

# PLANNING WORSHIP

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We plan worship with some sense of who our community is and who they are called to be in Christ's Eternal Dominion in which we are now living in part and toward which we are moving to live in fully forever.

Because worship is not just for those gathered but for those who might be gathered with us in the future from the larger community, we have to consider potential visitors, as well as the old faithful when planning worship. Also, we worship as part of the whole communion of saints, so we have to be true to the tradition within our particular cultural vernacular. This is a tricky balance.

There is a comfort zone with regard to the style of a community's expression which you can't go beyond too much at any given time, though this comfort zone can be expanded slowly over time as new normals are set by pushing beyond the bounds a bit, but bit by bit slowly over a long time (3-5 years in some places, faster in others).

You must know the overall purpose and flow of the order of worship as well as the purpose of each part. When you know this, you can experiment with what form and style each part should take.

Because the Word is the center of Reformed worship, start your planning by reading the scriptures for the day (however those are chosen: by spiritual discernment and/or by following the lectionary). Read these silently, out loud, act them out and jot down any images or ideas that come to you. Once you have an idea of how the sermon will go, think about how the rest of the worship service can also support the Word God wants to speak.

There are times in the church year where you have other things that need to be done—i.e. celebrate Christ's birth, Mothers' Day, ordain church officers, commission mission teams. How will these fit into the unfolding of the Word in the service?

What is the overall mood and movement of mood in the worship service? On an ordinary Sunday, the movement of the mood can be plotted like this:

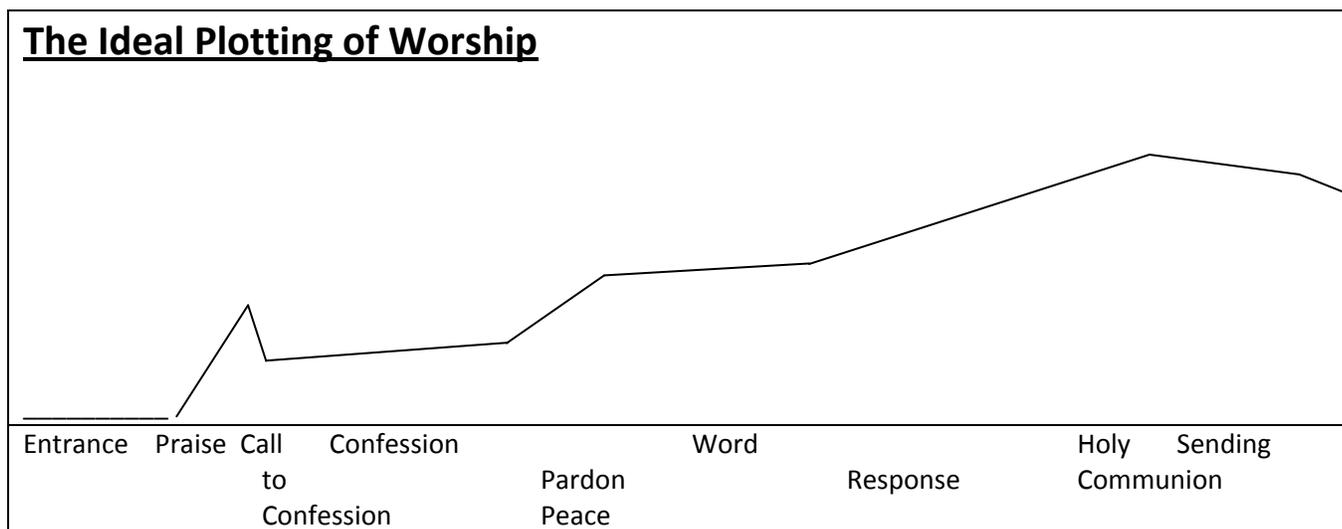
<b>Element of Ordo</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Mood</b>
Greeting and Announcements	Allay anxiety by helping us know what's going on and that we can trust leader to take us into the very heart of God	
Prelude	Helps us enter into ritual worship space as unique, set apart; helps us quiet down to prepare to meet the Lord in worship	
Call to Worship	Indicates God wants to be in communion with us	
Praise	Response of Praise to God at God's calling us to worship	Joyful

