

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS

Archdeacon Bob Barrett

Informal Worship Designing & Leading

**Informal Worship covers a range of styles
Many are a blend of traditional and modern.
It requires good decision making
and careful planning.**

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS Number 9

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Informal Worship – Designing & Leading

Informal Worship covers a range of styles - many a blend of traditional and modern.
It requires good decision making, careful planning and skilled leadership.

This series of Booklets provide practical ideas to help leaders develop their skills in a variety of ministry areas. Experimenting with them, growing your own ideas, discussion with ministry teams will help both you and others grow in skill. Good modelling, evaluation and training will inspire worshippers to worship, pray and grow in their Christian life and ministry.

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THINKING ABOUT STYLES

- Informal and Traditional Worship

Churches who provide a variety of styles are giving people alternatives to opt into rather than opt out because they do not find the available style helps them come close to the Lord in worship. A different style can provide a way into worship and church life. Having 'entered' those same people may find their 'worship-home' in that same style or in another one.

For over twenty years I have been **observing, participating** in and **leading informal worship** services. Looking back at our earlier attempts I realise how limited they were. Fortunately God was good - he blessed people in spite of our inadequacies and mistakes. God still does! Nevertheless there are things we can do which enable people to be assisted in their worship and more open to all the Spirit wants to do.

Worship has developed through the years. Many people still thoroughly enjoy 'the good old services'. They know how to worship God using **traditional worship styles**. They are relaxed and fully involved. They express worship and are open to the Spirit. The Spirit is present. The people's faith grows. All of this can and does happen during traditional worship.

However many do not find traditional worship so helpful. This can be for a variety of reasons. Maybe they do not feel comfortable; its style is foreign to their background; content does not seem to fit their taste; the music is difficult; the words unlike those of their vocabulary; or . . .

Such people may learn to worship in a traditional environment. They may eventually find a comfortable 'home' in such a setting.

Many people find a more informal approach to worship more suitable. It fits their personality, music taste, age, background and experience. **Informal worship has a place** in today's church. Parishes who offer a variety of styles find more people are attracted. A different style can be an 'entry point' - a way into worship and church life for some who would not come to a traditional style. Having 'entered' those same people may find their 'worship-home' in that same style or in another one.

Neither traditional nor informal styles are right or wrong. **Both have their place** in today's church. Both can provide true worship *'in Spirit and in truth'*.

Informal worship covers a **range of styles** - some with a 'service' in the people's hand - some without. Many informal worship styles are in fact **blended**. They are a good blend of traditional and modern. They powerfully use traditional hymns alongside modern songs; set prayers and informal-spontaneous prayers; formal-set Prayer Book content incorporating flexible elements; . . .

Informal worship **requires careful planning**. Seldom does it just 'happen'. The Spirit guides us as we plan ahead. The Spirit works powerfully in well planned worship. When planning your informal worship do not ignore the concepts of traditional worship. Some traditional structures and content can be powerfully used in informal worship.

Informal worship **requires skilled leadership**. It is more difficult to plan and lead than traditional worship (which also requires special skills – some the same, some different). We need informal worship which is worthwhile, relevant, uplifting, appropriate and honouring to God. Providing such worship is an exciting challenge.

This booklet will help you prepare and lead informal worship - but it cannot replace prayer, hard work (learning and preparing), doing it and learning through discussion, evaluation and further skill development.

As you seek to increase your understanding and leadership of informal worship you will also find help from other Developing Your Skills booklets 1: 'Visitor Friendly Worship', 2: 'What is Worship?' and 3: 'Leading the Prayers'.

WHAT IS INFORMAL WORSHIP

IT IS NOT . .

- **not** having a '**sing along**'.
- **not** a '**performance**' by an up front leader or group.
- **not** just '**following the whim**' of the next suggestion from the leader or congregation - for a prayer or reading or song . . .

INFORMAL WORSHIP IS . . .

- is a well **planned** worship journey (Booklet 2).
- is using a suitable **structure**.
- is **congregational** - corporate worship in which we all may easily participate.
- is bringing a **freshness** of approach to worship by being free of the week by week repetition of 'the words from the Book' (while acknowledging some find freshness in repetitive styles.)
- is often using the **elements of a book** service in a flexible and informal manner.
- is often using elements from **other sources** (books or made up by leaders and/or congregation members).
- is often a carefully planned **blend of structure** with space for **spontaneity** - using a structure with **creativity**. A creatively followed structure gives flexibility and brings a combination of the security found in the **familiar** and the release found in the **unexpected**.
- is often a **regular** week by week style.

INFORMAL WORSHIP TARGETS DIFFERENT PEOPLE -

It Seeks To Provide A Style which youth and young families (and often people in their 40's and some in their 50's and 60's) find relevant.

Different informal styles suit different target groups.

THE STYLE AND ITS SUITABILITY often depends on . . .

- the style of **music**.
- the type of **instruments** and accompaniment.
- the place of **children** - within the service or in a specifically designed programme.
- the day, beginning **time and length** of the service.
- the degree of **participation** allowable.
- the **amount** of sung worship; individual prayer; silence; teaching; testimony; creative ministry; prayer-healing ministry.
- the **language** of leaders, songs and Bible readings.

