

Dynamic Worship for Longview EPC

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

- Jesus Christ

"We should consider it the great end of our existence to be found numbered among the worshipers of God."

- John Calvin.

Foundations of Corporate Worship

Every person worships; meaning every person ascribes ultimate value to something. Every person has someone or something that deeply affects their emotions, that radically orients their thoughts, that primarily controls their decisions. The difference between people is not whether they worship, but what they worship. Depending on what you worship, you are living in eternal reality or temporal illusion. Depending on what you worship, life is experienced as fractured or as whole. Depending on what you worship, you are headed down a path of destruction or a path of healing. Thus a central theme of the Bible is that all creation should worship the one, true, God. As worship theologian Zac Hicks writes: "That God should be worshiped is His Divine command to all creation, and it is thus the goal and end of all existence. Therefore worship involves all of life; nothing said, thought or done is out of the realm of the worship of God. Worship, for believers, is then not only an act engaged in on Sunday mornings. It is a way of life."

With that said, corporate worship is a gift from God. It is a consistent call to re-orient a people prone to distorted, destructive worship back to distinct, constructive worship. As Exodus repeatedly makes clear, God's people are redeemed in order to gather in worship of him (e.g. Ex 5:1, 10:7-11). Jesus underscores this purpose in John 4 and the New Testament authors tell us in various ways to "not neglect meeting together" (Heb 10:25, 1 Pe 2:9-10). Likewise, Scripture teaches that while expressions of salvation in Christ, such as affecting social renewal through word and mercy ministries, will one day cease - worship will remain forever (e.g. Rev 21:1ff, 22:3)!

All of this is because of God alone.

Everything, including the opportunity and ability to worship, begins with God. Only because of what we receive from him may we worship. Only because he is seeking true worshipers may such a person exist. Only because of his grace (as opposed to human creativity or spiritual devotion) do we enter into true worship. If worship begins with anything else, it is no longer worship of the biblical God. Just as we must rely on the Spirit of God for our salvation (John 3) we must rely on God for the ability to worship in truth as by his grace he reveals himself to us through his Word. As worship Pastor Bob Kauflin says, "It takes God to worship God." (Titus 3:4-7)

Yet while worship is ultimately about God it is not only about God. The ultimate goal is certainly God's glory, but the proximate goal is the good of God's people. As we gather together, using the gifts the Spirit has provided, we build one another up as individuals and as a faith family (e.g. 1 Cor 14, Eph 5, Col 3). So what glorifies God and builds up his people? God-directed, gospel-centered worship.

1. God-directed: God is the expert on true worship. Thus we look to his revelation to direct the elements contained in worship. We only do what he prescribes in the Bible (known in theological circles as "the regulative principle") while the means by which the elements are expressed are worked out by those carrying out the elementsⁱ all the while seeking to please God, not ourselves.
2. Gospel –centered: The message of salvation through Jesus Christ is the theme of each service. Are the words we speak, the songs we sing, the sacraments in which we engage presenting regular opportunities for people to see the worth and beauty of Jesus Christ? When people leave the service, do they know they have been with Jesus? (More on this below)
3. People-edifying: Worship pleases God when his people offer authentic expressions rather than rote 'going through the motions'. Thus worship that glorifies God will spring from hearts aligned with the truth of God's word. With this in mind it was very important to the Reformers that worship should be in the language of the people, rather than a special language only a certain group could understand. They knew that when God meets with people he wants to be understood in order to heal, strengthen and bless them. Consequently even a visiting unbeliever should be able to understand what is going on, after all, corporate worship may be the means by which some of God's people come to faith! (1 Cor 14, Acts 2)ⁱⁱ. Likewise worship that springs from the heart will be expressed in the way the people of one's day, age and culture naturally expresses itself, or what Hicks refers to as one's "cultural-heart expression"ⁱⁱⁱ. Corporate worship should provide the cultural-heart expressions of the people gathered in order to help connect them to Christ.

