

BETHEL MENNONITE CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR WORSHIP LEADERS

Marlene Kropf, a scholar of congregational worship, notes that Mennonites did not have a formal agreed upon order of worship. She suggests this changed with the advent of the *Hymnal: A Worship Book* in 1992 when some standardization of worship came about. Regardless of the order of worship, authors Marlene Kropf, June Aliman Yoder and Rebecca Slough suggest there are three essentials in a worship service:

1. Encounter with God.
2. Engagement with self and others.
3. Empowerment for faithful living.¹

How to get there is up to the worship planning team. 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 (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 worship leader works at:

- developing a unified worship service around the text and theme;
- coordinating the choice and location of appropriate hymns (done in close consultation with song leader and preacher)
- keeping aesthetic elements and development of the arts in mind
- coordinating or preparing prayers, special music, stories, and of course invocation and benediction

all within the context of the theme of the service.

The overall intention of this document is to familiarize you with the tasks and responsibilities of the worship 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 for that Sunday.

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 planning team, and any special items related to the service or day. (eg. Communion, child dedication, potlucks etc.). There may be times when the worship leader and the preacher decide jointly that someone will be invited to give a three-to-five-minute story, testimony, or other expression of God’s leading in their lives. Ensure that such people have sufficient lead time to prepare adequately and emphasize the time limit so as not to overburden the service.

¹ Marlene Kropf, “How do we know when it is good worship?,” *Visions* 13(1)(2012): 36-44 and June Aliman Yoder, Rebecca Slough, and Marlene Kropf, *Preparing for Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), p. 30-37.

Being prepared to lead worship on Sunday morning includes being punctual and assisting other participants as necessary (sound checks etc.). The worship leader acts as host, welcoming and leading worshippers into active worship, drawing on personal spiritual resources and the invocation of the Holy Spirit to carry forward the order of worship.

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).

Two weeks before the service:

- you will receive from the preacher information that outlines the text and focus of the service. The song leader, accompanist, technicians, and any special music group (choirs, etc.) will also receive this information or you should forward it to them.
- establish who will be reading Scripture. You can either read the Scripture yourself or find someone else to do this.
- with the help of the preacher, determine whether there will be a storyteller or equivalent (see tips below), and if so, arrange details with that person.
- together with the song leader, and preacher, choose hymns for the service; ensure the accompanist is notified of the hymns selected.
- draft an Order of Worship to share with the song leader and preacher. A suggested Worship service outline:

- 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

The week before the service:

- Confirm with the preacher and song leader that what was discussed last week is still in place.
- Choose your Call to Worship and prayers and finalize your Order of Worship. The usual parts of the service that the worship leader is responsible for are:
 - Call to Worship
 - Open the service with an invocation and a call to worship, interspersed with congregational hymns or special music, or before or after such music;
 - The service should not open directly with music after the prelude, unless there is a choral call to worship;

- As appropriate, give words of welcome (see tips below);
 - Provide a brief orientation for the service – what’s the theme, how does this service fit with previous/upcoming services, etc.
- Words of Confession/Assurance
- Offertory: Ushers are asked to the front of the church to participate in the dedication of gifts. The Worship Leader offers this prayer unless the dedication falls just before the Prayer of the Church by a pastor. In that case it should be included in that prayer.
- 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)
- Contact the pianist/organist and advise them of the hymns that will be played – give them as much lead time as possible, especially if one of the songs is less well-known.
- If there will be a storyteller/testimonial/reflection, ensure the person knows the theme and text, and prepares for within the time given (see tips below).
- Contact the sound technician and video technician to advise them of any special requirements for Sunday morning. 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. *Please send this information to the church office as well.*
- If you would like the Scripture text to be projected, please request this specifically. Provide the video technician the text of the scripture and please be consistent with the translation for both projected and read scripture. The church standard is the NRSV.
- Plan the use of projection carefully. Some congregants can hear better when words are projected; some resent the visual distraction of the screen.
- Ask all participants to come to the sanctuary for a sound check at least 30 minutes before the worship service will begin.
- Provide the Administrative Assistant with the Order of Worship **no later than Thursday noon**. This is so that the bulletin can be prepared in time for Sunday morning. The Administrative Assistant will email the final bulletin to the worship team on Friday.

Sunday morning (or the morning of the service):

- Meet with all persons participating in the service at least 30 minutes before it starts, to run through any additional details and perform a sound check.
- Double check that the video technician has prepared the required slides.
- Meet with the pastor to discuss which announcements, if any, should be highlighted. The Worship Committee generally discourages making announcements that are already found in the bulletin.

- Meet with the pastor (and choir, if there is one) 5-10 minutes prior to the service for a preparatory prayer.
- BE PUNCTUAL!

