

Worship Leadership in Secular Settings

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Introduction

Although the following ideas and guidelines can apply to worship in many different settings and locations, they are written for people who lead informal worship in primarily secular locations—resort and leisure areas, special events, marketplaces, and similar nontraditional settings where people can come together to worship God and find Christian fellowship.

Wherever people gather, there is potential for a group to gather for worship—on the beach, by the lake, on the riverbank, at boat ramps, in campgrounds, under trees, in recreation rooms, yacht clubs, by a swimming pool, in shopping areas and office buildings, hotel lobbies, and restaurant facilities. At special events such as flea markets, carnivals, festivals, exhibitions, sporting events, and hobby-related gatherings, people can worship God together. Wherever a group can gather and have minimal distractions, they can focus together on the celebration of Christian worship.

What happens when we worship?

1. Communion with God, spiritual growth, and refreshment for living through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
2. Celebration and fellowship of the Body of Christ.
3. Renewal of commitment to God and service to Him.
4. New confession of personal faith in God through Jesus Christ.

Why should we hold worship services in nontraditional settings?

1. As an active, visible presence of the Body of Christ in the world.
2. As an active witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.
3. For the fellowship and personal support of Christians away from home, on the move, or in the work place.
4. As an opportunity for non-Christians and seekers to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in terms which they can understand.

What are some differing dynamics between worship in the church and worship in leisure or marketplace settings?

1. The institutional building vs. outdoors, nature, special events, marketplace, and workplace settings.
2. One church or denomination vs. various backgrounds, religious traditions, and beliefs.
3. Permanency and tradition vs. transiency and flexibility.
4. Formality vs. informality.
5. Familiarity and friends vs. newness and strangers (or co-workers).

6. Chosen, recognized church leadership vs. volunteer, peer leadership, or resort ministry personnel.
7. Ongoing church resources and equipment vs. minimal supplies and adapted accommodations.
8. Standard times for worship vs. more flexible days or hours.

How do I gain permission to hold a worship service in a public or secular setting?

1. Build rapport with the management through personal contacts, involvement in activities in their setting, other forms of ministry in their setting (camping, recreation, crafts, etc.).
2. Be aware of the peoples desires within that setting to participate in worship services there. Share that with the management or delegated personnel and ask permission to hold services for a period of time. Be sensitive to his or her attitude and responses to this approach, and do not push yourself on them.
3. If another Christian group is already holding services or desires to do so, seek ways to be supportive and cooperative.
4. If nearby businesses offer worship opportunities, let the management know. They may feel the need to conform to their competition and offer the same. Many families are attracted to places that offer them worship services that are coordinated with their leisure activities and special events.
5. Work cooperatively with management and employees-gaining permission to hold group worship, to publicize it, and to conduct the services.
6. Keep management up to date on the progress of your services and any changes that need to be made.
7. Choose a worship time that is convenient and attractive to people in that setting.

How can the worship service be promoted?

1. Use the natural forms of publicity within the setting such as bulletin boards, newsletters, bulletins, signs, posters, word of mouth, announcements, special event programs, or handouts.
2. Visit the people you are trying to reach, inviting them to come. Contact them during the week, on Saturday, or even an hour or so before the service.
3. Design a creative handout that will spark interest or stir curiosity in the event. This may relate to your worship theme. It could contain a riddle, be shaped like an object in your theme, or be an attractive Scripture selection that you are going to use in worship. Any promotion piece should state your location and time of worship.
4. A clown or mime being used in the service would be good in promotion prior to the service.
5. Offer people transportation to the service. In some large campgrounds, a van may be useful in picking up campers who are staying some distance from the worship site.

What are some desirable characteristics of a worship leader in nontraditional settings?

1. Has a personal, active relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
2. Has a growing relationship through Bible study and ministry.
3. Has a deep concern for individuals who have no relationship to Christ or who are struggling.
4. Desires to share their faith with others, both non-Christians and Christians.
5. Able to understand and identify with the individuals who are meeting to worship, such as vacationers, campers, raceway fans, carnival workers, motel workers, travelers, convention-goers, hobbyists, and shopkeepers.
6. Able to relate to and cooperate with management and employees in the setting (e.g. campground manager, service personnel) on personal, business, and practical levels.
7. Available for visitation and promotion, as well as for follow through.
8. Committed to the task and responsible.
9. Flexible and able to deal with unexpected circumstances.
10. Trained, experienced, prepared.
11. Cooperates with local churches in giving or asking for assistance.

What are the basic ingredients of Christian worship?

Communion with God, prayer, praise, confession, petition, thanksgiving, intercession, Scripture reading, testimony, proclamation, music, meditation, commitment, dedication, giving, and involvement of the people.

How is corporate worship expressed?

1. Through prayers.
2. Through singing and other music by vocalists, ensembles, instrumentalists, congregation, choirs, and puppets.
3. Through testimonies of God's activity.
4. Through Scripture reading by individuals, a congregation, or dramatic groups.
5. Through Bible study, preaching, message, or devotional thought.
6. Through dramatic monologue, dialogue, mime, drama, taped music, message, and media presentations.
7. Through periods of directed or undirected meditation.
8. Through personal and group commitment.
9. Through offerings of gifts, self, talents, etc.