Even though all of us have times we long to simply 'do church on our own', Scripture makes it clear that there is something vital about corporate worship. (Ps 111:1) Just as the Trinity exists in vital relationship with one another, so when the scattered church gathers weekly to rehearse the gospel together ("we remind each other whose we are, how we got here and why it matters"^{iv}), we re-orient ourselves to our distinctness from the world and our unity in Christ; and we reflect God's image into our world. Of course all is in vain unless Holy Spirit enlivens all we do, but Christ promises Holy Spirit delights in doing such work so we readily entrust our offerings to him to do with as he sees fit.

Theme of Corporate Worship

Kauflin holds, “There are no normal Sundays, just fresh opportunities to behold the glory of the Lord.”^v

This means each Sunday is an opportunity to give thanks for the salvation that has been given to us. It means the consistent theme of every service shall be that image bearers of God (Gen 1-2) who fell into rebellion and sin (Gen 3) were so loved by God that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8) raising us to new life in him (Col 3:1, 2 Cor 5:17) and restoring creation by his power and for his glory (Is 60; Rev 21)! This regular gospel-oriented theme provides a cohesiveness to the elements within each service as well as between all services themselves. (It also saves worship planners from having to create new themes each week!)

Therefore as we plan worship the overriding question is “How can those gathered by God in our place of worship best understand the beauty and ramifications of this glorious gospel announcement?” What will need to be explained? What cultural expressions will need to be used? What ‘language(s)’ will best invite people to make an invigorating connection with the gospel?

Narrative of Corporate Worship

In worship we tell a story: the story of God and his people. As story it needs to be 1) understandable, 2) engaging and 3) have a clear narrative arc.

Understandable: In order to communicate well, we must speak the language of the people with whom we worship (e.g. 1 Cor 14:1-10). Whether the language is one that is spoken, sung, or non-verbal, it is important to consistently consider “Are we making worship comprehensible to all gathered? Are the words used making everyone feel welcomed, respected and appropriately included?” As Frame writes: “A healthy church is a church with believers at all levels, from spiritual babies to spiritual fathers and mothers. And in worship there should be something for all of them.”^{vi}

Examples:

- Are we using insider language that people without a church background cannot understand or are we being courteous to guests by using familiar language? For instance do we say “Welcome, we are so glad you are here!” or “Brothers and Sisters in Christ, isn’t it great to be together in the house of the Lord?”
- When we use insider language or engage in practices that are uniquely Christian do we concisely explain what we are doing? For instance “We are about to pray for people who are suffering. You might ask ‘if God is both all powerful and loving why would he allow tragedy at all? Good question – one that many people, Christians or not, have wrestled with for centuries. There is no easy answer. But I do know this – only Christianity

offers a God that has experienced suffering and injustice. He is not distant. He knows our hurts. And that makes it safe to approach him with our needs. So with that in mind, let's pray."^{vii}

- Do we reference secular sources to help those gathered know that we live in the same world as they, and that the gospel may be applied to all of life?

Engaging: In order for a story to do its work it needs to be presented in a compelling manner, catching the attention of the listeners and giving them reason to 'stay tuned'. Thus we ask ourselves: Is the gospel being presented in such a way that its message is vividly portrayed? (Gal 3:1, 1 Cor 1:23)

Examples:

- Are we beginning where people are, with what they do understand and then moving with them to something they need to learn?
- If we are communicating with contemporary people are we using contemporary language?
- Are we utilizing as many of our senses as possible as we tell the story? Do visual learners see the joy of Christ, the beauty of confession, the intergenerational nature of the church etc. in those leading worship? Do auditory learners hear worship that humbles everything about ourselves and exalts everything about God?
- Are we helping people connect the gospel to local culture? Are we using vocabulary, sources for analogies, standards of excellence, etc. that foster wise prayer and engagement of the gospel in our town?

Narrative Arc: Worship is enhanced when there is a clear narrative arc which emphasizes the movements of the gospel.

1. Welcome: Initiating invitation from God to leave the distractions of the world and focus on the things of God.
2. Praise: We see God in all his power and glory
3. Recognition: Having accepted God's invitation, we see ourselves in light of his holiness and recognize our unholy state
4. Renewal: We hear the hope of salvation in Christ through the reading of the Word, the explication of Scripture, the ministry of the sacraments
5. Response: We determine to daily serve God, his church, our city and world
6. Reengage: We scatter into the world as the body of Christ sent to show those placed in our path the goodness of God who is the beginning, middle and end of history.

