

BETHEL MENNONITE CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR SONG LEADERS

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Introduction:

“Everyone I know who teaches songs to congregations uses a different approach. Teaching a song, like preaching a sermon, is an exercise in communicating truth through personality...”¹ In his book *The Singing Thing Too*, John Bell gives concrete advice on the ins and outs of song leading, in this book’s case, specifically teaching new music. The book functions as a how-to guide and explores every pitfall or insecurity that a song leader may face behind the mic. “Believe in your own voice. It is the only one you have and God is certainly not going to give you a transplant.”²

This document aims to provide confidence to the song leaders of Bethel through information and direction on the worship planning process. The overall intention is to familiarize you with the tasks and responsibilities of the song leader. The **first section** includes a checklist of tasks that need to be completed in the days leading up to the service and on the day of the service. The **second section** includes some important tips, advice and resources that will help you with your planning. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact the preacher and/or worship leader for that Sunday, or a regular song leader.

Worship Planning:

The “worship planning team” at Bethel usually consists of worship leader, preacher, and congregational song leader. Others involved in worship, and who may have valuable input into planning the service, might include the director or leader of the worship music if applicable (choirs, instrumental groups, etc.), pianist/organist, scripture reader(s), story tellers, and so on. Based on a scripture text and any overall theme that will have been suggested, the song leader works at:

- developing a unified group of songs that fit the text, theme, and tone of the service.
- Choosing appropriate hymns (done in close consultation with the worship leader and preacher)
- Coordinating additional instrumentalists or singers if desired. (Ex. Guitarist, drummer, additional singers)

all within the context of the theme of the service.

A pastor will send an email to everyone on the worship planning team approximately 2 weeks prior to the service. The email will note the theme, the scripture text, who is on the worship

¹ John L. Bell, in *The Singing Thing Too: Enabling Congregations to Sing* (GIA Publications, Inc., 2007), pp. 9-10.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

planning team, and any special items related to the service or day. (eg. Communion, child dedication, potlucks etc.).

While the worship leader acts as the primary host, the song leader facilitates musical aspects of worship with the same level of welcome and engagement, but fewer spoken elements. The worship leader is your teammate in the planning process.

THE CHECKLIST

The following responsibilities apply to planning worship services throughout the year. The last section of this checklist applies to planning worship services for the summer (July and August).

About two weeks before the service:

- You will receive information that outlines the text and focus of the service from someone on the pastoral team. The worship leader, accompanist, technicians, and any special music group (choirs, etc.) will also receive this information.
- Together with the worship leader, and preacher, choose hymns for the service; ensure the accompanist is notified as soon as possible of the hymns selected.
- You may consult the following order of worship for an idea of how many songs to choose and of what function they serve in the service:

Prelude

Opening Words

(Announcements)

Prayer of Invocation

Gathering Hymn

Prayer of the Church

Worship Music or Hymn

Children's Feature

(Hymn could be added here if Worship Music is included)

Dedication of Offering

Worship Music or Hymn

Scripture Reading

Sermon

Worship Music or Hymn

(Announcements)

Benediction

Sending Hymn

Postlude

Early in the week before the service:

- You should provide a list of potential songs to the worship leader (and pianist) as soon as possible but no later than Wednesday afternoon at 4pm so that the Worship leader has time to finalize the order of worship. The worship leader needs to provide the Administrative Assistant with the Order of Worship **no later than Thursday at noon.**
 - Contact the **sound technician** and **video technician** to advise them of any changes to the verses of the hymns, and if any other microphones will be required for other instruments.
 - The video technicians prepare slides for music, scripture readings and other visuals. Email them any information that you would like projected at videotechnician@bethelmennonite.ca. You may also CC the projectionist. *Please send this information to the church office as well.*
 - Note: the tech team may contact you instead of the other way around.
- Determine with **the accompanist and any other musicians** what time you would like to rehearse on Sunday morning. Unless otherwise specified, the accompanist will arrive at 9:30 to run through the songs. It is recommended to meet at 9 or 9:15 to rehearse if you are doing any new songs or songs that require other instruments.
- You may be asked for a sound check at 30 minutes before the worship service begins.

Sunday morning (or the morning of the service):

- Meet with all persons participating in music to run through the music and perform a sound check.
- Double check that the video technician has prepared the correct musical slides.
- The worship leader may call you and the rest of the worship team for a prayer before the service.
- Be punctual out of respect for the other musicians, and tech team.

