

Worship: Foundations

An introduction to preparing and leading
worship in the Methodist Church

Worship:
leading &
preaching



The **Methodist** Church



Contents

Acknowledgments

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Worship: Foundations

An introduction to preparing and leading worship in the Methodist Church

Worship is at the heart of all we do as Christians. As a worship leader or local preacher, you have an awesome responsibility to lead the people of God in worship and to lead them well. This booklet offers a framework that should help you to shape various acts of worship. From the outset we want to encourage you to be creative in your planning and leading of worship, therefore the framework introduced here should be seen as a skeleton to build upon rather than a straitjacket. After all, there are as many ways to worship as there are worshippers – so variety is important.

Throughout the training course *Worship: Leading and Preaching* we will keep returning to the question “What is Worship?” For now, let us take our working definition from question 46 in *A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists* (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 2000):

“To worship is joyfully to proclaim, in the power of the Spirit, the wonderful acts of God and to celebrate his glorious nature. We worship God, not only in formal or informal acts of worship, but also with our lives, by serving him in serving other people.”

In our planning of worship, we are attempting to enable the worshipper to proclaim joyfully all that God is, has done and will do.

As you work your way through the material you’ll find that some of this is boxed. This gives you the opportunity to put into practice what you have just read.

The 'menu items' of worship

A helpful way of creating an act of worship is to imagine yourself selecting items from a traditional British restaurant's menu. A typical menu may be divided into:

starters mains desserts coffee

Similarly, the 'menu' for worship, whether it be traditional in form, café style, Messy Church or an informal praise service, might be divided into:

gathering hearing responding sending

- **Gathering** brings us into a deeper awareness of God's presence.
- **Hearing** God's Word affirms the greatness and goodness of a God who acts to save us. (This is also known as 'The Ministry of the Word'.)
- **Responding** is our way of reflecting on and deepening our relationship with God.
- **Sending** encourages us to live out our discipleship in the world.

This can be a helpful structure to enable a congregation to know what it is doing, where it is going and why it is going there.

The grid below lays out the four sections of the menu, a description of what we are doing at that point in the worship and the possible 'ingredients' of our corporate worship that might be served in each course. It should be noted the 'ingredients' listed are not exhaustive. There may be other items that you might want to include. It is likely that there are a number of words in this grid that are unfamiliar – don't worry about this as everything will be explained as you work through the booklet. For now, it is enough to have a bird's-eye view of the whole service.

Depending on the way you construct your act of worship, different ingredients may be in different places (eg prayer of confession, Lord's Prayer).



Worship Menu	What are we doing?	How do we do it? (Possible ingredients)
Gathering	Approaching God	• Call to worship • A sentence of Scripture • Gathering hymn(s) • Prayer of approach • The Lord's Prayer • Silence
	Adoring God	• Hymn of adoration • Hymn of praise • Prayer • Silence • Responsive Psalm or Canticle (eg <i>Te Deum</i>) • Use of images
	Confessing our sins	• Penitential hymn • Prayer of confession • Silence • Interactive prayer
	Offering assurance of God's forgiveness	• Declaration of forgiveness • Hymn of assurance
	Giving thanks	• Prayer of thanksgiving • The Collect • Hymn of thanksgiving • Responsive Psalm or Canticle (eg <i>Gloria</i>) • Children's/all-age address
Hearing God's Word (Ministry of the Word)	Looking to the Scriptures	• Bible reading(s) • Responsive Psalm/Canticle • Dramatic reading • Narrating the story • Drama based on the reading • Hymn(s) reflecting the Bible reading
	Listening for God by expounding the Scriptures and interpreting God's Word	• Sermon • Discussion • Question and answer • Meditation • Silence • Use of images

Responding	Giving thanks	• Prayer of thanksgiving • Hymn(s) of thanksgiving
	Praying for ourselves, others and God's world	• Prayers of intercession • Prayers of petition • Prayer of confession • Intercessory hymn • Hymn of lament • Interactive prayers • The Lord's Prayer • Use of images
	Dedicating our lives to God's service	• Offering • Prayer of dedication • Hymn • Call to make a commitment • Holy Communion • The Lord's Prayer
Sending	Going to live out our discipleship	• Word of challenge • Prayer of dismissal • Blessing

Creating your own menu

Putting together an act of worship can be like selecting from a menu. However, it's not as easy as that. As a worship leader or local preacher, your task is to *create* the menu. This is a skill you will continue to hone throughout your ministry.

A chef will work hard to devise a menu with a balance between the courses so that each course complements the others. You, too, will need to develop a palate for what works and equally for what doesn't work. So, for example, just as it's hard to imagine going to a restaurant and eating four courses of puddings, likewise a worship diet of only praise songs or hymns about how we are feeling will only nourish for a short period of time. Within each act of worship and over a longer period of time, it's important to offer a congregation a balanced diet.

First things first – doing your prep

At this stage, you might feel rather daunted, or you might feel fired up ready to prepare your first acts of worship. Either way, it is time to stop, pause and consider: this is holy ground you are about to enter. In the preparation and delivery of worship, you are aiming to lead without getting in the way of God and God's people. So take time to be still and to pray. No matter how many acts of worship we have prepared or led, we need to remember this is about, and for, God.

Hold before God:

- the church you will be leading in worship
- any feedback you have had from previous services you have led
- your feelings about this act of worship.