The Narrator(s) is critical to keep moving forward through the narrative arc. As such he/she/they:^{viii}

- “Move the story along without giving away the ending or unnecessarily rehashing previous material. (E.g. – [the opening] is to awaken the worshiper’s attention not give a complete gospel presentation).”
- “Make vital connections efficiently without becoming pedantic.”
- “Refrain from inserting self in story by being overly verbose, emotionally manipulative or excessively personal.... Worshipers should leave discussing the excellence of Jesus not the excellence of worship leader. This balance is only accomplished through careful preparation, self-editing, and comprehension of your role.”

Throughout these weekly dialogues with God (as he reveals and we react to the gospel story) opportunities for a full range of human reactions will be present. At times we will be full of reverence, awe, submission (e.g. Rev 4-5); other times sorrow, doubt and confusion (e.g. 2 Cor 6:2-10, Matt 28:17), at still others excitement, joy, celebration (2 Sam 6:14-16, Pss 146-150). Likewise, every facet of our person will be involved: body, heart, soul, mind, will (Deut 6:5, Matt 22:34-36, Ro 12:1).

Elements of Worship (What)

Our adherence to the authority of Scripture requires that everything we do in worship be biblical. We listen to God tell us how he is to be worshipped rather than create ways we want to worship him. Thus we pray (e.g. 1 Ti 2:8, Jude 20), we sing (e.g. Col 3:16), we listen to the exposition of Scripture (e.g. Col 3:16, Rom 10:14), we celebrate the sacraments (e.g. Matt 28:18, 1 Cor 11).

Yet while Scripture tells us what to do, it doesn’t tell us exactly how to do it. As theologian and scholar Dr. John Frame puts it: “...there is a distinction between the elements of worship (the things scripture prescribes) and the circumstances of worship (the things we must work out for ourselves in carrying out the elements).”

Conveyance of Worship (How)

Scripture (especially the prophets) repeatedly teaches that God is more interested with the content of our worship rather than the style or cultural expression of worship (e.g. Amos 4, John 4). God wants a proper heart rather than some proper form. This is not to say that culture is neutral, but rather that as Creator and Redeemer God has created a world in which a variety of cultural expressions are valuable to him. Therefore we are at peace with the substance of the gospel being presented in our culture’s natural expression (use of sound systems, musical elements, preaching styles, offering receptions, etc.) while always remembering that in worship we are seeking to please God and not ourselves.

Components of Worship

Prelude

The purpose of the prelude (along with the postlude) is to provide a joyous framing of the gospel story that is about to be told. While in some places the prelude is used to slow down and set a contemplative mood prior to worship (and so will be the case at certain worship services of Longview EPC) it is generally a losing battle to try and make this a regular circumstance as our people are excited to see and greet one another in the sanctuary prior to worship.

Likewise, while the music during the service is focused on congregational singing and music with an overtly Christian message, instrumental music of a wider spectrum may be used during this time. This enables a possible musical connection with a wider spectrum of people as they hear 'their music' in church.

Reminder for worship leaders:

- Set an example by ending conversations when you hear the prelude begin, taking your seat and using the rest of the time to prepare for worship.
- Warn musicians that people will likely be talking over the prelude and explain why so they will not be offended

Welcome Sequence

As a good host welcomes guests to his/her home, so during this initial sequence the worship leader welcomes all gathered to Longview EPC, introduces him/herself, and quickly helps them move from the noise of gathering into worship proper; orienting them as to why we are gathered and who is doing the gathering.

Preparation for Worship: This brief component should creatively ask people if they are ready for what will happen over the next hour(ish). Get them thinking "Why am I here?" or "How do I worship?" As a transition it should last about 30-60 seconds. It is followed immediately by song or a responsive Call to Worship. If transitioning into the Call to Worship, the Preparation for Worship will be shorter.

