

Lay Worship Leaders'

Guidelines and Resources

*Leading Our Congregation
in the Worship of God*

To: Lay Worship Leaders
From: Pastoral Staff
Subject: Leading Our Congregation in the Worship of God

We are very pleased that you have agreed to serve as a lay worship leader. We are convinced that your participating in this manner enriches our corporate life as a people of God.

Let us share with you some of our thoughts and convictions in the hope that we can aid your preparation.

The **purposes of corporate worship** are doubtless multiple and varied. Of central importance is proclaiming or setting forth the good news of God's gracious love and faithful goodness; the enduring interaction of worship is between God's action and our needs. Thus people speak frequently about the need to be inspired, to "get something out of the service," to find something to help them through the next week. Leading in worship therefore requires our reflection on what God is doing and also on what people need.

For at times people need comfort, because of illness or loneliness or rapid change or severe disappointment; but people also need challenge: to invest themselves, to care about others, to serve the Lord. At times people need to hear the word of God's grace, but at other times it must be the word of God's judgment. We all need help with our daily, personal lives; but we are also called to social responsibility.

So as you prepare to lead our congregation in worship, we urge you to bear in mind that you are witnessing to God in ways that will support, enrich, and challenge the lives of the worshipers.

When our congregation gathers on Sunday mornings, **worship is a corporate act**: we worship God together, not as an aggregation of individuals, but as a people, as a community of faith. The images of the church in the New Testament are corporate images: the body of Christ, the people of God, the new Israel, the flock, and a holy nation. The Confession of 1967 declares that:

"The new life takes shape in a community... to be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as his reconciling community."

Thus our worship experience must not become a spectator sport, to which we come as isolated individuals to be entertained by one or two persons performing. **Participation** is an expression of our corporateness and mutuality. Hence hymns, litanies, responses, and corporate prayers provide an important dimension of our worship service.

Furthermore, we urge you to see yourself as fulfilling a representative function. When, for example, we offer a prayer we are trying to represent the attitudes and concerns of the people: hopefully our prayer becomes their prayer. So too, the congregation is the true choir; the Covenant Choir fulfills a representative function, offering praise or thanksgiving to God on behalf of the people.

By serving as a **lay worship leader**, you are fulfilling at least three important **purposes**. First, you are symbolizing the priesthood of all believers, our affirmation that all people, not just ordained clergy, have access to God and can minister to others. Second, you are enriching the representative function of the worship leader; no pastor can be sensitive to all the needs or concerns of the congregation, but hopefully, together we shall more nearly fulfill that representative character. And third, you help us physically and emotionally by sharing the leadership responsibility – for which we are grateful.

The **sequence of worship**, the flow and movement represented by the various parts of the service, is also an important consideration in your preparation.

We urge you to read Isaiah 6:1-8, the prophet's own account of his calling; this passage demonstrates the basic flow of worship. It begins with praise of God: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Then, as Isaiah discerns the majesty of God, he is overwhelmed with his own sinfulness, indeed, a shared sense of being lost and unclean: "Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips..." So too our service of worship begins with acts of praise and confession (the corporate prayer of confession).

The focus returns to God and the news is good; Isaiah confronts the living Lord and discovers that God is merciful and able to transform Isaiah's life: "... your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." So too our service of worship moves next to the proclamation of God's good news, through scripture and sermon and on occasion through the sacraments.

Having experienced God's gracious love, Isaiah responds; he answers God's call and is sent out in ministry:

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.' and he said, 'Go...'"

So too our worship service moves from proclamation to response. We respond to God's good news with our hymns of faith and discipleship, our prayers of intercession and dedication, the offering of our gifts, etc.

Within this general pattern you are being asked to take the **responsibility** for preparing and conducting the following parts of the worship service:

1. Corporate Prayer of Confession
2. Declaration of Forgiveness
3. First Scripture Reading
4. Prayer of Dedication (of the offering).

Although we are appending examples for several of the above, we strongly encourage you to prepare your own material, using language that is simple, rather than Shakespearian, and concerns that are specific, rather than platitudinous. A good guideline is to use prayers and statements that are meaningful to you personally; the result will probably be a freshness and directness that enriches the experience of the worshipers.