After your prayers, it is time to begin. This might be a good time to locate the Service Planning and Reflection Form (media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/WLP_Service_Planning_Reflection_Form_2025.pdf). This is designed to help you reflect as you plan an act of worship. Don't worry if you can't answer all the questions at the moment – it's a guide, not an examination! You might find it helpful to talk this form through with your mentor. It might also be more helpful to return to the form at the end of the planning process.

Where to begin

"Let's start at the very beginning. A very good place to start" might be good advice if you are learning a song from *The Sound of Music*, but it might not necessarily be the best place in planning worship! As your ministry develops you will find your own way of starting your planning.

First let us take our cue from the restaurant menu. The chef will often begin with the main course and work out the whole menu from there. This is helpful as it means the

starter and dessert complement the main. So a good place to start your planning is through 'Hearing God's Word'. Once you know what your main course is, you will often be in a better place to know how you might lead people to this place and how you might encourage them to respond.

Hearing God's Word

In the menu outline 'Hearing God's Word' appears to be one of the shortest sections but, in reality, it often takes the longest time to prepare. We, of course, hear God's Word throughout worship and indeed throughout our lives. Here in what is technically called the 'Ministry of the Word', we drill into the Scriptures to mine what they might say to us today.

Worship Menu	What are we doing?	How do we do it? (possible ingredients)
<i>Hearing God's Word</i> (Ministry of the Word)	Looking to the Scriptures	• Bible reading(s) • Responsive Psalm/Canticle • Dramatic reading • Narrating the story • Drama based on the reading • Hymn(s) reflecting the Bible reading
	Listening for God by expounding the Scriptures and interpreting God's Word	• Sermon • Discussion • Question and answer • Meditation • Silence • Use of images

Throughout this document we will look at each section in more detail using the questions "What are we doing?" and "How do we do it?" as we try to describe the flavour of each of the ingredients.

Looking to the Scriptures

The Bible is our primary text in helping us to understand who God is, how God has been revealed through the ages and how God acts in offering salvation. Most often, it is where worship leaders begin in compiling an act of worship and setting its theme. It is important that we engage both seriously and systematically with the Bible. For Christians, because Jesus is central to our faith, there might be a tendency to focus on the New Testament and to neglect the Old Testament. The Old Testament, though, was the Bible Jesus and the first Christians knew, and the whole Bible is important for us in telling the story of salvation.

- **Bible reading(s)**

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) (a three-year cycle of readings, which the Methodist Church and many other denominations use) offers two sets of readings for each Sunday of the year (one for the 'principal service' and one for a 'second service'). It's worth noting that the RCL doesn't have a thematic link, so you shouldn't

worry if you can't find one! A lectionary is a good tool for taking us around the Bible, rather than always sticking to familiar territory. There are other ways to choose Bible readings and indeed other reading schemes. This is explored in further detail in Module Section 2.3. The RCL includes suggestions for a Psalm, a reading from the Old Testament, the New Testament (outside of the four Gospels) and a Gospel passage. While they don't all need to be used, it is good to know for yourself which readings you are using and (probably more importantly) to have an understanding of why you are using them.

- **Responsive Psalm/Canticle**

Instead of simply being read out loud, the appointed Psalm can be said responsively or a paraphrased version of the Psalm can be sung.

The Psalms are the oldest hymns in the Christian tradition and were written to be sung, although the original tunes have long since been lost. Traditionally responsive Psalms are sung antiphonally with a lead singer (or cantor) singing the verses and the rest of the choir or congregation responding. Many preachers use the text of the Psalms and invite them to be used antiphonally (recited or sung by two groups). For example:

Alleluia. O praise God in his holiness;
praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty acts;
praise him according to his excellent greatness.
Praise him with the blast of the trumpet;
praise him upon the harp and lyre.
Praise him with timbrel and dances;
praise him upon the strings and pipe.
Praise him with ringing cymbals;
praise him upon the clashing cymbals.
Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord. Alleluia.

(Psalm 150 – *Singing the Faith* (StF) 840)

Here the worship leader might lead the light-printed text, whilst the congregation joins in the bold. Other good ways of reading antiphonally are those on the right and those on the left, or upper and lower voices. Another way of using a Psalm is to sing a hymn based on the Psalm, known as a paraphrase. There are many examples of paraphrased Psalms in *Singing the Faith* (eg 479, 480, 481, 631, 728).

- **Dramatic biblical reading**

It can be helpful for congregations to visualise the story by seeing it read dramatically by more than one voice. This adds interest and sometimes gives a different insight when we see the story being played out. *The Dramatised Bible* (Michael Perry (ed) (London, Harper Collins, 1989)) is a good resource for supplying ready-to-use dramatic readings and covers most of the Bible where it is possible to do so. You can, of course,

create your own version. In either case, rehearsal of the reading beforehand is strongly recommended!

- **Narrating the story**

Whereas a dramatic reading would include a number of people giving voice to each of the characters in a particular Bible passage, narrating requires the skills of an individual storyteller. They would take a congregation through the passage by telling it in their own words as a story. Narrating requires a good knowledge of the passage and can add a freshness to familiar stories. However, there is always a risk that a key part of the biblical text is lost in the retelling.

- **Drama based on the reading**

There is a vast array of ready-to-use dramas available. They are not necessarily retellings of Bible passages as laid out in *The Dramatised Bible*, but rather parallel stories that highlight a particular aspect of the reading, or a particular relationship in it. A good example is a collection of imagined conversations between Jesus and Peter published by the Iona Community called *Jesus and Peter* (John L Bell & Graham Maule (Glasgow, Wild Goose Publications, 1999)). A well-rehearsed and delivered drama can add richness to an act of worship. A poorly presented drama can do quite the opposite!