Call to Worship: A responsive call to worship is broken into anywhere from approximately 2-6 segments. In it people either: hear God's invitation to worship (if used in the Welcome Sequence) or hear of God's greatness and worth and invite them to offer their praise (if used in the Praise sequence). Most commonly the call to worship uses the words of Scripture.

Reminder for worship leaders:

- The purpose is to awaken attention with one main idea. It can be based on scripture, a lyric of an upcoming hymn, an illustrative incident from life, a time of year.

- Avoid Christian jargon! We immediately want to ensure people that they don't have to be part of the club in order to be with us on a Sunday morning. If you must use it, be sure and explain it (see above).
- It is difficult for preachers to get in and out so quickly – be diligent in cutting anything unnecessarily from your remarks so it stays close to the time frame (don't go beyond 90 seconds). For example, cut out lines such as “as I was thinking about worship this week”

Praise Sequence

The early section of worship calls us to begin with God – who he is and what he is doing. We remind ourselves that God alone is worthy of worship, that God alone has made worship possible, that God alone has made it possible for us to come into his presence.

Call to Worship: A responsive call to worship is broken into anywhere from approximately 2-6 segments. In it people either: hear God's invitation to worship (if used in the Preparation for Worship) or hear of God's greatness and worth and invite them to offer their praise (if used in Praise sequence). Most commonly the call to worship uses the words of Scripture.

Music of Praise: The opening song generally focuses on God's attributes, tends to be in a major key, is joyful with bright tempos. After the opening song music continues the narrative arc by connecting people with the majesty of God.

Prayer of Adoration With energy and delight in the Lord, this prayer is filled with longing and joy at who God is and the riches we have in Christ Jesus. This prayer shall be limited to praise of God, not commenting on who we are as people or our need- but focuses solely upon marveling at who God is. Spoken at a pace reflective of the content it may be led by a worship leader(s) or prayed in unison by the congregation.

Reminder for worship leaders:

- We communicate with not only our words but with congruency to who we are in our daily lives (don't change your personality), our facial affect and our body language (match content and expression).

Recognition Sequence

This next section of worship allows for the consideration of humanity's fallen state. Though God is glorious beyond all else (as we just celebrated in the praise sequence) our lives don't reflect that glory. We turn from God to lesser things, and we are sorry for that. It is not how we want to live. And, as we continue reflecting, we see that God does not want us to live that way either and has made a way out for us. From sorrow we move to pardon, relief, and joy through the hope of the gospel.

Confession and Assurance: At times beginning with scriptural words, other times with words of invitation or explanation of repentance (as little as 15-30 seconds, no more than 60 seconds) we are invited to enter a time of repentance. Aware that acceptance of personal sin and the need for confession is confusing/off-putting to many people, the leader should make a compelling case for the importance, beauty and hope of confession given the promise-based relationship God has established with us in Christ.

Example:

- Just as a marriage cannot flourish without honest communication, so our marriage-like relationship with God cannot flourish without speaking freely and honestly of all facets of our lives, including those where we fall short. Knowing that our Bridegroom is not going anywhere, we now enter that conversation with what we call a prayer of confession.

The Prayer of Confession is either prayed in unison aloud or led by a worship leader. Spoken at a reflective pace it is connected with either the general theme of fallen-ness or the specific sub-theme of the day. For instance on a Sunday in which we speak of world mission, we may confess our failure to live as a global community. On a Sunday in which we focus on justice we may confess our failure to meet the needs of the marginalized. On a Sunday in which we proclaim the resurrection we may confess our failure to live as new people in Christ. Formatting of the slides may assist people in the tempo and syncopation of corporate recitation through indentations, paragraph breaks, etc. Likewise slides and/or oral direction may be used to direct people into a time for silent confession in which the worshiper is encouraged to personalize the corporate prayer or confess any other sins that come to mind. The length should be about 30 seconds to 1 minute. The time is closed either by adding a short sentence to conclude the prayer; saying, “Amen” or moving into a musical response of confession that is a short offering sung by worship leaders, choir or congregation focusing on the cross and the promise of pardon.

