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PRESBYTERIAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSICIANS
Office of Christian Formation

Planning Music Like a Worshiper

Questions for Musical Worship Planning

Why Think Like a Worshiper?

Effective worship planning begins by remembering that worship leaders are first **worshipers among worshipers**. Effective music leadership creates opportunities for the whole congregation to participate fully in the worship of God. Musical choices informed by considering the perspective of those in the pews shift the focus away from a small group of leaders and invite the entire body to offer its joyful sacrifice of praise together.

Whether serving a large church with multiple ensembles or a small congregation led by volunteers, every worship planner can make thoughtful musical choices that help people encounter God and one another in worship. The following questions are intended as a practical toolkit for planning worship that is theologically grounded, congregationally engaging, and attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Beginning with Worship

- What might God be inviting this congregation to experience in this service?
- How might we partner with God in God's invitation?
- How can our leadership model authentic worship rather than simply facilitate it?

Evaluating Song Choices

Theology

- What does this song tell us about God?
- Does it proclaim truth that is faithful and clear?
- What does it communicate about who we are as God's people?

Purpose

- What function does this song serve within the architecture of the service?
- How does it support today's Scripture, sermon, sacrament, season, or theme?
- What response is it inviting from the congregation?

Participation

- Is this song meant to be sung by everyone or primarily listened to?
- Will the congregation feel confident singing it?
- If it is new, have we provided a way to learn it?

People Resources

- Can our musicians lead this song well?
- Does it fit the gifts of our ensemble?
- Will leading it with excellence encourage rather than distract from worship?

Shaping the Journey

- Do the musical choices and placement support the emotional and spiritual flow of the service?
- Does the energy rise and fall naturally?
- Where does the congregation need space to reflect?
- Are we allowing silence where silence is appropriate?
- Are transitions smooth enough that worship continues uninterrupted?
- Is every musical moment helping move people toward God?

Thinking Like Your Congregation

- If I were sitting in the congregation, would I know what to do?
- Can I comfortably sing this melody?
- Can I hear the collective voice of the congregation around me and experience my own voice as part of the whole?
- Is the key appropriate for the average voice?
- Are the rhythms and range accessible?
- Are familiar songs balanced with opportunities to learn something new?
- Do we need encouragement, comfort, challenge, celebration, lament, or hope today?

Removing Barriers to Participation

- Can everyone see the music and lyrics?
- Can everyone hear clearly?
- Are translations needed?
- Have copyright permissions been addressed?
- If movement or clapping is encouraged, are people's hands free?
- Have we given just enough instruction for how we are requesting participation?

Embracing Your Context

- What does our church do especially well?
- What limitations should we embrace instead of fighting?
- Are we trying to imitate a constructed ideal, or faithfully serve our own congregation?
- How can today's resources be used creatively and faithfully?

Leaving Space for the Spirit

- Have we planned thoughtfully?
- Have we also left room for holy surprise?
- Are we willing to hold our own plans loosely?
- Are we attentive enough to respond if the Spirit leads differently than expected?
- Does every element ultimately point beyond itself to God?

A Final Check Before Sunday

Before finalizing the service, ask:

- ✓ Does this service tell the story of God's work among God's people?
- ✓ Will the music help the congregation to perceive their own connection to God's story?
- ✓ Have we made it easy for everyone to participate?
- ✓ Does the music serve the worship rather than become the focus?
- ✓ Have we planned well while remaining open to the Holy Spirit?

The goal is not simply to lead worship well—it is to create the conditions in which the whole congregation can become active worshipers together.

Helpful Resources

- *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song* — Constance Cherry
- *The Complete Worship Service* — Kevin J. Navarro
- *Worship Is a Verb* — Robert E. Webber

The Takeaway

Plan thoughtfully. Think from the pews. Create space for congregational participation. Trust the Holy Spirit to move in unexpected ways.

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