1. Corporate Prayer of Confession

The Corporate Prayer of Confession (*see samples on page 5*) is the means whereby we acknowledge our rebellion against God and the resulting hurt that we cause to others; this prayer should ask for God's mercy and affirm God's steadfast love. We urge you to be specific and honest in this prayer.

Begin by saying, "**Please remain standing, and join me in the corporate prayer of confession.**"

Conclude your prayer with something like "**We ask your forgiveness as we silently confess our sins.**" as the final sentence in your corporate prayer of confession. Allow a brief time of silence of 30 seconds for personal reflection and then begin your declaration of forgiveness.

2. Declaration of Forgiveness

The corporate prayer of confession is followed immediately by a statement declaring God's mercy and gift of new life. Examples are provided in the attached pages of resources. Such a scriptural statement provides the **Declaration of Forgiveness** (*see samples on page 6*).

Following the sung response after the **Declaration of Forgiveness**, say, "**Please be seated,**" and pause for the congregation to settle.

3. Scripture

Your reading of the **first scripture lesson** will be enhanced not only by your having read it aloud several times, but also by your efforts to understand its meaning, so that you give proper emphasis in the reading of it.

While the reading will be listed in the order of worship, **we ask you to announce clearly what passage you are going to read.**

At the end of your reading, say the following (which is also printed in the bulletin):

One Voice: This is the Word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

For the Gospel:

One Voice: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Response: Praise to you, O Christ.

4. Prayer of Dedication

The **prayer of dedication** (*see sample page 8*), offered after the offering, expresses for the worshipers their thanksgiving and their personal commitment. Not only do we give our money to God; we give ourselves. Out of gratitude for God's grace and goodness, we commit ourselves to seeking God's will and living by God's way. The prayer of dedication should be brief and should conclude with "Amen," which signals the ushers to move.

Procedural Guidelines

Let us conclude with some procedural details. So that you may know the general theme or topic of the service in which you will be leading, the scripture readings and sermon title are listed both in the *Covenant News* and in the preceding Sunday's worship bulletin. Three weeks prior to your Sunday you will receive an information form that includes scripture readings, sermon title, who is preaching, and a summary of this booklet, plus an enlarged printout of your scripture reading.

Please drop off or email **no later than the Sunday preceding your Sunday:**

- 1) a written or typed copy of your Corporate Prayer of Confession,
- 2) your Declaration of Forgiveness (see page 6), and
- 3) a short informational paragraph about you

This can be emailed to the administrative email Secretary1@core.com, faxed to 216-791-2228, or left in the church office with the receptionist.

On Sunday morning please come to the office of the pastor preaching by 9:30 a.m. so that we can confer on any last minute details and join in a brief prayer of preparation.

You and whichever pastor is not preaching will enter the front of the sanctuary by 9:55 a.m. and sit in a front pew near the lectern. On the last verse of the processional hymn, you will move to the lectern to lead the congregation in the **Corporate Prayer of Confession** and the **Declaration of Forgiveness**. Please be sure to adjust the microphone to your height. Pause long enough for the congregation to become silent and expectant, and then **invite them to remain standing and join with you in the prayer**. Ask them to "pray" with you, not to "read" or "recite" the prayer. Remain at the lectern for the response, then invite them to be seated and begin the first scripture reading. **Please announce the reading (book, chapter and verses)**. When you complete the reading and the response, return to your pew.

After the ushers pass your seat as they bring the offering forward, move to the lectern. **After the Doxology, please introduce your prayer of dedication by saying, "Let us pray."**

As your schedule permits, when the postlude begins, please stand by the cloister door steps next to the lectern to greet people as they leave.

If you have any question about this task, please phone one of the pastors at 216-421-0482.

Resources

Sample Corporate Prayers of Confession

You are encouraged to write your own Corporate Prayer of Confession. You may find it helpful to review these examples. You may wish to end your prayer with something like, "We ask your forgiveness as we silently confess our sins."

Merciful God, we confess that praise to you is often not on our lips, that gratitude to you often does not fill our hearts. We become obsessed with our daily routines and our personal agendas. Forgive us for ignoring you. Fill us anew with your presence and with your purposes. Recreate us in the image of Jesus Christ.

Gracious God, we confess that we close the doors of our mind, shutting out your truth. We lock the gates of our hearts, pretending to be self-sufficient. Help us to sense your presence and to taste your grace, that we may fling wide the portals of our hearts, making them temples set apart from selfish use for your service.