The Assurance of Pardon always follows confessional prayer. Using words of Scripture to reinforce the truth that our confidence is based on God’s promises rather than human hope, this is an announcement of forgiveness, grace and pardon found in Jesus Christ. It is appropriate to introduce this section with words such as “Be sure and listen to this promise from God” or “Never forget this critical truth”.

Morning Prayer: Having the elements of confession and the thankfulness of an assured heart, this prayer is done by the worship leader alone. The prayer should take into account the elements that surround it in the narrative arc of the service, allowing our faith family to stay in the flow of the Recognition sequence.

Music of Recognition: It is appropriate to have congregational singing that enables the worshippers to express thankfulness and commitment to Christ during this sequence. This music is generally more reflective than in the Praise sequence.

Baptism: Takes place during the Recognition sequence as it involves seeing oneself in light of who God is: either as a member of the covenant family of God or a person in need of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.

Reminder for worship leaders:

- Matching affect, tone and language is critical in keeping the narrative arc compelling. We are not meant to be acting, but to be authentically experiencing the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst. (This holds true for all worship sequences)

Renewal Sequence

In this sequence we hear the hope of salvation in Christ through the reading of the Word, the explication of Scripture, the ministry of the sacraments.

Children's Lesson: This is an opportunity for the youngest children gathered to hear explanations of the gospel story in language and with illustrations suitable to their age. For time management considerations, questions of the children are limited (as you never know where that is going to go!) and only one point is made. It is appropriate to conclude the lesson with prayer.

Song of Invocation: A sung prayer of the congregation this short song requests Holy Spirit's work in this part of the service by actively applying the Word read and explained to all the persons gathered. This application may come through challenge, encouragement, insight, correction, inspiration, etc..

Scripture Reading: Though this element may be placed in any of the above sequences we have it here as the sermon is always grounded in a biblical text. Unless the text is embedded in the sermon it is appropriate to enter the reading saying "Today's scripture reading is from the book of ___" and conclude with "This is the Word of the Lord!" (some in the congregation with a liturgical background may respond "Thanks be to God!").

Sermon: Preaching should be expository and Christ-centered. The theme climaxes in Christ and his ultimate salvific work on our behalf. The purpose of the sermon is not to simply provide information but to lead those gathered to worship – both individually and corporately – so that they leave strengthened in their souls to do the will of God. Generally the sermon is expected to last 25-30 minutes. On sacrament Sundays the sermon should be about 20 minutes.

The Lord's Supper: The first Sunday of the month we celebrate the Lord's Supper (Communion). The Lord's Supper liturgy is part of the Renewal sequence immediately following the sermon. It includes an invitation and instructions, prayer of confession, words of institution, serving of the elements, prayer of thanksgiving and passing of the peace.

Response Sequence

Having received a special life-transforming sight of the worth and beauty of God we then give back to God suitable expressions of his worth.

Music of Response: A musical response to the Word exclaimed. The selection is either a "Ministry of Music" as a special piece provided by the worship team or choir or a congregational hymn or worship song. The purpose is to invite a heart response to what was just preached articulated through the music.

Affirmation of Faith: As a response to the Word exclaimed, worshipers affirm their belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ through speaking together a long-standing orthodox creed of the church.

Prayers of the People: As a response to the Word exclaimed, this prayer focuses on the needs of the church and the world awakened through the preaching. The prayer may begin with praise but its primary focus is intercession. They can be prayed by a leader or the congregation. It is appropriate to explain to those gathered the purpose of the time with words such as "Hearing of God's desire to use us to show the world that he is good, and believing that God promises our prayers are a vital means through which he effects change – we are now going to intercede on behalf of the world in prayer." If prayed solo by a leader, they now begin their prayer. If it is a congregational prayer the leader explains they will be receiving intercessory requests on a given topic. When the request is spoken the worship leader will repeat it into the microphone followed with the words along the lines of "Lord in your mercy" to which the congregation replies "Hear our prayer." While this segment is called "Prayers of the People" (plural) because more than one prayer is offered, the response is singular in order to emphasize our unity in prayer as one corporate body of Christ.