- **Hymn(s) reflecting the Bible reading**

Singing a version of the Bible passage, or a hymn containing themes close to it, gives a congregation a different experience of the reading. It can also help to highlight a different aspect of the text that you might be exploring in worship. Two helpful resources in matching hymns to particular readings are the 'Index of biblical texts' at the back of the music copy of *Singing the Faith* and the 'Hymns for Sunday Worship' section on the Resource Hub section of the Methodist Church website (methodist.org.uk/resources).

Listening for God by expounding the Scriptures and interpreting God's Word

To expound is to present and explain a theory or idea in detail. Much of *Worship: Leading and Preaching* will focus on how we are attentive to the Word of God. You will be guided through the Methodist Quadrilateral and the Pastoral Cycle (Module Section 1.2) to help your theological reflection (thinking and speaking about God). Christians believe that the Word of God, mediated through Scripture, comes to life by the Spirit, in and through God's people. As we reflect on God's Word we can use different methods to consider what it might mean for us today:

- **Sermon**

"How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:14) (NRSV)

Preaching has been at the heart of Methodist worship since the time of its founder John Wesley. In preaching we seek to grapple with the meaning of the text in its original context, for its original hearer and what it might be saying to us today. If you are training to be a local preacher, as the course progresses you will spend a lot of time focusing on the various forms of preaching, how to prepare a sermon and how to deliver it as the course progresses.

- **Discussion**

Discussion and conversation are at the heart of much café-style worship and can be helpful in all-age worship too. The key to a good discussion is carefully crafted questions. You need to ensure that you form questions so that everyone can contribute; in most cases these should be open questions (ie those that require more than a 'yes/no' answer). Good discussion does not flow when the leader of worship thinks they have the right answer and that is where the congregation needs to get to!

- **Question and answer**

A variation on discussion is to ask the congregation to listen to the Scripture and then in groups come up with questions they'd like you to answer! This is not a cop-out for the preacher – you will need to do more reading around the passages than you probably do in preparing a sermon, and much of the information will not be needed, but you will at least be prepared!

- **Meditation**

A meditation can be a number of things. It can be a printed resource, such as a dramatic reading from Nick Fawcett's 'No Ordinary Man' series (published by Kevin Mayhew), offering reflections from the perspective of various biblical characters. Or it can be encouraging the congregation to picture themselves within the story and inviting them to respond imaginatively to the scene. Alternatively it can be using the techniques of *Lectio Divina* (which we will explore later in the course). There are many books of meditations on the market and many more on the internet. A good source is theworshipcloud.com. The key to meditations is finding examples that are authentic to the style of worship you are preparing and finding the right people to deliver them. This takes skill and timing.

- **Silence**

Giving a prolonged time of silent reflection (up to ten minutes) can be helpful to some. Others will find the experience more difficult unless you provide ways to help them rest in or travel through the silence. If you need an excuse to include an extended silence, you need look no further than 1 Kings 19:11-13.

- **Use of images**

In all of the above, the use of pictures and photographs to illustrate your point can make it easier to listen for God's Word. As with all things beware of overuse as they will appear to be a gimmick and soon lose their impact. When looking for images on the internet, bear in mind that some images are copyrighted. Google, however, has search tools that allow you to select a copyright-free option.

Time to begin planning the act of worship

As already mentioned, **Looking to the Scriptures** is most often where worship leaders and preachers begin in compiling an act of worship and setting its theme. Whether you are following the set lectionary text, working from a theme, or have been inspired to preach from a particular text or idea, you need to decide which items (ingredients) from the menu you are going to include, which you are going to omit, and (most importantly) why.

The best way to learn about this is to do it. Make a copy of Appendix 1, grab some paper or a device to record your thinking and let's begin to draft an act of worship.

Step 1: Looking at the Scriptures

Using the guidance above you need to decide how you are going to find your Scripture. If you are starting from a theme you'll need to think what passage(s) of Scripture illustrate this best; if it's from the lectionary, which of the set readings are you going to use?

[If you are struggling to know where to start why not take "Lead us not into temptation" as a suggested theme or you could tackle the Principal Service of the First Sunday in Lent in Year C of the RCL, which suggests Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalm 81:1-2, 9-16, Romans 10: 8b-13* and Luke 4: 1-13. (Note: * The small letters 'a' and 'b' indicate that the verse is split into two sections and you are to read from or to the indicated point).]

Spend a little time considering prayerfully which readings you are going to use as the basis of your act of worship and then make a note of them. Add this to your planning grid under *Looking to the Scriptures*. You now need to think about how they will be delivered. Are you going to read them straight from the Bible, or invite someone else to do it? Using the examples above what other ways of hearing the Scriptures might there be?

Step 2:
Listening for God
by expounding the
Scriptures and
interpreting God's
Word

The style of service and the type of congregation will often dictate how you might approach this aspect of the worship. The most common way in Methodist worship is the sermon. Guidance on exegesis (that is using tools and techniques to pay careful attention to the biblical text in order to learn about its context, when it was written, how it was formed, and what was going on in the lives of the people who wrote it) and preparing a sermon is contained in Module Sections 2.1 and 11.2 with some help in the Service Planning and Reflection Form in section 2b, (media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/WLP_Service_Planning_Reflection_Form_2025.pdf) but as we have already noted there are more ways of listening for God's Word than listening to the preacher.