INFORMAL WORSHIP HAS AN AIM.

It aims to lift people's attention to the Living Lord. Our aim is fulfilled if we help people come in openness, in praise and in worship - so they are put in touch with the Living God, strengthened in their relationship with God; so they are built up in their faith and eventually go encouraged to live as Christians and serve the Lord.

Informal worship fits into the overall task of '**Equipping the Saints** for the Work of Ministry' (Ephesians 4); developing their maturity (as people and as Christians); building their fellowship with fellow Christians; helping them find and use their ministry gifts; and enabling them to be better salt and light in the community.

STRUCTURE IS IMPORTANT.

Every service has a structure. Every service should be designed so that the Father is exalted, Christ seen and the Holy Spirit given freedom to work. It is sadly possible to plan an informal worship service so that this does **not** happen.

In every service the worshipper should be helped on their **worship journey** - so they are encouraged and enabled to '*worship the Father in Spirit and Truth*'. It is possible to lead a service in a way that leaders get in the road. We need to develop our skills so that it is Christ who is seen - not us.

Informal worship requires some kind of structure. The leadership **of your parish** can develop an appropriate structure for your situation.

A service **without a structure** has no backbone and nothing 'holding it together'. It flops in all directions. It doesn't seem to go anywhere. People get confused: one minute they are reflecting on the Lord - the next listening to the leader make comments on the week that's gone; supposed to be praising God for his greatness - but the words of the next song drag their thoughts off in a different direction; keeping quiet to listen - but interrupted by someone sharing their thought of the week. Structureless services can head in too many directions too quickly.

Structures become true informal worship by:

- Firstly the presence and work of the **Holy Spirit** - inspiring worship and touching people.
- Secondly the openness and participation of each **worshipper**.
- Thirdly the **leader** whose attitude, manner of leading and skill encourages and enables worshippers to worship.

The central aspects of this are out of our hands (*'the Spirit goes where he wishes'*). However we can open the doors to worship, or get in the road of worship, by the way we plan the structures and lead the service.

Structure is like a framework in which we place, in order, the various elements of the service.

DESIGNING AN INFORMAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Developing your Skills booklets 1 and 2 will help you explore these questions.

WHEN DESIGNING A STRUCTURE CONSIDER FOUR THINGS:

1. The **purpose** of your worship and the concept of the worship journey.
2. The **target group** - who the service will be for.
3. The appropriate **content** - the possible elements you would include in the service - and which of those you will use in the service on **this particular occasion**.
4. The **order** - so that the elements flow together in a unified whole - an order people can follow, find helpful and be uplifted by.

IF YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DESIGNING an informal service the following **exercise** may assist you. A group in your church can work through these questions and shape a service that can be truly honouring to God and worshipful for the participants.

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SERVICE?

Answer this in **general** when designing or improving a regular informal worship service - and ask it in **particular** when preparing a particular service.

- Consider the **general** things (applying to all worship) such as the Father glorified, the Son seen and the Spirit free to work).
- Consider the **specifics** for this style of service. Specifics emerge from the next questions.
- Consider the **theme** and desired outcomes of this particular service.

QUESTION 2: WHAT IS THE TARGET GROUP?

- What type of people is the service (designed to be) attracting?
- Consider the profile of your average 'Tom and Tania' who may turn up or who you may want to encourage to come.
- If you were **planning** a new congregation or **evaluating** the suitability of a particular worship service it is worth spending some time on this question. You want to know whether the content, order, and way of doing things is suitable for the type of people you hope will attend.
- Consider such things as:
 - age and generation.
 - music taste.
 - family situation - grandparents/parents/singles/solos/teenagers/children.

- career - employed - unemployed.
- book - or non book culture.
- education and reading ability.
- church background or not.
- long term Christians, new Christians, not yet Christians.
- tastes, interests, lifestyles.
- days and times they might find attractive.

QUESTION 3: WHAT KIND OF CONTENT IS SUITABLE FOR OUR TARGET GROUP?

- Consider whether it is appropriate to **hand out** a book(s), a service sheet, use a projector for all or some content.
- Consider **timing** - to begin and end; and for each element (e.g. how long a prayer time do they need or can they cope with).
- Consider **music** – whether to use, what and how much – the type of songs and instruments – participation by singing and/or listening.
- Consider **teaching** - what type of sermon, how long, . . .
- Consider: prayers and readings; horizontal (relating to others) before, during and after (and how to make such time visitor friendly).
- Consider all the possible elements that could be included. For example - will we use and how will we do it?
 - Bible reading(s).
 - Other reading(s).
 - Dance, drama, clowning.
 - Testimony - talk or interview.
 - Confession - what type of?
 - Silence for silent prayers, listening to God, soaking up God's presence.
 - Healing - prayer ministry
 - Holy Communion – sometimes, always? How informal?
 - Traditional hymns and/or modern songs.
 - Children's talk, songs, involvement.