Additional responsibilities for July and August:

- The worship leader is expected to carry out the tasks already mentioned above. Note that because there is no song leader during the summer months, the worship leader will introduce the songs (but is not required to lead them). The worship leader, in consultation with the accompanist and preacher, will also choose the songs. Since congregational singing tends to be livelier when being directed by a person, you might want to ask someone to lead the singing – but be aware that the song leader is not expected to help choose the songs during the summer. That is the job of the worship leader!

RESOURCES, TIPS AND ADVICE

Resources: where to find worship resources

- *The Bible; Voices Together; Sing the Journey; Sing the Story*
- Worship Leader Edition of *Voices Together* (contact Pastoral staff for access)
- *Words for Worship 1; Words for Worship 2*; and other resources – all available in the church library
- Christine Longhurst website (<http://re-worship.blogspot.ca/>) – other on-line resources should only be used if okayed by a pastor
- CommonWord (MC Canada’s Resource Centre at CMU Library); CMU library; Bethel’s library; pastors’ libraries, etc.
- “Enfleshed: Spiritual Nourishment for Collective Liberation,” <https://enfleshed.com>
- Feel free to ask other worship leaders where they find their resource material

Words of Welcome:

- Providing a safe and warm welcome is such an important task for worship leaders!
- Depending on your style and comfort level, the worship leader welcomes the congregation into God’s house and God’s presence, and then welcomes all to this unique faith community that is called Bethel Mennonite Church.
 - Worship Committee prefers that individual introductions be avoided or limited.
 - Worship Committee also suggests that worship leaders avoid welcoming newcomers, infrequent attenders, and regular attenders – rather, simply acknowledge that we are all welcome!
 - Mention the welcome cards found in the pews and invite newcomers to fill them out and give them to an usher.
- It is important to be welcoming—we recommend that the Statement of Welcome found weekly in our bulletin be read aloud, perhaps monthly (first Sunday of the month).
- Be conscious of those participating online, welcome them as well and look at the cameras at the back of the sanctuary as you do.
- As part of your demonstrated welcome, consider inviting newcomers to participate in worship by reading scripture, telling a story, lighting candles, or otherwise. If you need assistance in identifying “newcomers” for this purpose, check with the pastors or the Worship or Hospitality Committees. Remember time limitations for the service, though, and respect them by not having too many “extras” participate.

Speaking:

- The opening comments by worship leaders significantly impact the tone and spirit of the worship hour. Give careful thought and consideration to the words that you use, as you are guiding the overall flow of the service.
- 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. Worship leaders bring their own style to the worship service. Smile, be confident and warm. Many people tend to speak quickly – resist that temptation! Speak slowly and clearly. Practice beforehand!
- A brief comment, or a pause of transition, between different parts of the service will enhance the experience of worship. Pausing for a moment before a prayer or litany will give participants time to enter into a reflective mood.

Inclusive Language:

- 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, religion) 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 song leaders and/or pastoral team if you would like to make any such changes.
- When a language other than English is used in poetry, quotations, etc. please translate them in their entirety to English.

Music:

- Music is a universal language and one of the ways we worship God together. A variety of musical styles and instruments symbolize our unity in diversity, even as the use of *Voices Together Book* and four-part harmony typify our congregational singing. Our hope is that through our music our worship will be enriched, and our faith strengthened.
- Pianists and other instrumentalists are invited to:
 - Prepare gathering music (prelude) for 5 to 15 minutes before the start of service.
 - Accompany congregational singing.
- Song leaders (except during summer months) will:
 - Select appropriate hymns with the worship leader.
 - Discuss accompaniment with instrumentalists.
 - Lead the congregational singing.
- Choirs and instrumentalists will have schedules determined by the directors.
- Bethel is a rich musical community- song leaders are encouraged to add an additional instrument or two to the music leading to enrich the service.

Scripture Reading

- Scripture lies at the heart of worship. Reading should be from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and done with reverence, meaning, and appropriate cadence.
- Scripture may be read, memorized and told, or dramatized. All readers should:
 - Familiarize themselves with the content of the selected passage.
 - Practice the reading to become familiar with the cadence of the passage and learn the pronunciation of difficult words, phrases, and names

Children's Time:

- Children's Time is intended to include the children in worship. The storyteller may draw on a story book, drama, or personal experience.
- Story tellers should be reminded not to take too much time. The children's story should usually be about 5 minutes

Reflections/Storytelling/Testimonies:

- The purpose of such reflections is to help us get a glimpse of how we congregants integrate our faith into our day-to-day lives. From time-to-time persons may be asked to prepare a three-to-five-minute presentation to:
 - Tell an experience that has helped shape their faith.
 - Respond to the morning theme.
 - Share a challenge with the congregation.
- Arranging for this kind of reflection should be decided upon by the preacher and worship leader together, and not by the worship leader acting alone. If you have an idea for someone to do such sharing, feel free to discuss with the preacher.
- Although our tendency is to speak orally, such response could also be other artistic expression, such as dance or visual presentation or otherwise. Be creative! Encourage others to be creative!