Using the guidance above, decide how you will encourage the congregation to listen for God's Word and add that to your grid under *Listening for God*.

In a few sentences you have had to make some big decisions – these won't necessarily be easy. Take your time and keep returning to God in prayer as you think about the act of worship.

Responding

Having set the main course you now need to decide what to plan next. Do you go back and think about the starter (how you will gather people in the presence of God), or do you think about the dessert (how you are going to encourage a response)? In order to keep a flow we'll think about the response next, but there is no set rule.

Worship Menu	What are we doing?	How do we do it? (Possible ingredients)
Responding	Giving thanks	• Prayer of thanksgiving • Hymn(s) of thanksgiving
	Praying for ourselves, others and God's world	• Prayers of intercession • Prayers of petition • Prayer of confession • Intercessory hymn • Hymn of lament • Interactive prayers • The Lord's Prayer • Use of images
	Dedicating our lives to God's service	• Offering • Prayer of dedication • Hymn • Call to make a commitment • Holy Communion • The Lord's Prayer

Giving thanks

We give thanks to God 'in response' to all we have experienced so far in worship. We might be giving thanks for hearing a clear gospel message of how God has acted in Jesus (teaching, healing, forgiving, dying, rising etc). Or we might be giving thanks for how we have been challenged in an aspect of our discipleship. Alternatively, we might be giving thanks for how God might be calling us as a Church or as individual disciples.

- **Prayer of thanksgiving**

This might be a spoken prayer led 'from the front' or a prayer that includes a congregational response. It's good to use a variety of prayers as this will better suit the variety of people in the congregation. There are many good examples written by others, although you are, of course, free to use your own words. A good starting point is to use someone else's prayers as a framework for your own, even if you end up rewriting their material! A good example of a prayer of thanksgiving is:

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you for your call that comes to us—
**the call to discipleship, to service,
to sharing in the work of your kingdom.**

We thank you that you call us as we are—
**with all our faults, all our doubts,
and all our sin.**

We thank you that you chose us
not through our own deserving,
but by your grace, your love and your mercy.

We thank you that as you chose your people Israel,
your disciples, and your Church,
so also you have chosen each of us.

And we thank you that though we fail you repeatedly,
though we disobey your will,
and turn away from you,
**yet your purpose for us continues
and your love endures.**

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for calling us,
and we ask very simply, but also sincerely,
help us to respond in the name of Christ. Amen.

Nick Fawcett, *Prayers for All Seasons*
(Suffolk, Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 1998), p. 485

This prayer would work well if you were able to project or print out the prayer for the congregation.

- **Hymn of thanksgiving**

In the same way, the choice of hymn here would express our thanks ‘in response’ to the worship we have experienced so far. Look again at the section in *Singing the Faith* entitled ‘Praise and Thanksgiving’. A good example would be *StF* 78 ‘Give thanks with a grateful heart’, as this directly expresses “give thanks because he’s given Jesus Christ, his son”.

Praying for ourselves, others and God's world

Our worship is never about us in isolation *from* the world; it is instead, a way to engage *with* God's world and so it's important that we offer our prayers not only for ourselves, but for those in the world around us.

- **Prayers of intercession**

These tend to focus outwards and include prayers for the Church, the people of the world, those in authority, those in our neighbourhood and those in need. They might take on a particular focus: for example, we may have been thinking about the call for justice in the prophets, and so, in response, we might pray about the injustice we find in the world. Or they might reflect a particular need in the local community. Or they might be in response to a particular situation that has been in the news that week.

We are interceding on behalf of those for whom we pray. It is helpful if the congregation can own these prayers in some way, most obviously with an opportunity to respond. For example, from the first service in the *Methodist Worship Book*:

Blessèd are you, eternal God,
to be praised and glorified for ever.

Hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church:
make us all one, that the world may believe.

Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you:
that the life of Christ may be revealed in us.

Strengthen all who minister in Christ's name:
give them courage to proclaim your Gospel.

Inspire and lead those who hold authority in the nations of the world:
guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace.

Make us alive to the needs of our community:
help us to share each other's joys and burdens.

Look with kindness on our homes and families:
grant that your love may grow in our hearts.

Inspire us to have compassion on those who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble:
in your presence may they find their strength.

We remember those who have died:
Father, into your hands we commend them.

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory:
bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Silence

Heavenly Father,
you have promised to hear
what we ask in the name of your Son:
we pray you to accept and answer our prayers,
not as we ask in our ignorance,
nor as we deserve in our sinfulness,
but as you know and love us in your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Methodist Worship Book, (Peterborough,
Methodist Publishing House, 1999), pp. 34-35*

- **Prayers of petition**

As a term, this is often used interchangeably with intercession, but here we are seeking guidance and strength for ourselves rather than others. 'Ourselves' includes the life and work of the local community in which we are leading worship. These prayers focus more towards us – for example, praying for the needs of the local church or specific people within our fellowship: petitions for individuals.

- **Intercessory hymn**

Singing the Faith 517-531 are hymns that could be sung as prayers of intercession. Or you might read the words of one of the hymns as the basis of a prayer.

- **Prayer of confession**

It is usual that prayer of confession come early in an act of worship (see below). However, depending on the theme, it might be entirely appropriate to offer a prayer of confession at this point.