Gracious God, whose goodness extends even beyond our imagining, we confess to smallness of faith. We shrink back from the demands of your discipleship because we fear our needs won't be met. You offer us the liberation of self-giving servanthood, and we end up worrying more about acquiring and accumulating things for ourselves. Forgive us for the ways our lack of faith hinders your work through us. Open us to your Spirit. Renew us by the power of your love to find our joy in following your way.

Eternal God, our judge and our redeemer, we confess that we have failed to be an obedient people. We have not done your will, we have refused to bear the troubles of others. We have ignored the pain of the world, and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. Forgive us, we pray, and free us for joyful obedience; through Jesus Christ our sovereign savior.

Almighty God, we confess to seeking the security of other fortresses. We take refuge in our achievements or our affluence. We put our trust, not in you, but in our career or our country. We despair at the power of evil, but we are also afraid to open ourselves to the power of your spirit. Forgive our pride. Calm our fears. Transform us into trusting disciples.

Gracious God, we try to be good; forgive us when our goodness makes us judgmental. We try to be faithful; forgive us when our faithfulness makes us intolerant. We try to be helpful; forgive us when our helpfulness becomes condescending. Take our best efforts, O Lord, and transform them by your grace and goodness.

Declaration of Forgiveness Samples

One Voice: Hear the good news!

#1 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might be dead to sin and be alive to all that is good.

Or #2 God does not deal with us according to our sins, for with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with God is plenteous redemption.

Or #3 The Apostle Paul declares, "I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in height or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Or #4 The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun.

Or #5 If we had died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Christ. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.

Or #6 God shows the divine love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Or #7 If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just, forgiving and transforming our lives.

Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel.

Response: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Lay Worship Leaders Summary

A. Responsibilities during Worship

1. Corporate Prayer of Confession (*which you compose*)
2. Declaration of Forgiveness (*which you select either from the samples on page 6 or from other passages of scripture.*)
3. First Scripture Reading (*which is selected by the person preaching in that service*)
4. Prayer of Dedication of the offering (*which you compose*)

B. Procedure

1. Sermon topic and scripture reading for your Sunday is mailed to you three weeks prior to your Sunday; information may also be in the *Covenant News*.
2. Responsibilities: 1) compose Prayer of Confession, 2) select Declaration of Forgiveness, 3) compose Prayer of Dedication, and 4) write biography paragraph.
3. Send Prayer of Confession, Declaration of Forgiveness, and biography **by the Sunday prior to your assigned Sunday**.

4. On your Sunday:

9:30 a.m. Meet in the preaching pastor's office

9:55 a.m. Sit in a pew in front of lectern

Service responsibilities as outlined

11:00 a.m. As your schedule permits, when the postlude begins, please stand by the cloister door steps next to the lectern to greet people as they leave.

Helpful hint: Obtain a large bulletin before the worship service, which has the hymns copied and inserted in the bulletin.

Lay Worship Leader – introductory paragraph

Our Lay Worship Leader today _____
(Name)

who joined the Covenant in _____.
(Year, if known*)

Please add one to three sentences describing yourself, mentioning, as you wish, your work, family, hobbies, and other involvements in the church and community.

* if you don't know the year, leave it blank as we can look it up in the Session records.

Practical Tips for Lay Worship Leaders

1. After you write your prayers, read them out loud, especially the unison prayer of confession. Are the phrases short enough and obvious enough for unison use? If not, rewrite and/or add commas.
2. Before you speak from the lectern microphone, move the microphone into a position where you can lick it like an ice cream cone.
3. Target your voice to the back wall of the sanctuary. Do not use your conversational voice; project or throw your voice. Imagine a little old lady with a hearing aid in the last pew; if she's straining to hear your voice, throw it farther.
4. Speed: slow
5. Enunciation: exaggerated
6. Before starting to speak, wait for the congregation to settle.
7. A sample Prayer of Dedication:

Gracious God, we thank you for your generous blessings of life and love, light and laughter. We offer you our gifts as token and pledge of our faith in you and our commitment to your way. We ask that our money may be transformed into acts of ministry and mission. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Guidelines for the Use of Inclusive Language in our Services of Worship

Preface

Christian feminists, both clergy and lay, both male and female, warn that we are running three risks in our use of language about God and about people:

1. Misrepresenting God
2. Reinforcing unhealthy societal stereotypes about men and women
3. Alienating some women from the church and/or the Christian religion.