When considering content remember that people who come to this service might not attend any other service of worship. Month by month this will be their only place of worship. Therefore if they are ever to hear teaching, receive Holy Communion, etc. – this will be the occasion.

QUESTION 4: WHAT IS THE MOST APPROPRIATE ORDER TO PLACE THE ELEMENTS?

Order creates the **flow of thought and feelings**. Order takes people as they arrive (their thoughts, emotions, hopes . . .); gathers them together so that they may hear what the Lord is saying; respond in openness, prayer and worship and go out uplifted, challenged, inspired, encouraged, willing and able to be God's people in their homes, work situations, friendships and community involvement. Good order allows the Lord to do what he wants. Bad order gets in the road, it distracts and confuses.

When laying out your answers to these four questions consider the issues raised in the following sections.

THREE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Any worship service keeps our aim in mind.

To achieve these results it is vital to include three essential elements. When these three are done well participants' faith will grow.

In considering these three and other elements of the services we remember that good services recognise both the long term participant and the first time visitor; the mature Christian and the not yet Christian observer. It seeks to be relevant to all groups.

Essential element number 1: Preaching - Teaching

Good preaching (which teaches and encourages Christian living) builds up Christians. It needs good content which is communicated - see Booklet 5 'Preaching and Teaching'. The amount of time given to reading and 'opening up the Bible' depends on the target group. Somewhere around 20 minutes is usually appropriate. Over 25 to 35 minutes and we are likely to cease communicating - especially if we are encouraging visitors to return and if we are involving people who are not trained listeners. Too much time given to the sermon does not leave enough time for other essential elements. An Alternative worship style may require a shorter sermon and/or a different style of 'teaching/preaching'.

Essential element number 2: Praying

Set aside a reasonably long time slot for prayer – at least 5 minutes. Not prayers led by one up front person - who talks at God on the congregation's behalf (while the people's minds wander). To develop people's maturity we need a prayer time in which they are fully involved - their minds thinking through the issues of the prayer; their hearts feeling the emotions involved; their spirits reaching to the Lord in thanksgiving, intercession and openness; their voices possibly joining in.

Time to think, listen and intercede are vital. Once a congregation is helped to grow in this area they may need around 10 to 15 minutes set aside.

For more ideas on these issues see the later Section on prayer and Developing your Skills Booklet 3: 'Leading the Prayers'.

Essential element number 3: Worship

In one sense the whole service is worship. However informal worship has the opportunity to spend time focusing on the greatness, power, love, the majesty of our God. A great deal of modern music can powerfully focus us and give us good words to express worship.

As a congregation learns to worship they will look for around 20 to 25 minutes to be set aside in this 'vertical dimension'. It is not just a matter of 20 minute singing. Right flow and skills are vital to turn 'songs' into 'worship' - see section 11.

What about **other elements**?

Put simply the other elements lead into, link and/or form a part of one of these three.

They begin and conclude the service.

They link these three elements together.

They may be a part of these three (e.g. a drama or testimony as a part of the teaching; or silence as part of the prayers).

Occasionally they provide a physical and mental stretch break to aid concentration and participation (e.g. a song between the sermon and the prayers - well selected it will also move people's thoughts and hearts from the sermon to the prayers).

These three essential elements will probably **take most of the time** available.

If too much time is spent on other elements these three critical ones are crowded out or reduced to a length which loses their effectiveness.

DECIDING CONTENT

Some 'boundaries'

When discussing content it can be helpful to place possible content under three headings. This is especially important when **planning a new service**. It helps all those who design and lead each service to know what their boundaries are.

Should a leader in planning a particular service want to step outside the guidelines created by these three headings then that leader knows they can **negotiate changes** with whoever has the overall responsibility for that service.

Most elements will easily locate themselves under one of the headings - especially when we have decided how informal the service is going to be. Target groups, service length and what other worship opportunities a parish gives also determine where possible elements 'fit' in the always/sometimes/never exercise.

When placing elements under one of the headings also consider the style of that element. It can also be helpful to discuss the length of **time** that may be allocated to it.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Always	Sometimes	Never

Column 1: Always

Here you are looking for elements that the service will (nearly) always include. For example you may choose to always have: modern music, one Bible reading, 15 minute sermon, one traditional hymn, brief silence (one minute), use Power Point for the sermon (to assist visual people and aid memory); etc.

Column 2: Sometimes

Here you list elements that could sometimes be used - to give creativity, flexibility and fit certain themes. For example: sometimes a drama, testimony, second or third reading, second traditional hymn, corporate prayer on the screen, Holy Communion, children's talk, long silence (4 minutes), organ music, dramatised reading . . .

Column 3: Never

This is a very important column as it **determines the boundaries** of the service for leaders. They know what they may **not** do when leading and planning. For example we will never: be longer than 70 minutes, wear robes, put the prayer book in the hands of people, make comments on every song...

When **doing this exercise** allow time to discuss and **explore** the **suggestions**. Do not always assume informal services means we always/never will . . . Discuss. Look for alternative ways. Be creative. Think carefully about each element.