Note about July and August:

- There are no song leaders in July and August. The worship leader will introduce the songs and the songs will be led by the accompanist. The worship leader will also choose the songs. Since congregational singing tends to be livelier when being directed by a person, you may be asked to lead the singing – but if you accept, you will not be expected to help choose the songs as that is the job of the worship leader during this time.

RESOURCES, TIPS AND ADVICE

Song Resources:

- *Voices Together; Sing the Journey; Sing the Story*
- A youtube playlist containing all the contemporary worship songs in voices together.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhXhOFvkCzoy2MdHcbJna1oMiJkoZpAvT>
- Previous bulletins- these will help you see whether a hymn has been recently sung, or what hymns Bethel likes to sing.
- *The Anabaptist Worship Network*
- *The Singing Thing Too* by John Bell of the Iona Community.
- The *Voices Together* website for video resources.
- **Bethel's Beloved Song Spreadsheet**. For access, email the Music and Arts Coordinator or the church office.

Words of Welcome and Transitions:

- Providing words of welcome is the task of the worship leader, however, depending on the order of worship, the song leader may be the first face the congregation sees. It is important to introduce the hymns with a cheerful disposition, and you might say a brief word of welcome such as "Good morning, it's great to worship with you." Or "Good morning friends, it's a joy to gather together." This sets a welcoming tone for the worship.
- Don't be afraid to speak! You can offer a brief word about why a song is suitable, or give brief instructions where necessary.
- You may also share words that honour the transition into the next musical component. This helps with flow and releases rigidity. Avoid summarizing what has just been said.

Communication:

- The energy of the song leader gives confidence to the congregation to worship freely and with an open heart. Look up from your hymnal frequently, and smile often.
- When introducing hymns, use a stronger voice than in your normal speech. Speak just above the mike and project your voice. Enunciate clearly and slowly so that everyone can understand you.

- Be secure in who you are. Song leaders bring their own style to the worship service. Smile, be confident and warm. Practice beforehand!
- Song leading is not a performance and you need not be intimidated.

Inclusive Language:

Some of the following tips are from “The Guidelines for Worship Leaders,” however they are useful as the song leader chooses hymns with a breadth of perspectives and images for God and the Kingdom of God in mind.

- Language has power, transmitting not only ideas and facts, but emotions and values as well. All participants in worship are encouraged to choose language supporting principles of inclusiveness, (ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, sexuality, religious) to enhance the dignity of all persons present.
- Try to avoid words like “brotherhood” and “mankind”. Try to use gender neutral pronouns. Eliminate language that stereotypes any group in any way.
- When talking about God, try to use imagery other than God as Father. Some examples are: Ruler; Sovereign; Redeemer; Sustainer; Liberator; Creator: Healer; Servant; Light; Rock; Truth; Alpha and Omega.
- When talking about God, look for alternatives to the masculine pronouns “he/his”. Jesus is a historical figure so the use of the masculine when referring to him is appropriate. The Holy Spirit is generally not assigned a gender.
- In hymns and poetry minor changes in language can be made without altering the message and flow of the piece. Consult with the worship leader and/or pastoral team if you would like to make any such changes.

Information about pianists, instruments, and choirs:

- Pianists and other instrumentalists are invited to:
 - Prepare gathering music (prelude) for 5 to 15 minutes before the start of service.
 - Accompany congregational singing.
- Choirs and instrumentalists will have schedules determined by the directors.
- Bethel is a wonderful intergenerational musical community- song leaders are encouraged to add an additional instrument or two to the music leading to enrich the service.

Scripture and music:

- Song leaders should heavily consider the scriptures of the day when choosing the songs.

- There is a scriptural references index in voices together which should be consulted in conjunction with the other indexes to choose the appropriate hymns and songs.
 - An attachment is included on guidelines for using the voices together index's.

Children's Time:

- Sometimes the children's stories include a musical component- it is helpful to know about these musical aspects before hand so that you can choose other hymns accordingly.

Sermon/Reflections/Storytelling/Testimonies:

- At times, the pastor may suggest a hymn of response following the sermon.
- Should there be a special reflection or testimony of some kind, you may consult the person giving the testimony if they have a preferred song that will follow their testimony. The pastor or worship leader may also make this known to you.

Special note about the Benediction:

- The Worship Leader chooses the Benediction and if there is a Sending Hymn the sequence should provide a clear ending to the service.
- Those Sundays when a community lunch (potluck or otherwise) is scheduled, a prayer of thanks for the meal and the fellowship around tables should precede the benediction. Singing the Doxology or as grace is also possible (#71 in VT)

Thank you for using your musical gifts to enrich our worship together!