- **Hymn of lament**

Our response to God's Word might not always be to praise or even to pray; instead, it could be to offer lament (a truly biblical response). There are a number of hymns of lament throughout *Singing the Faith* (eg StF 700 'God weeps').

- **Interactive prayers**

There are numerous books suggesting ways to offer prayer through activities. Prayer stations can be a good way to allow the congregation to pray at their own speed and encourage an individual response. Other ways include inviting people to light candles for particular situations or placing markers on a map for the areas we want to remember in prayer. It's a good idea to make a note of the interactive prayers you have found useful and maybe start gathering the resources you would need if you chose to use them. It is often the case with these ideas that less is more.

Dedicating our lives to God's service

- **The Lord's Prayer**

This is often used after the prayers of intercession as a way of drawing all our prayers together. This prayer, perhaps more than any other, encapsulates so much of what we would want to say about God and our life as God's people. As you will see it can be used appropriately in a variety of places. We too often presume that everyone coming into worship will be able to pray the Lord's Prayer from memory, and we can unintentionally exclude them if they cannot. Therefore it is good practice to have the words available in some form. There are two versions printed at the back of *Singing the Faith*. Singing the Lord's Prayer offers the congregation a different – some might say a deeper – experience of praying the prayer. *Singing the Faith* contains two versions of the Lord's Prayer – 762 in the traditional form and 763 in a modern version. You can hear excerpts of each version at methodist.org.uk/resources.

- **Use of images**

Images can be very powerful when praying for situations in the news. You can produce a PowerPoint of images – then encourage the worshippers to pray with their eyes open! Make sure to use images that are copyright free.

Having given thanks, we commit to doing something. There are many ways for us to serve God. Here are a few examples:

- **Offering**

The offering is important for the financial viability of the church but equally, if not more importantly, it allows us to respond in a tangible way to offer back to God what we have been given. Some congregations choose to stand when the offering is presented, others dance forward joyfully with their offering, whilst others sit prayerfully. Each could be interpreted as the giver offering not just their money but their very selves to God, which is in fact what God asks us to give.

Of all the ingredients that you might include on your worship menu there are two things that if omitted may cause upset. The first is the Lord's Prayer; this is because many people believe Jesus commanded that we say it every week; he didn't! The other is the offering. Missing this out upsets most treasurers and leads to strange scenes of stewards trying to catch your eye at the back of the worship space by waving collecting plates or bags at you!

- **Prayer of dedication**

As a worship leader or local preacher you will usually be expected to receive the offering. It is customary to ask God's blessing on both the monetary gifts and the givers as they are offered back to God, the source of all that is. Increasingly we need to remember to ask God's blessing on monetary gifts offered via standing orders! Formal words may be used, but often it is better to do this extempore as you may well be holding a number of collection plates!

- **Hymn**

There are plenty of hymns that allow the congregation to express their commitment or dedication to God. See *Singing the Faith* 544-567 for some examples. At this point in the service, the hymn could also be emphasising an aspect of the sermon, or reflecting the overall theme of the worship.

- **Call to make a commitment**

Although not appropriate at every service, there might be times when you feel you want to invite the congregation to make a public commitment, either individually or corporately. This could be a call to the front (“those wishing to give their life to Christ are invited to kneel before the Lord...” – we would usually use the communion rail!). Equally, it could be done through a rededication of baptismal promises (methodist.org.uk/additionalmethodistliturgies) or perhaps a commitment to write to your local MP.

Some people are very reluctant to stand out in the service itself, so another way of approaching a call to commitment is to invite people to sit in a particular part of the church after the service, with stewards or the preacher then sitting/listening/praying with them.

In deciding whether or not to call the congregation to make a response it is good to know your congregation, whilst at the same time being willing to take the risk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Holy Communion**

Technically Holy Communion can never be part of an act of worship, as it is the act of worship. We included it here in the menu to help us with understanding where the breaking of bread might appear. Within the Methodist tradition, Holy Communion is presided over by a presbyter (although occasionally, the Methodist Conference grants an authorisation to a deacon or a layperson to preside). Whether or not the service includes Holy Communion we conduct all our acts of worship expecting Jesus to be present and we aim to help people respond appropriately.

- **The Lord's Prayer**

This is another place where you might use the Lord's Prayer if you haven't used it earlier.

Back to the planning

Step 3: Responding

The congregation will want to respond to what they have heard in an appropriate way, and so you may not want to include everything listed here. One consideration that will help your decision is how much time you have left in the act of worship.

All the items can be placed in a variety of orders: as this is part of the climax think carefully about the flow of the worship. Where are you hoping to lead the congregation? You will need to think about who delivers each part: will it just be you or might you ask others to lead in the Responding section? Make your choices based on the answers to these considerations. Once you've decided, make your notes in your planning grid.

Having selected which items and who might deliver them, you will need to decide what form they will take. For example, where are your prayers of intercession coming from – a book or from within you? Will you need to write them in advance? See the guide above.

Gathering

In your planning, you now need to choose whether to continue forward or to go back to the beginning of the service. As the Sending section is very brief but no less important, we'll go back to the Gathering to consider how we lead people into the presence of God. This is an important section as here we set the tone for the entire act of worship.