An informal worship service is **not as simple as it seems**. Also remember that not all traditional things are bad - for example some traditional hymns fit well into an informal service; some written prayers can be very powerful during informal worship (perhaps put on the screen and prayed slowly by everyone).

What we use depends largely on our target group and degree of formality - plus our leadership skill and creativity.

ONE POSSIBLE ORDER

A 75 MINUTE SERVICE

The following is an **easy to follow simple order**. It keeps in mind many of the points in this booklet. Notice the time frame.

It can easily be added to with some of the 'sometimes elements' (section 6.6). If they are placed in the right position they will enhance the worship journey, prepare people and help them be open. If elements are carelessly included they give a disjointed order - which often interrupts what the Lord is doing.

In a sense the following **divisions are arbitrary** but they give a useful flow. On any particular occasion one element could be better in another section - or in more than one - e.g. silence.

SAMPLE 10 a.m. SERVICE.

Part One - GATHERING TOGETHER AND FOCUSING ON THE LORD (6 MINUTES)

- 10.00 am Brief concise welcome statement
 - A greeting ('say hi to those around')
- 10.01 am Lively song (or two) of celebration
 - A brief prayer
- 10.04 am A brief Bible verse or silent reflection
- 10.05 am Confession and Absolution (assurance of forgiveness)

Part Two - LISTENING TO THE LORD (30 MINUTES)

- 10.06 am Testimony (occasionally) or children's talk
- 10.09 am Song and children go to Sunday School
- 10.12 am Bible reading(s)
- 10.14 am Sermon (17 minutes)
- 10.31 am Response (one or two of):
 - a prayer of commitment, or
 - silence for reflection, or
 - song (which responds to the theme), or
 - a statement (song, spoken or listened to) of belief and/or commitment.

Link this with a natural flow to either part 3 or 4. The order (3 or 4) depends on the theme and purpose of the particular service.

Part Three - PRAYING (10 MINUTES) - WHICH COULD BE:

10.36 am Thanksgiving and/or

Intercession and/or

Silence to listen (perhaps followed by the sharing of words, prophecy, pictures).

Part Four - SUNG WORSHIP (14 PLUS 10 MINUTES)

10.46 am Four to five songs (14 minutes)

These songs are chosen for the vertical, 'to God' direction - so that we can express God's 'worth'. A brief introduction, directing our thoughts then three to four songs (with no comment between), a time of silence and concluding with one further song.

11.00 am Holy Communion (10 minutes) (see below)

(On weeks Holy Communion is not included more time can be given to the sermon or part 3 and/or part 4 and/or another creative addition - drama, testimony . . .).

Part Five - GOING (4 MINUTES)

Both the next two elements turn our attention to the Lord's promise to be in the world with us as we live for him etc.

11.10 am Prayer

11.11 am Song

11.14 am Notices

11.15 am Dismissal - a clear cut ending - plus fellowship over coffee.

Also: An **offering** - where? Two places which do not interfere with the flow are either the songs at the beginning or the final song.

FITTING IT ALL IN - some comments on length and timing

Every **parish** tends to have **policy** guidelines regarding the length of its services.

The **factors which influence** this include:

- people's concentration span
- people's busyness in today's society
- the number of services that must be fitted into the schedule
- long enough for appropriate content to be included, at a length relevant for the purpose of each element
- the availability of crèche and Sunday School
- long enough to make it worth attending.

As responsible church leaders we keep in mind the **lifestyle** of people. In many communities there has been increasing pressure on people. For example employers are expecting longer hours (often for less pay and no overtime payment); expenses often require more than one income; we have moved into a seven day society; Christians, in trying to be good parents, have school meetings and sports events to attend, plus wider family (aging parents etc) to keep in touch with.

We want Christians also **to attend home groups** and be involved in a **ministry** at a time when there is less week to fit it into. It is therefore responsible to consider the **length** of our worship services.

More congregations are facing the **consequences of growth**. Lack of space in church buildings for increasing numbers and a desire to offer a variety of styles (or for rural situations the need to get to the next centre). All these place time pressures. Midday or soon after is turn off time for morning worship (more especially for children); each congregation in the one building needs a **30 minute gap** between finishing and starting times.

The sample 10.00am service above (one possible order) shows that a service does not have much 'spare time'.

Do **not** try to include **too many** elements. If too many are included we may rush some (to the points where they may as well not have been included). Too many can make the service long and/or the 'journey' disjointed.

As worship develops and people's **maturity** deepens the **tension** becomes one of too much content (the number of different elements) versus the time given to each element (e.g. people wanting more time to pray and develop in depth intercessions). What should we reduce or remove? What should we devote more time to?

If one element (e.g. the sermon) **goes on too long** - then either the service becomes too long (and people stop coming) or other elements are removed or rushed and the service becomes truncated - with the journey incomplete. This is unsatisfactory and does not assist maturity.

Having a **service plan** which includes the time each element will begin helps leaders be aware of sections which may be lengthened (e.g. silence, prayer) or slightly shortened (depending on how today's service 'is going') so the service does not cut an essential element.