Appropriate topics for prayers of the people include:

- Praying against systemic evils such as injustice, discrimination, oppression, etc. and for building the kingdom of God.
- Needs of the world such as government officials, wars, natural disasters, national or international crises.
- Needs of our town such as poverty, violence, homelessness, racism, school systems, local leaders, etc

- Needs of the church such as ministers leaders, missionaries, ministries of the church; people who are ill, suffering, needing employment, losing faith; people who are struggling with loneliness, marriage pains, parenting, etc.

Reminder for worship leaders:

- Avoid the following: Partisan political prayers – do not take sides, preaching through the prayer – we already had the sermon, addressing controversial topics that require nuance

Re-engage Sequence

Worship doesn't end when we leave the sanctuary. This sequence prepares us to continue to worship in spirit and truth as we re-engage with the world through our daily lives. It is a time of meditating on how we can respond in faithfulness to the Word that was just preached and then going out and living it!

The Lord at Work through Longview EPC: As we prepare to go out, we are invited to do so engaging in the community of the church and our service to the world. This is done through the highlighting of important life markers (birth, new members, death, marriage) and upcoming events. Only events that are relevant to a high percentage of those gathered should be addressed with the announcement giving only the outline of the event and where people can find more information. It is appropriate to limit the announcements to 3 items when possible, with no more than 5, including regularly an invitation to sign in on the friendship pad and instruction for visitors on how to get connected. Delivered with warmth and brevity this element should take about 2 minutes. For quality control and time management only worship leaders deliver announcements unless, on rare occasions, a member of the congregation is asked to comment briefly.

The Closing Song sends people out with confidence in God and a renewed sense of purpose to engage in kingdom-building throughout the week. Thus it is generally a higher energy, bright tempo piece that inspires.

Benediction These “good words” are God’s parting words to those gathered. As such they are a blessing rather than a command (which implies the Christian life is about working to earn God’s favor) or recap of the sermon (which implies the most important thing is to remember what the preacher said) or a wish- you-well (that implies we are now on our own). The blessing is a promise of God going with us with grace, which is the lone reminder we really need as we leave.

Postlude: Like the prelude, the postlude provides a joyous framework for the gospel story. In this case it is joyous ‘sending’ music that is relatively short (2-4 minutes). (See notes on prelude)

Officer Installation: Once a year approximately 10 minutes is allotted for the ordination and installation of church officers (Ruling Elders and Deacons). It usually occurs in the Re-engage sequence of the service as it affirms the work of Holy Spirit calling and gifting leaders for shepherding our faith family as we live as the church scattered in the city. Officers involved in the installation will gather prior to the service for instruction.

Commissioning: When there is a commissioning for mission trips, those leading this element shall gather 30 minutes prior to the service to review logistics (where to enter, stand, use which mic etc.). The person(s) introducing the trip and praying shall keep in mind the subtlety required to present missions in a gathering which may include unbelievers so that we may be faithful to the sending as well as sensitive to what is perceived by many as triumphalism and self-righteousness. This element is usually included in the Re-engage sequence of the service.

New Member Welcome: When appropriate, new members will be introduced and welcomed by the congregation into the faith family. Usually occurring in the Lord at Work element new members will introduce themselves, say where they live and briefly share what brought them to Longview EPC. The worship leader will invite the congregation to come forward to greet and welcome them into the family following the Benediction.

Confirmation Sunday: Once a year (or as needed) during the Re-engage sequence we celebrate the public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior by our Confirmation Class. Those who were baptized as infants, make their baptism complete with their public profession of faith. Those who were not baptized as infants receive the sacrament of baptism as well as profess their faith. Confirmands arrive early to review instructions for the morning.