Worship Menu	What are we doing?	How do we do it? (Possible ingredients)
Gathering	Approaching God	• Call to worship • A sentence of Scripture • Gathering hymn(s) • Prayer of approach • The Lord's Prayer • Silence
	Adoring God	• Hymn of adoration • Hymn of praise • Prayer • Silence • Responsive Psalm or Canticle (eg <i>Te Deum</i>) • Use of images
	Confessing our sins	• Penitential hymn • Prayer of confession • Silence • Interactive prayer
	Offering assurance of God's forgiveness	• Declaration of forgiveness • Hymn of assurance
	Giving thanks	• Prayer of thanksgiving • The Collect • Hymn of thanksgiving • Responsive Psalm or Canticle (eg <i>Gloria</i>) • Children's/all-age address

Approaching God

In this section, we are inviting the congregation to turn their minds from the business of the week to focus their attention on God who is already present. It's important in our worship to put God first and so it's appropriate to do this before we welcome the congregation, even if this seems counter-intuitive. We can do this in a number of ways:

- **Call to worship**

Here we mark the beginning of our corporate act with appropriate words, such as “This is the day that the Lord has made”, to which the congregation may respond, “We will rejoice and be glad in it!” (*Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 1999), p. 27).

- **A sentence of Scripture**

For example, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7b) (NRSV).

- **Gathering hymn**

As it may suggest, this is a hymn designed to gather us together in order to approach God. You will find many gathering hymns in *Singing the Faith* in the section ‘Gathering in God’s presence’ (nos. 18-38). There will be others throughout the hymn book that are equally appropriate – it’s worth keeping a note of them for future use.

- **Prayer of approach**

This is a prayer designed to remind us of who God is and why we are gathering. A good example can be found on page 39 of the *Methodist Worship Book*.

Lord our God,
eternal and wonderful,
wholly to be trusted:
you give life to all;
you help those who come to you
and give hope to those who call on you.
Set our hearts and minds at peace,
that we may bring our prayers to you
with confidence and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- **The Lord’s Prayer**

Some people find placing the Lord’s Prayer early in the service useful. It has echoes back to a past era when often most, if not all, the prayers were offered at the beginning of the service.

- **Silence**

Here you might provide an opportunity for people to reflect on the act of worship they are about to experience in a personal way. Leading people into silence is not always easy as we live in a noisy world. Therefore, it is good practice to suggest briefly how a congregation might use the silence as some can find it an uncomfortable experience, for example by saying, “We take a moment of quiet to acknowledge God’s presence among us.”

Adoration is part of our response to God's self-revelation. As a lover adores their beloved, so we love and adore the God who loves us first. If we acknowledge God's presence, it naturally leads to adoration: as we recall God's majesty and glory, we are filled with a sense of awe and wonder. The ingredients offered below help us to point to God's majesty and glory – the reason for our adoration.

- **Hymn of adoration**

When we sing a hymn of adoration we are reminding ourselves of and refocusing on God's eternal nature. In hymns of adoration we proclaim who God is. You will find many hymns of adoration in *Singing the Faith* from 39 to 69. A good example of a modern hymn of adoration is 'Everlasting God' (StF 46).

- **Hymn of praise**

In recognising what God has done for us, we naturally begin to praise. There are many hymns of praise in *Singing the Faith* in the section 'Praise and thanksgiving' (nos. 70-98), as well as other hymns of praise throughout the hymn book. The focus of the hymn should begin and remain with God. A hymn that does this well is 'From all that dwell below the skies' (StF 75).

- **Prayer**

As with the hymn of adoration, a prayer of adoration should focus on God's nature, and acknowledge who God *is*, rather than what God *has done*. It is sometimes helpful to structure such a prayer using a Trinitarian form, focusing in turn on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but as has already been said, this should be viewed as a helpful structure, not a straitjacket. For example:

Holy God, Father of all,
creation reveals your majesty,
its variety reminding us of the abundance of your grace.

Holy God, Saviour of all,
you have overcome death,
revealing your love for all humankind.

Holy God, present to all,
you breathe life and truth throughout the earth,
reminding us of your power to challenge and transform lives.

Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we adore you.

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- **Silence**

Silence used in this context helps us to acknowledge that we can be silenced by the awesome wonder of God alone. Don't be afraid of using silence in worship, even when children and young people are present. It can be what many people long for.

Confessing our sins

- **Responsive Psalm or Canticale**

This is another place where a Psalm may be read or even sung. If you are following the lectionary a Psalm is appointed for that service. You might choose to have it read, have it said responsively (see above) or a paraphrased version might be sung, eg *Singing the Faith* 481.

Canticles are very similar to Psalms in their style – they are essentially hymns formed from a biblical text, such as the Magnificat or 'The Song of Mary' based on Luke 1:46-55. They appear in *Singing the Faith* (nos. 791-799). They, too, can be spoken or sung using many musical settings, eg 'Tell out my soul' (StF 186) echoes the Magnificat.

- **Use of images**

We live in an age of images and as it has been said a picture can paint 1,000 words. However, this means that you need to choose images carefully as they may detract from rather than enhance the worship. Many churches now have the ability to project images or video clips. You might also hand out small printed copies of an image or have it printed on the notice sheet. You might ask the congregation to reflect on the cross, or an icon, a candle, an art hanging or banner.

When selecting images make sure that you have permission to use them or they are copyright free.

Having acknowledged God's goodness and perfection we cannot help but recognise our failure to live up to the high standards set for us by Jesus, both as individuals and as a worshipping community. In confessing our sins, we are being open and honest before God and removing any potential barrier that may be standing in the way of us fully engaging with God in our worship.