Begin on time - or people gradually come later. Time 'lost' at the beginning cannot be made up at the end.

Each leader and participant in reading, prayer leading etc therefore needs to carefully use the time they have available - so they neither crowd out the good nor God.

LEADERS SKILLS - SOME GENERAL POINTS

The leaders are to lead! **Position** yourself where you can easily see the congregation; be seen by the congregation, musicians and singers; and be heard.

Lift expectancy in the Lord's presence, word and action. Your aim is to lift people in worship and help them **be in touch with the Living God**. You are **not** leading to 'go through the service'.

Be decisive and in control (to give people security), but not dominant (not taking the focus away from God).

Give the **minimum** brief clear **directions** - watching that people have understood. Only say what is absolutely necessary.

Generally - as you lead informal worship '**do it**' rather than 'talk about it'.

Sometimes it can be important to explain what will be happening.

For example 'We're moving now into a time of worship, it will include some silence so we can be open to anything the Lord may be saying. After the silence I will let you know when it will be appropriate to share any words . . .'

In giving instructions be warm and give a sense of **togetherness**.

Not '*sit*' (cold), not '*please sit*' (the classroom);

Rather '*let's sit or kneel as we pray*' (togetherness and a flowing lead into what is about to happen).

The desired sense is '*we are doing this together*'. Avoid '*you*' - use 'we', 'us'.

Know your general **policy boundaries** and time flow guidelines for the service.

Avoid drawing attention to yourself (by clothing, movement, mannerisms, facial expression). Be pleasant. Convey warmth. Inspire people to look to the Lord.

Ensure everyone (singers, musicians etc) will be ready and will **begin on time**.

Keep your **eyes open** - so you know what is happening - are people 'with you', can they follow, is someone wanting to contribute, have some 'switched off'.

Be **ready for anything** and be able to vary your plans. For example: if the sermon goes too long, a testimony 'changes the feel or direction', the Holy Spirit touches people in a different way and creates the need for a different response

. then be ready to change songs, shorten prayers, add reflection time etc.

Do not speak too fast. Speed causes thoughts to be rushed and prevents people thinking (feeling with) what is being said. If people are to join in corporate prayers etc, then lead an even pace at their speed.

Avoid jargon. Ask other leaders to let you know if they observe you slipping into this (or other faults).

When the **service is finished** . . . the leader, singers and musicians need to be sensitive to any prayer-healing ministry taking place at the rail, and to fellowship-conversation among worshippers - and therefore not to play or talk or sing too loudly.

LEADING - SKILLS FOR EACH ELEMENT

LEADING WITH THE WELCOME STATEMENTS

It is good to **briefly** welcome people (1-2 sentences).

This can begin the service or follow an unannounced opening song (especially if there are a large number of people gathered and talking - the music brings them together better than a voice can).

Keep to the point - an **example**: *'Welcome everyone, especially those who are here as visitors. It is good to have you with us. As we worship let's be open to the Lord's presence (. . . or love, or power, or word to us . . .) and let's celebrate his greatness as we sing . . . (. . . or before we sing of our great God let's say 'Hi' to those around us).*

- this - sets the tone and builds expectancy.
- lets visitors know they are allowed to be there.
- is punchy, not wasting time.
- gives a hint of theme ' . . . Lord's love . . .'
- without being unnecessarily long.

Maybe write it out so you can be concise, to the point.

Practise saying it.

THE 'GREETING' - SAYING 'HI'. Normally it is useful if this:

- . . . is a **non threatening** comment. **Not** *'tell people how much God loves them'* - rather - *'say hi to those next to you'*.
- . . . is **brief** - if longer than **15** seconds newcomers or shy people are embarrassed - Yes - 15 seconds maximum!
- . . . is **early in the service** - probably best at the beginning - so as not to interrupt the flow. Early on it can relax people and draw them together.

THE FIRST SONG. This should be well known and easy to sing so people are immediately involved. A celebration song will give the service a positive feel.

OPENING PRAYER.

After an opening song - don't say *'Let's begin with prayer . . .'* The song is effectively a prayer - as the song finishes carry straight on to a prayer (without saying *'Let's now pray'*- e.g. *'Almighty God, it is wonderful to know of your love for us and your presence with us. As we worship here today may we find ourselves lifted into your presence, may we hear your Word to us and may we worship you in the way you desire. . so that we may be strengthened to serve you in your world. . '*

Use a **variety** of prayers.

Maybe **write** the prayer out - so it is precise and concise.

Help people come into the presence of the Lord and be aware of his care, love, greatness, power . . . as appropriate for the theme of the service.

MAYBE AN OPENING BIBLE VERSE

Ensure it fits the theme.

Read it with the minimum introduction.

Maybe just read it - an **example**: *'God says in Psalm 46: 'Be still and know . . . '* (Psalm 46:1-2) – it will often be more powerful if **no** comment is added.

THE CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

This enables the worshipper to seek cleansing and be freed from the burdens, worries and failings of the week. Lead it so they can leave those things behind.