What are characteristics of creative worship?

1. Creative worship is led by God's Spirit. It is guided, but spontaneous, joyful, and reverent. It has an air of expectancy.

2. It is prepared for the group expected in attendance at the service with their needs and preferences in mind. People in leisure settings who are breaking their routine are often open to new forms of worship.

3. It actively involves the congregation.

4. It consists of enough elements that are familiar to the congregation that they are comfortable in their worship and feel that they have participated in a Christian service. Yet it has variety and movement.

5. It allows for God's revelation and man's response in worship and commitment. Being creative in nature, it should bring new things into being—new thoughts, insights, and attitudes.

6. The music is well chosen and carried out. The congregational music should especially be chosen with care and led with sensitivity.

7. The senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste are used to stimulate effective responses in worship of God.

8. The creative arts such as drama, mime, and clowning are utilized effectively.

9. The use of art and imagery complements worship and creates a sense of celebration and excitement. It also reinforces the theme, gives people something on which to focus, and encourages memory retention.

10. Creative worship and its desired spontaneity usually require more planning than a traditional service does.

What are some general suggestions for nontraditional worship leadership?

1. Lead people in worshipping God rather than doing church or having a religious get-together.

2. Keep your language simple for children and for those who do not understand the language of Zion.

3. Major on common beliefs and practices, respecting people's rights and avoiding divisive or controversial theology or issues.

4. Maintain a sense of informality in worship, but always be prepared to conduct an orderly service.

What are some things to look for in designing a worship service?

1. Follow basic principles for Christian worship. Make it God-centered and biblically grounded. Have a definite purpose for each item included. Build your worship around a theme or a progression of events to provide unity and focus. Alternate moods and movement, silence and expression, standing and sitting, spoken words and music, and participation by worship leaders and congregation. Maintain a sense of progression.

2. Design your service around a theme, letting each part of it contribute to its development. Choose themes that would be conducive to worship and appropriate for the situation and setting, for example:

Outdoors—handiwork of God, trees, ocean, water, wind, plants, sun.

Family—personal relationships, children, love.

Praise—for God's activity in our lives, Jesus Christ and salvation.

Parables—about the kingdom of God and the Good Samaritan.

Seasonal emphasis—Christmas, Easter, and national holidays.

3. Choose songs for the congregation that are familiar or very easy to learn. The text and music should be easy to sing and understand.
4. Try using some different types of musical instruments in effective ways.
5. Be creative! Mix new approaches with traditional ones in order to accomplish some of the objectives in the above section on creative worship.
6. Capitalize on the setting where you are, using its attractiveness and unique characteristics to contribute to the worship experience.
7. Use the religious history of the area as a theme or item of interest.
8. Keep the service moving along and respect starting and ending times that have been announced. Thirty to forty minutes should be adequate for most settings.
9. Keep yourself studied and prayed up in order to lead worship in the best possible way.
10. Be diligent in planning for worship and never settle for second-rate efforts. We are children of the Creator and should reflect His integrity.
11. Remember to give God the glory, and do not focus excessive praise on musicians and other worship leaders. Consider whether it might be possible, and appropriate, to ask that people refrain from applause.

How can I help build a sense of fellowship among the people?

1. Mingle with the people and find out interesting things about them. If appropriate, mention a few facts about people in your welcoming comments such as where people are from, new babies, and newly weds.
2. When helping people to get to know each other before the service starts, refrain from discussing church affiliation. Some may not even be Christians and would be embarrassed to admit it.
3. Involve others in your welcoming comments and introductions, being careful not to embarrass them or to give them the opportunity to take over.
4. Do not make jokes about people's differences. Be confident in who you are and express genuine caring in new relationships.
5. Be accepting of all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds in whatever condition they appear for worship.

What things may be needed to assist with the worship experience?

1. Location, seating, podium, sound and lighting equipment, and possible shelter from the weather.
2. Volunteers to help with the worship leadership, preparation for the service, and clean-up.
3. Bible, scripture selections, order of worship, and songbooks or song sheets.
4. Musical instruments, CD or tape player, CD's and tapes, and media equipment.

5. Publicity, signs, and banners.
6. Containers for the offering.
7. Tracts, discipleship materials, and guest registration cards.
8. Coffee, juice, and doughnuts for fellowship time

What are some practical guidelines?

1. Use instruments, cassette tapes, and CD's that are practical, portable, and practiced.
2. Be sensitive to the comfort of those you are leading in worship in the areas of audio, visual, and seating distractions.
3. Avoid duplicating copyrighted songs and other materials for use in your worship. If you have questions, consult the publisher or copyright laws. Consider getting a use license from Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc., 17201 NE Sacramento St., Portland, Ore. 97230-5914.
4. Talk with your sponsoring church or association about furnishing hymnals, songbooks, or Scripture portions for you to use. Also, let churches in Southern Baptist Convention partnership states know of your needs.
5. Make offering containers available to those who want to contribute, but do not pass the plate during the service.
6. Have materials available for follow-up for counseling with new Christians, seekers, and others. Have trained volunteers to talk with people needing counseling.

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