Miscellaneous

Music

General: As noted above, many places in Scripture teach that one of the primary goals of corporate worship is to edify the whole church. For thousands of years this edification has come through music. While we certainly sing to praise and honor God, we also sing to strengthen one another (e.g. 1 Cor 14, Eph 5, Col 3). Therefore in congregational singing text and music should play complementary roles, with the text as the determining point. As Hicks writes:

“The text of a given song should be theologically accurate, God-centered, gospel-informed, and coherent and logical in thought. This does not mean that a song cannot be simple; this does mean that a song cannot be simplistic. All of these combine to inform the criteria for what make a ‘good’ congregational song: sing-ability (a melodic line which is not overly difficult to sing), musical complementarity (accompaniment which enhances rather than distracts from the text), theological precision (a message presenting doctrine consonant with the

Scripture's), and logical coherence (a set of words which make sense and present a unified message).

Church music, in general, should be executed with the utmost quality and integrity. This involves skillful playing (Ps 33:3b), creativity and freshness (Ps 33:3a; 40:3a, 96:1, 149:1b), and stylistic diversity (Ps 150)."^{ix}

With that in mind music shall be evaluated at least with the following criteria:

1. Does the song proclaim gospel truths?
2. Does the song proclaim sound Reformed theology?
3. Does the song fit the content of the narrative arc?
4. Does the song fit the tone of the narrative arc?
5. Is the song 'singable' for the majority of the congregation?

Style: Since authentic worship is what God desires, there is room for a wide range of musical styles in corporate worship as long as those styles support substantive content. Discerning the appropriate style is not based on whether people are pleased but whether people are offering authentic expressions of worship. Though these ideas may seem to be the same, there is a nuanced difference. The first is human-centered, asking the self if we are pleased. The second is God-centered, asking if God was pleased. Was God pleased with worship because it moves toward expressing true wholeness, through connection to him; or was he displeased because people were just going through the motions? Are we inviting people to express love for God in "the way people in our day and age might most naturally express their worship unto God"—what Hicks refers to as "one's 'cultural-heart expression'?"^x

Worship Services at Longview EPC

For our situation a blended or 'convergence' service is most appropriate for engaging our faith family's cultural-heart expressions. This type of service incorporates elements of historic Presbyterian and ancient Christian worship at large such as recitation of creeds, confession of sin, responsive readings, etc. *as well as* modern elements such as informal language and dress, slide projection, extended music sets, and contemporary music and instrumentation (guitars, percussion, keyboard, etc.).

Prayers

"Biblical prayers and the prayers of great Christians through the centuries are poetic and heartfelt. They are richly textured with God's truth and promises, bathed in humility, and grounded in confidence that they will be answered. Let your public prayer flow out of your private communion with God. Your personality and passion for God should show in your prayer. You have been chosen as part of the congregation, not as a polished veteran of the stage. Celebrate the richness of the names and metaphors God has given us by which we may know and address him. In general, write out your prayer. Preparation will keep you from certain pitfalls:

- Stammering – "Oh, you, uh, God, uh, just really..."

- Repetition – “Lord, we just want you to be Lord, Lord.”
- Evangelical clichés – “We just ask you for your blessings.” “Thank you for being God.”
- Accidental theological errors – “Jesus, we’re glad you’re not human like us.”

Prayers need not sound like they are being read, but they should sound like they’ve been prepared. Always use “we” rather than “I”, as you are praying on behalf of the entire congregation. Your prayer should last no more than 3 minutes or approximately 400 words. You should practice reading your prayer aloud at a relaxed pace to build confidence and check timing.”^{xi}

Transitions

It is important to see transitions between the larger elements of a worship service as elements themselves. They are the connecting threads that keep the narrative arc flowing. If done well, transitions enable us to connect element to element without distraction. If done poorly, the arc loses cohesion and opportunity for distractions from what the Lord is doing in our hearts abound. Because we live in a culture that is so easily distracted it is important to pay careful attention to the transitions. Likewise, transitions done well can encourage fuller participation by those gathered.