- **Penitential hymn**

As we come before God together in worship, it can be helpful to sing of our sinfulness in a corporate way. The section of *Singing the Faith* that does this directly is 'Repentance and forgiveness', beginning at number 419. The first of these hymns works particularly well as it acknowledges both the individual and corporate aspects of our sinfulness. Again, there are other hymns with a penitential tone that can be found elsewhere in the hymn book.

- **Prayer of confession**

This prayer should highlight the differences between God's perfect nature and our fallen nature. For example, while God is generous bestowing gifts, we can be selfish in using ours. A prayer of confession is most effective when it includes an essence of turning away from our sinful ways and turning back to God – this is what we mean by repentance. It can be helpful to include a congregational response so that all those gathered can feel that they are 'owning' the prayer.

An example of a prayer of confession is:

**God of mercy,
your love for us is strong,
but our love for you is weak.
You call us to follow Jesus,
but we are slow to obey.
You care for all that you have made,
but we ignore the needs of others
and misuse your creation.
We are sorry for our sins.
Forgive us,
and help us to please you
by the way we live;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Methodist Worship Book (Peterborough,
Methodist Publishing House, 1999), p.198

(This prayer, taken from a Holy Communion liturgy, is said by the whole congregation. You can, of course, use it in other services.)

- **Silence**

As noted above, silence can be a helpful way of enabling the congregation to engage in a personal way. This can be especially true when it comes to acknowledging our individual struggles and failings before God. Silence can also be offered as part of more structured prayer of confession, by saying, for example, "We take a moment of quiet to acknowledge our own sin before God."

- **Interactive prayer**

Occasionally, words alone are not enough to express our confession and instead the congregation can be invited to do something that in a visual and participative way expresses our confession. For example, the congregation could be invited to write their confessions on a piece of paper that is then brought to the front of the church, and then shredded or burned. You will need to think out carefully the logistics of these actions! Of course, interactive prayer can also be used effectively in other parts of our worship.

Offering assurance of God's forgiveness

Having confessed our sins it is important that we should be enabled to cast off the burden of guilt, otherwise we may be stuck psychologically at this place. Thus a prayer of confession should always be followed by declaring God's forgiveness.

- **Declaration of forgiveness**

Here we hear God's declaration of pardon, an important part of the gospel. This should be proclaimed clearly in Christian worship.

There are various examples of words of the declaration of forgiveness in the

Methodist Worship Book. You will notice some are given in the first person (“grant you pardon”) and some in the second person (“forgive us our sins”). You need to think about what your role is at this point in the worship and how you best convey what God has offered to us all.

The almighty and most merciful God
grant you pardon,
forgiveness of all your sins,
time for true repentance
and amendment of life,
and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God is love
and forgives us through Jesus. **Amen.**

Methodist Worship Book (Peterborough,
Methodist Publishing House, 1999), pp. 149, 199

It is good when congregations respond to the declaration of forgiveness. The most obvious way is to invite the congregation to respond with ‘Amen’. You could also invite the congregation to respond in their own words, acknowledging God’s forgiveness for themselves and thus participating in this important aspect of the gospel story.

- **Hymn of assurance**

This should seek to reinforce the truth of God’s forgiveness, rather than reinforce our sinfulness. See the section on repentance and forgiveness in *Singing the Faith* (nos. 419- 438). When using a hymn of repentance and/or forgiveness ensure you read the words carefully. You don’t really want to offer a prayer of pardon and then invite the congregation to start singing about their sins again straight after!

Giving thanks

- **Prayer of thanksgiving**

If prayers of adoration, broadly speaking, acknowledge who God is, prayers of thanksgiving can be seen as acknowledging what God has done and continues to do even now. In reality the list of things we want to give thanks to God for is endless.

- **The Collect**

This is a prayer that gathers all our prayers into one. There is a Collect offered for each Sunday in the year from page 523 of the *Methodist Worship Book* and can be seen as a link between ‘Gathering’ and ‘Hearing God’s Word’.

- **Hymn of thanksgiving**

Allow the congregation as a whole to express their thanksgiving. As *Singing the Faith* is split into ‘God’s eternal creation’, ‘God’s redeeming work’ and ‘God’s enduring purpose’, the potential to offer thanks through hymnody seems almost as endless as the thanks we might offer!

- **Responsive Psalm or Canticle**

See above.

- **Children's/all-age address**

Technically this is more of a bridge between 'Gathering' and 'Hearing God's Word'. The preacher or worship leader might use it to introduce the theme or link what is going to happen in the congregation with what will happen in another part of the building in Sunday School/Junior Church or similar, if that is part of the church's practice.

There are many ways of addressing and engaging with young people. The key to success is being interactive rather than didactic (intending to teach). You can find many printed and online resources (eg rootsontheweb.com/about-roots/adult-all-age-resources) to help you, and it's worth keeping a note of good ideas for the future. However, the best ideas are often the ones you create yourself as you can deliver them with a sense of ownership. It's usually a good idea not to plan a children's talk or activity expecting a group of children to 'give you the right answer' – you can guarantee they won't and you can get yourself into a tangle. Be prepared to listen, as what they might well give you is a new insight into the ways of God.

Some things to bear in mind:

Do

Keep it simple

Be confident or use someone who is

Make it relevant to the whole congregation

Make sure that is just as much worship as the rest

Don't

Be patronising

Script this bit of the service

Use the young people as entertainment

In some Methodist churches you will be told they never have children in worship. To the local church this might appear to be the case but it's usually a good idea to prepare something, so that you're not caught out. A good all-age address can often be more memorable than a sermon. Talk to your mentor about how they prepare this section of worship. "All-age" is intergenerational so you are aiming to allow everybody present to join in the worship, not just one particular age range. Of course this should be said of the whole act of worship!