Informal worship can use a **variety of confession styles** - at a variety of stages in the service (e.g. after the sermon is a better place for some themes and flows).

For example:

- from the Prayer Book or other resource book - on the screen.
- a meditation with silence - taken by the leader.
- a silent reflection and quiet song.
- a prayer on the screen - silently read by the congregation.
- a visual object (ensure everyone can see it)
- a picture on the screen.

Be **creative**.

The **Absolution** - know your parish policy. Does the service leader or clergy person take this?

THE BIBLE READING(S)

Informal worship needs **good readers**. Ensure they have the reading(s) at least the day before so they can practise out loud.

Use a variety of **styles** - one reading, not too long; two or three brief readings (read as a whole); joint readings (two people reading different parts).

Responses to the readings should only be used if **everyone will know** and remember them (visitors won't) and/or if they are in a service sheet or on the screen. Ensure readers know and **stick to parish policy**.

THE SERMON

It is often better **earlier** rather than later in the service. Opening up the Word of God in the sermon often leads to a response. The Lord begins 'doing something' in people's lives.

The sermon earlier also has a better chance of being 'heard' - while people are alert and fresh - awake to concentrate.

If you are preaching keep to the time frame given (or you risk spoiling the rest of the service). Know what happens afterwards - are you to lead a response, prayer, lead a guided silence.

THE RESPONSE is the 'so what'.

This deals with the '*what will I do with this?*'

Give people an opportunity to cement their response to the sermon (to the Lord's encouragement, challenge etc) by giving time for:

- Reflective silence, meditation or contemplation of the implications of what has been said.
- Promising (e.g. to forgive or to commitment to some action).
- Prayer for help or about 'the issue'.
- Expressing thanks or worship or intercession.
- Celebrating the reality - a song or . . .
- The Spirit to further 'touch' them.
- A statement of belief (Creed, song, or . . .)
- Confession and receiving forgiveness and assurance . . .
- Personal prayer or receiving prayer (or pointing them to prayer healing ministry later).

The **Spirit of God** (through the sermon) can trigger any of these (and other) things. We need to design the service so there is time and flexibility to adjust for 'whatever is needed'.

Do not repeat, nor summarise the sermon, nor give your version, your comment on what it meant to you, nor add the bits you feel were missing, nor give another sermon.

Try to be - inclusive yet not making those who don't want to respond feel guilty. Be gentle; not controlling; cultural to the people and the service (e.g. more traditional Anglicans can use coming to Communion as a way of receiving from God). Lessen the gap between head knowledge and heart response.

THE PRAYERS

Developing Your Skills Booklet 3: 'Leading Worship – the Prayers' covers more fully the areas of prayers and silence. Discuss these ideas and techniques with fellow leaders.

When leading prayers . . .

- do not fill up the prayer time by continual speaking.
- do find creative ways to involve others.
- the goal is **corporate prayer** - encouraging the people to pray.

One simple technique to get people praying:

1. Pick four topics (preferably one personal, one for the church, one for the community and one for the wider world).
2. Say something like *'Today we are going to focus our prayers in four areas, with each of us praying silently for the issues that come to our mind . . . '*
3. *'Firstly let us focus on our Sunday School and pray silently for our teachers.'*

BE QUIET FOR TWO TO THREE MINUTES.

(the silence jolts people into the recognition
that the prayer depends on them).

4. *Secondly let us pray for our community - especially those who are lonely and have special needs.*

Silence . . . etc.

Encouraging others.

- It is really good to encourage others to get up and lead a brief prayer. **How** you do this depends on the size of your building, its acoustics, your sound system, and how good your people are at prepared and extemporary prayers.
- If using a variety of people it is important to ensure most are **clearly heard**. There are many **techniques** that can be used. For example: encouraging people to stand when they pray, teaching about speaking out loudly, repeating the subject, keeping them brief, having pre-prepared people ready near a microphone.
- If your church is having **problems** in this area ensure the issues are discussed and creative ways explored. Do not just stop having people pray out loud from the congregation because they can't be heard or won't do it. There are many ways to overcome such obstacles.

Silence is essential during informal worship.

Silence **must** always be **directed**. Tell people what it is for (for listening to God, reflecting on our need for forgiveness, personal silent prayer, letting the Spirit touch us. . .). Booklet 3: 'Leading Worship – the Prayers'

Watch for:

- Prayers that are 'thin' or meaningless.
- The simplistic *'Lord bless . . .'*
- Mindless use of meaningless clichés.
- 'Sermons' veiled as prayers.

Do . . .

- Use the Lord's prayer (with words on screen).
- Keep your eyes open - to see if anyone is wanting to lead in prayer and to see if the congregation is still praying - or are they bored.
- Use some prayers (on screen) for people to say together.

SUNG WORSHIP

See the next section 'Choosing, Ordering and Leading Songs'.

HOLY COMMUNION IS A VITAL ELEMENT.

It can easily fit into informal worship and is important for regular informal worship as it may be the only service most attend.

Its position in the service can vary.

It can be placed as a **climax** to the service - drawing together what the Lord has been saying and receiving his empowering as we go into the world.