All those involved in maintaining the narrative arc of the service should ask:^{xii}

- Are my instructions as clear and concise as possible? (Do I need words when a hand gesture is enough?)
- Does this link the two acts of worship, showing how they are related in theologically accurate manner? (After the prelude we don’t invite God to join us (“We ask you to be with us in worship today”) but affirm God has asked us to join him (“We are grateful you’ve asked your church to gather in these walls today”))
- Is my tone warm and encouraging or cold and detached?
- Am I inviting people to move with us in the story or directing them how to do worship correctly? (After the Assurance of Pardon: “With the joy of new life in Christ I invite you to join your voices with ours as we sing..” versus “Remain standing and sing out church”)
- Am I utilizing all the senses? (“Close your eyes and picture seeing Jesus right in front of you, now listen to these words from Psalm 23”)
- Am I teaching – but not too much. (“In response to what we’ve just heard, let’s use the words Christians have used for thousands of years to affirm our trust in Christ saying together the Apostle’s Creed”)
- Am I sensitive to the tempo and rhythm of the sequence this transition is moving into/out of? There are balances of energy and rest to be maintained? Are words even necessary here? If words are necessary do they need to give the worshipers time to reflect (so slower pace) or are they being used to keep the energy high (so quicker pace?)

- Am I sensitive to how much time is allotted for the transition? Consider three different ways to introduce Romans 8:1-11:
 - “The apostle Paul knew the Lord and his unending and measureless love. He writes about his experience of it through Jesus Christ in a letter he wrote called Romans. In chapter 8 of that letter he talks about many wondrous things: our freedom in Christ, our being brought into God’s family through Christ, and our new identity in Christ. We begin to look at this great chapter with the first eleven verses.”
 - “Because of the love of the God given to us through Jesus Christ we have a new life, a new identity. The Apostle Paul writes about this new us in Romans 8:1-11.”
 - “As we listen for God’s message to us this morning, we listen to his words from Romans chapter 8, verses 1-11.

Likewise transitions are aided by:

- Musical underpinnings between elements appropriate to the mood of the place in the overall narration. For instance in transitioning between singing and the Children’s Lesson a scaled down continuation of the completed song may continue until the children are gathered. Or in moving from a prayer into a song, the music can begin as the prayer is ending (or serve as an undergirding to the prayer itself)
- Worship leaders moving into place as the previous element is concluding (for instance the leader doing the welcome is in place when the prelude ends) and knowing who is going to move where if they are moving at the same time.

Financial Giving

In congruence with scriptures such as 2 Kings 12:9 and Matthew 12:41, where tithes and offerings were collected in boxes as people came and went from the temple, Longview EPC collects tithes and offerings through the wooden boxes found at all the entrances to the church sanctuary. Not taking an offering during the worship service enables visitors exploring the Christian faith to be present at worship without feeling obligated to contribute monetarily. Also, it reminds believers that giving is an extension of worship that may occur any day of the week and through a variety of means.

Sidebars

As stated above, our public worship is to be intelligible (or understandable) to all kinds of hearers. Worship side bars are an attempt to help us to understand why we do what we do and what certain elements signify and mean in our service. A Pastor provides the weekly sidebars in congruence with the elements contained in the theological theme of a given week’s service.

Audio – Video

It could be said that this ministry is successful when no one notices it. The music is loud enough to inspire singing by all the congregation, the slides move at a pace congruent with corporate worship, lighting transitions move smoothly from one setting to the next, etc..

Attire

While the dress code for worship leaders is 'informal' there are still elements of appropriateness for those leading from the front. Please no shorts, short skirts, ripped clothing, etc.

ⁱ Frame. John M. "Worship and the Reformation Gospel"

ⁱⁱ For more on this see Redeemer Presbyterian paper Evangelistic Worship
https://www.redeemercitytocity.com/s/Evangelistic_Worship-4tep.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Hicks, Zac. "Two Services - Why?"

^{iv} Kauflin, Bob. "True Worshipers, Seeking What Matters to God", 2015

^v *ibid*

^{vi} Frame. John M. "Worship and the Reformation Gospel"

^{vii} Redeemer Presbyterian Church Worship Leader Manual, 2010

^{viii} *ibid*

^{ix} Hicks, Zac. "A Philosophy of Worship and Music in the Church"

^x Hicks, Zac. "Two Services - Why?"

^{xi} Redeemer Presbyterian Church Worship Leader Manual, 2010

^{xii} See Ryan, Paul. Reformed Worship, March 2006 for helpful article on crafting great transitions