people in the assembly. If our goal is simply to find a warm body to read scripture, greet people at the door, or hand out service folders, we are suggesting that everybody can do everything. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul reminds us that there are a variety of gifts in the body of Christ. Not all of us are song leaders, or public speakers, or preachers. Each community recognizes the gifts and tasks needed in worship and designates some to serve in the various roles of presiding minister, assisting minister, reader, usher, greeter, acolyte, altar guild member or sacristan, cantor, and choir member.

Worship committees or teams, pastors, deacons, directors of music, and volunteer coordinators are among those who are called to help match the gifts of the members of a congregation with the various roles in the liturgy. This is particularly important for integrating newcomers within the life of the congregation. Often those who are already most involved in the life of a congregation will be the ones to volunteer when worship needs are made known. Since those with genuine gifts for worship leadership may not always come forward on their own, it will take sustained efforts on the part of a congregation's leaders to be aware of everyone's potential ministries within a congregation. If a pastor or lay leader discovers that someone plays the trumpet, or is a public speaker, or has an



interest in art, these names should be passed on to the appropriate person to invite that individual to use those gifts in the worship life of the community.

## Memorial gifts

Most congregations receive monetary donations as memorial gifts to remember people in the congregation who have died or to honor family members of the deceased. Families may wish to give items that will be used in worship, and it may be useful for the worship committee or team to keep an updated list of items that would serve as useful memorial gifts. Such a list may be helpful not only to the family but also to the congregation, since it is very awkward to accept a gift that does not fit into the congregation's plans. A listing of memorial gift options should also indicate that the actual selection of a memorial item will be in consultation with the pastor, worship committee or team, or in some cases, a memorial committee.

Here is a list of common worship items for memorials:

- vestments and paraments
- albs for assisting ministers and choirs
- eucharistic vestments (chasubles and stoles)
- musical instruments
- processional cross, torches
- ritual lectionary or ritual Bible
- hymnals and other worship books
- communion and baptismal vessels
- sound or live-streaming upgrades

- altar linens
- banners
- funeral pall or urn pall
- paschal candle and stand
- sholarships for training of key worship leaders and musicians
- renovation projects

## Recognizing worship leaders

- Acknowledge volunteers on social media or in e-newsletters.
- Write letters of thanks, particularly after busy festivals or seasons.
- Host appreciation dinners or picnics.
- Recognize ministries during congregational worship.
- Pray for liturgical leaders, along with all other areas of ministry, that are in service to the congregation and to the broader needs of the community and the world at large.
- Recognize ministries in congregational communications, such as newsletters or service folders.