It can be **early** in the service - especially if children are present for the first part and wish to share in Communion. It should never be the very first thing. Some prior input (maybe the children's talk) helps us focus on the Lord in Holy Communion.

It can be an element of **our worship** - naturally flowing out of our consideration of the Lord's greatness, or leading into our worship (for all the Lord has done).

It can be a part of our prayers of **thanksgiving**.

It can come immediately **after the sermon** as a part of our response to the Lord we come openly in gratitude for his grace to receive his empowering.

It can be good to avoid being 'stuck in a rut' with regard to positioning. **Creative changes** can powerfully challenge people and deepen their involvement.

Informal worship needs a **Eucharistic prayer** which is led informally. Not putting the book into the hands of the people can **focus their involvement** in a different way. Responses can be placed on the screen; worshipful songs can be used as responses (maybe sung seated or kneeling); the leader has the freedom to ad lib sections (maybe using Prayer Book services as a basis for their words). Changing, adding or replacing words can bring a Eucharistic prayer alive.

NOTICES normally fit best at the very end (after, not before, the final song/hymn).

At the end:

- Everybody has arrived - they are (sadly) unlikely all to be present at the beginning.
- People are more likely to remember.
- They do not interrupt the flow and people's worship (which notices do during the service).
- Lead naturally into the 'horizontal' fellowship time as the service concludes. This can be lost if another song follows. Unless it is a 'horizontal' song (linking us to others) it is usually better before the notices to complete the 'vertical' (us and the Lord) section
- They are at the time when visitors (if they have enjoyed the service) will be more open to hear what else is happening in the church.
- Notices should never 'read' the newsletter; in total not last more than one minute; nor immediately follow the sermon.

DISMISSAL

There needs to be a **clear cut ending** so that people know the service is finished.

If the music group continue to play it is usually best that they do so relatively quietly to avoid causing confusion by the service seeming to continue and preventing fellowship by making it difficult for people to hear each other.

CHOOSING, ORDERING AND LEADING SONGS

WHEN CHOOSING SONGS KEEP IN MIND.

The **whole service is the message** - not just the sermon. Check - **do we need this song** (or any other element of the service) for the overall message, purpose and theme of the service? Will it enhance or get in the road?

The **theme** is important - check with the Lord, the preacher and the overall co-ordinator.

A journey begins where we are now and ends up where we want to be. A **worship journey** is similar - a heart and mind journey in a time of sung worship (coupled with prayer and silence) can (should) be the same.

Choose enough songs for the expected service flow, plus two or three spare - in case they are needed and to give flexibility (perhaps one of these will fit better and respond to what the Lord appears to be doing, or may be needed to extend the worship time).

Repeating songs can be useful but there is no need to continually repeat a song. The thought can be reinforced by linking a song with a similar focus - provided the leader does not talk between the songs and draw the focus back to him/herself. Some songs should never be repeated.

SONGS SERVE DIFFERENT PURPOSES.

Music and songs (effectively sung prayers) can be used as a:

- **celebration** - in joyful expression of being a Christian. Louder music and clapping etc can be appropriate.
- **worshipful** quieter focus on God, his Word, his life and gifts.
- **Reflection** on the Lord.
- **Response** to the Spirit.
- **Teaching truth.**
- **Statement** of our belief, trust, commitment, willingness to obey.
- Touching our **mind** or **emotion** or **will**.

However do not use all possibilities in one service.

DIRECTION OF SONGS

Each song tends to have a direction of focus (some have more than one direction).

- **Horizontal to each other - drawing us together** in fellowship.
- **Horizontal to me** - to reflect on what the Lord is doing in me.
- **Vertical to us 'From' the Lord** (vertical downwards) - to help us be open and receive from the Lord. Creating intimacy with the Lord and enabling us to be open to encountering God's Spirit, shaping, changing, blessing.
- **Vertical 'to' the Lord** - to focus on the Lord - singing **about** God and singing **to** God (vertical upwards). This group are the essential ones for sung worship.

Note that many so called 'songs of praise' are in fact songs of 'God you are good now give me this'.

Some have a **sense** of celebration; others are quieter and more reflective. Often the **tempo** determines this.

To provide a good worship journey ensure the **direction, the sense, the tempo and the words fit the flow**. Do not keep changing the direction.

HYMNS AND SONGS

- Traditional **hymns** often stand alone, they tell a story, and they are complete in themselves. Some newer song-hymns are now like this.
- **Songs** often form a part of the journey. They need to be linked to other elements of the service (e.g. the confession, the prayers). They can be grouped to form a complete element - e.g. three or four songs, flowing from one to the other, can help worshippers become more open to the Lord's touch (blessing, word, healing or cleansing).

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Music should normally be what the **people can sing**. Watch complex tunes or tempo - they can be used when singing to (or for) the people (as an 'item').

Play at a **tempo suitable** to the song and its place in the service. Some songs can be both celebration (played faster and louder) or worshipful (played quieter and slower).

Watch that the **key** is not too high (excluding some men) or low (excluding some women).