Call to Confession	God's calling us to deeper communion by helping us see there's something blocking us-- sin	Can be startling after the joy of praise; can be scary; sobering; full of relief that someone's finally mentioned there's a problem; etc.
Confession of Sin	Acknowledging our distance from God due to sin and asking for forgiveness	Contrition, Repentance, Sorrow for Sin; woe!
Assurance of Pardon	God forgives us in Jesus Christ	Strong assurance of forgiveness→ Relief, restoration of unbalance, back on the road now
Response of Praise	Thanksgiving for grace	Yeah! Joy and thanksgiving!
Peace	We're all gathered together now in grace as common forgiven sinners.	Convivial rejoicing in communal gathering as equals by God's grace; sober recognition of our need for peace, forgiveness, shalom in Christ; awkward extension of Christ's peace to others whether we want to or not; etc.
Prayer for Illumination	Ask for Spirit to enable us to hear God speaking through words of scripture and sermon	Settling down to listen intently to our Beloved, asking for what we need to do that
Scripture and Sermon	Hearing God speak	Varies depending upon what's being said
Hymn of Response	Deeper faith response to what God has further revealed of Godself to us	Can be ardent, reflective, repentant, etc.
Affirmation/Confession of Faith	We believe this!	Varies
Baptisms, Reception of New Members, Commissionings, Ordinations	Accepting others into Christ's body and setting them apart for Christ's mission with prayer	Joyful rejoicing with angels at response to God's call, prayerful concern and blessing
Prayers of the People	We talk back to God in prayer and, as Christ's body, pray for others and the world God so loved	Varies
Offering	We offer ourselves and our resources to God for divine use	Serious, sober
Holy Communion	We enter into table fellowship with the Holy One	Reverent, joyful
Hymn	Our souls sing after being with God	Varies
Charge and blessing/ Blessing and Charge	Marching orders and blessing for them; or we're blessed then charged to extend the blessing as we go out to serve others	

Postlude	Opens the door out of ritual space into the world	
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Notice that there is a movement of the service as a whole from more distance to more intimacy with God. This is the overall intention of the traditional order of worship—it primarily glorifies God, yet, but it also teaches us how to live the Christian life with God and others.

There is a rhythm to good worship that can be planned and executed, enabling others to enter more fully into God’s presence. Though worship is not drama, you can plot out good worship like a stage director plots dramatic action by asking where the high point of this service should be and considering how that effect can be achieved WITHIN THE AIMS OF THE WORSHIP TRADITION.



In concert with the Word, trace out the service as a whole, thinking like a spiritual/drama director. If the sermon will be on Psalm 23, you may want a confession that talks about how we like sheep have gone astray. The confession of faith could actually be having the community stand to recite Psalm 23 in unison as the ending of the sermon. If the sermon will be on Joel 2, you will want more emphasis on confession. In fact, you may want to move the Confession after the sermon for this particular sermon in order for people to give full voice to their repentance after hearing the Word.

Think about the mood for each element of the service. Joy and praise are generally faster and more energetic than a confession of sin. Choosing hymns that embody such energy and playing them energetically and at a pace that moves along without losing people will help to convey such a mood. Reflective hymns are slower, more somber, perhaps with more complicated and lush harmonies. Spoken words can be just as musical in pacing and pitch, depending upon what’s being said for the exact nuance.

**DO NOT JUST FIND SOMETHING, THINK IT’D BE COOL TO TRY IT, AND JUST THROW IT IN!** You must engage in prayer and spiritual discernment and theological thinking first before you then think about the best forms and techniques to embody God’s Word in Christ through Holy Spirit.

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