The first warning points to the dominance in theology and worship of male metaphors for God, such as Father, Son, Lord, and King, and the exclusive use of male pronouns for God. Such usage ignores the many female metaphors for God in scripture and violates the Judeo-Christian affirmation that God is beyond gender (“I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst....” Hosea 11:9).

The second warning is summed up in the statement: “If God is male, male is God.” The critics warn that we are reinforcing, indeed giving religious sanction to the understanding that men are superior and therefore ought to dominate and that women are inferior and therefore ought to be submissive – in the church, at home, and in the workplace. The Christian feminists point out that Jesus rejected those stereotypes and substituted a discipleship of equals.

The third warning is that women who reject that understanding of male superiority and dominance will, if they have not already, reject a religion or church which seems to give religious endorsement to those unhealthy societal stereotypes. An additional dimension of the problem is dramatically different levels of experience and awareness of those risks within our congregation.

The following guidelines are suggested to advise the pastors, music staff, and lay worship leaders.

Guidelines

1. We are encouraged to use a multiplicity of names, metaphors, and similes when speaking to or about God.
 - a. Many biblical and traditional names for God are not gender specific, for example

God	Provider	Comforter
Yahweh	Sustainer	Counselor
Creator	Savior	Holy One
Redeemer	Reconciler	Bread of Life
Liberator	Spirit of Truth	Alpha and Omega

- b. Personal metaphors and similes for God do not need to be limited to Father; for example

Gracious God, who cares for us as a father and protects us as a mother.

O Thou who art our faithful Friend.

Our constant and wise Companion.

- c. Mystical or abstract names do not imply gender and add further richness; for example:

Infinite Spirit	Giver of Life	Holy Wisdom
Source	Ground of Being	Eternal One
Light	Infinite Depth	

- d. We may also follow the lead of scripture in using names for God drawn from nature; for example

Rock	Wind	Fire	Sea
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- e. The basic approach is to provide a “mosaic of metaphors,” seeking to express the richness of God’s nature and activity and attempting to avoid such singular usage of any one metaphor or name for God as to be idolatrous.

2. With regard to third person pronouns for God, we are encouraged to take a vow of poverty.

- a. The language of prayer, both corporate and individual, happily presents no problems, for second person pronouns are not gender-specific.

- b. Third person singular pronouns are gender-specific; and there are problems in referring to God with the use of “he” and also with “she,” or “it” or “they.”

- c. Whenever possible, we may use non-pronoun alternatives to “he, him, his”; for example:

1. Replace “he” or “him” by repeating the name God or by substituting another metaphor for God. Example: God is love and he (God, our faithful Friend) seeks our loving response.
2. Replace “his” with God’s, of God, the divine, the ultimate, the infinite, or the holy. Example: God invites us to obey his (the divine) will and to walk in his way (the way of God).
3. Replace “himself” with “in very self” or a synonym such as “the holy one.” Example: God himself (the holy one) is with us.

- d. Some awkwardness in expression is worth the price to free us from a too-limited understanding of God and to avoid forcing on others such a misrepresentation of God.
3. We may seek to maintain a healthy tension between familiar, traditional usages and transforming uses of inclusive language.
 - a. We shall continue to use the traditional "Our Father" in the Lord's Prayer, but in free prayer, we shall use the multiplicity of names, metaphors, and similes for God.
 - b. We shall continue to use the traditional Trinitarian language of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" in baptism and the doxology; but in calls to worship, free prayer, and benedictions we shall use other Trinitarian formulations, such as:

Source, Savior and Spirit
Creator, Christ, and Comforter
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer
 - c. We may introduce some gender-inclusive translations of scripture such as "An Inclusive Language Lectionary."
4. We are encouraged to use inclusive language about people in the free liturgical forms, such as calls to worship, prayers, sermons, and benedictions; for example
 - a. From "man" and "mankind" to humanity, humankind, human beings, persons, people, everyone
 - b. From "sons of God" to "children of God"
 - c. From "brethren" to "sisters and brothers"
 - d. From "brotherhood" to community, family of faith, partnership
 - e. From "chairman" to chair, moderator, or convener
 - f. From "clergyman" to clergy, clergyperson, pastor

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