Some musicians find songs in the same key easier to link together without a break.

Musicians can be **creative** to enhance the service: varying volume; varying which instruments to use; varying when they play and do not play. An instrument often becomes more powerful when it is not used - enhancing when it is used.

Musicians are to **serve the Lord** and **assist the people** in their worship. Do not be tempted to focus on 'doing your thing'. If what you want to do is not glorifying the Lord and enabling the people to worship then don't do it - even if it would help you!

Practise your introductions - for most just a few bars. Be able to flow from one song to the next without a break.

PLACING SONGS AND HYMNS IN ORDER.

The **first song(s)** should be bright and celebratory - reflecting the joy of coming together (being a Christian, God's presence etc). Ensure people know it well and that it is easy to sing.

Songs that 'stand alone' **during the service** should serve the purposes of that point of the service (in word, volume, sense and tempo). They may be providing a 'stretch break' but they can also reinforce the message and link people's thoughts from one element to the next.

A **worship time** (never call it a 'slot' nor a 'bracket of songs') enables the heart and mind to focus on the Lord - either to give him praise or to help us be open to receive from him.

- The **order** is important.
- **Direction** and focus should be linked.
- The **words** and theme of one can flow into the words of the next.

A sample time of worship could be:

- a) **One** song that guides our thoughts and focuses on the Lord - to move us from listening (the sermon) or praying, to worship.
- b) **Two to four** more songs that keep the **direction vertical** to the Lord and enable us to sing of his character and tell him how we feel about him - with no comments between.
- c) A time of **directed silence** (prayers or quiet to listen etc).
- d) An opportunity to **share** thoughts, **words**, prophecy or Bible verses.
- e) **One song** which draws this all together and enables us to move on (to prayers or to Holy Communion or to conclude the service or . . .).

A variation of this could be (after a or d) to use a couple of songs that focus on us - e.g. allowing the Spirit to come to us. If they follow a sermon which has challenged us to do this then place them first (as 'a') and maybe incorporate prayer to help us receive - then move on to 'b'.

The **Final song(s)** - easy to sing - so that people go out feeling positive about their involvement in the service. It can convey celebration and/or serving and/or joy of going out in God's power.

TO HELP THE CONGREGATION IN SUNG WORSHIP . . .

- Do it don't talk about it. Maybe briefly introduce the worship and then let it flow. Do **NOT** talk between each song - that draws attention back to the leader and away from the Lord.
- Do **not** conduct - you are not leading a sing-a-long or a choir.
- Do **not** embarrass people by asking them to do what they may not want to e.g. **not** '*lets all clap, dance, raise our hands . . .*'
- Vary whether you clap or raise your hands so that those who do or don't know either is okay.
- Give people the freedom '*to stand, sit or kneel as we enter a time of worship*'.
- When you are competent (and the music group is warned and able to cope) don't be afraid to change the order to better fit what is happening.

TO HELP THE SINGERS AND MUSICIANS . . .

They will look to follow your lead so . . .

- **Know** what is happening.
- Use **hand signals** (the ones your parish understands) to lead into the next song, repeat, stop, pause, musicians play, musicians be quiet and singers continue, . . .
- If a spoken **introduction** is required express it in a **meditative** way that will alert the musicians and singers to the next song (especially if you have changed the order).
- If you are **not** a strong tuneful **singer** place a good singer alongside you so that they can 'give the lead' when you are ready. If you don't sing well don't sing into a microphone - just use the microphone for the spoken parts.

WORK HARD at getting 'sung worship' right. It is very powerful.

KEEP IMPROVING, KEEP EXPERIMENTING

We can **enjoy** and **appreciate** informal worship but this should never leave us complacently satisfied. As we **evaluate** our services we will become more aware of aspects that are going well and areas that need improving. Be open to **learn** new skills, **experiment** with different order-flows, and try out different ways of introducing and leading. Try including different elements.

Our Lord is a great creator - he can create new ways and build new skills in us.

Pray that the Spirit will be at work. Pray that all who worship will find their participation increasing and their relationship with our Lord growing.

Pray too for the people who do not yet know and worship our Lord - pray they will.

TITLES IN THE SERIES:

- Number 1 "Visitor Friendly Worship"
- Number 2 "Worship - Who is it for?" – 2001 edition.
- Number 3 "Leading Worship - The Prayers"
- Number 4 "People Helping Skills"
- Number 5 "Preaching and Teaching"
- Number 6 "Stewardship - The Financial Area"
- Number 8 "Healing - Prayer Ministry"
- Number 9 "Informal Worship - Designing and Leading"
- Number 10 "Incorporation - Helping Newcomers Into Membership"
- Number 11 "Change - Introduce New Things Successfully"
- Number 12 "Youth Ministry For the 21st Century"
- Number 13 "Handling Hurts in the Church"
- Number 14 "Managing Conflict in the Church"
- Number 15 "Every Member Ministry – Making It Work"
- Number 16 "Criticism – How Do We Respond?"

Please note that Number 7 on Planning is not available in the Electronic Series.