Back to the planning

Step 4: Gathering

In selecting your ingredients for the Gathering you need to think about setting the tone of an act of worship. A children's breakfast praise meeting will require a very different tone from an evening service of devout older Methodists.

However, in both you will be attempting to remind the gathered people that they are in the presence of God, so select carefully. The key to your selection will be knowing why you have omitted particular aspects of the worship – bearing in mind that it would be a long service if you included them all!

Thinking about what you've planned so far, select carefully how you will lead the people into the awesome presence of God. Add these to your planning sheet – you won't, of course, be able to do everything and you will need to take into consideration local requirements such as whether children are present at this part of the worship.

Sending

We now turn our attention to the final section of the service and consider how it will end and equip us to re-enter the world to continue our worship through our life and discipleship.

Worship Menu	What are we doing?	How do we do it? (Possible ingredients)
<i>Sending</i>	Going to live out our discipleship	• Word of challenge • Prayer of dismissal • Blessing

Going to live out our discipleship

Rather like the coffee at the end of the meal, this section doesn't require anything too lengthy. However, it is important:

- to know that the service has ended
- to feel as though we are being commissioned in some way to live as God's people in the coming week.

- **Word of challenge**

This could pick up on the theme that has been explored throughout the worship.

For example, in response to the story of Peter walking on water: "Go and take risks for God; get out of the boat and focus on Christ!"

- **Prayer of dismissal**

Here we are being sent, and in the politest sense, being told to 'go'! We find words such as these at the end of a communion service:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Methodist Worship Book (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 1999), p. 210

- **Blessing**

Not only do we need to be sent, we need to know we are sent with God's blessing. Here are some typical examples:

The blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
remain with you/us always. **Amen.**

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you



and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with kindness
and give you peace. **Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all for evermore. Amen.**

Methodist Worship Book (Peterborough,
Methodist Publishing House, 1999), pp. 197, 506, 383

Back to the planning

Step 5: Sending

You should now be able to see the flow of your service. Now you need to think how will it end? Complete your planning grid.

Step 6: Review and thinking how will it work

One of the risks of this method of planning is that the worshippers can see the joins between the steps! It is your job now to make the flow of the worship feel seamless.

A good way to do this is to review your selection of hymnody. Is there a good blend? Do the words of the hymns lead you in the direction you are aiming to go? If you are not sure, ask a local musician to help you. They will have had lots of experience and many of them will be delighted to share it with you.

It's now a good idea to return to the Service Planning and Reflection Form (media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/WLP_Service_Planning_Reflection_Form_2025.pdf). You should be able to answer most of the questions on it. If you are still not sure, a conversation with your mentor or the local church steward may be helpful at this point.

Make sure you have checked all your arrangements with the local steward – don't presume anything – every church will have its own quirks.

Step 7: Fleshing out the skeleton

If you've followed this menu-planning method, you should have a skeleton of an act of worship that will 'work'. This, of course, is not the end. You will need to flesh out each element unless you have done so already. In the early stages you may feel more comfortable writing something nearer to a full script for your act of worship – but try to avoid reading it all out when you come to delivery! Everyone can suffer nerves so it's wise to have some of the smaller basics jotted down. For example:

- Know before you begin what your call to worship is.
- Have a note of the prayer you will use as you dedicate the offering.
- Make sure the Lord's Prayer is written down – you'll be amazed how many preachers forget it when they are leading! (You can find this on the inside back cover of *Singing the Faith*.)
- Choose the sending prayer you will be using – write it down, even if, like the Lord's Prayer above, it's a prayer you've said many times before.

Another task is to think how will you guide the congregation through the service, without becoming predictable or boring.

There will, hopefully, be people in the congregation who are new to church and who aren't familiar with what a congregation 'always' does. So think about how to help people who aren't sure. Be clear when to stand, when to sit etc, and for those who can't stand for the hymns or the offering, they may welcome permission to remain seated.

"We stand to sing hymn 547 in *Singing the Faith*" is clear, but rather stark and may make the service feel disjointed. A better narrative might be "We hear echoes of Romans chapter 12 where Paul urges his readers to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, as we stand to sing 547 from *Singing the Faith*, 'Beyond these walls of Worship'".

The skill of narration is helpful throughout the service as it helps to guide the congregation through the menu you are offering and might suggest why you have made these particular choices. So rather than "Let's hear our reading" or "We hear the set Old Testament text", a narrative style might say "We continue to think about the promises of God as we hear a reading from the Old Testament where, after 40 days and nights of rain followed by a long drying out, God speaks to Noah".

Developing your skills

This guide has attempted to set out clearly what is at the heart of what you will study as you train to be a worship leader or local preacher. As with any basic guide, there are many gaps which will be filled as you work through *Worship: Leading and Preaching*. However, we hope there is enough here to help you to start creating your own exciting worship menus for God and the people of God.

One of the things many preachers struggle with is selecting suitable hymns for worship. Content at methodist.org.uk/resources has been developed to help with this and is particularly useful if you are following the lectionary. You will help yourself immensely if you familiarise yourself with the music copy of *Singing the Faith* (as this contains all the reference sections).

Choosing hymns is more than finding words to suit your theme – finding balance in an act of worship is also an art. One way is to ensure that hymns are in different metres. Some guidance is offered at methodist.org.uk/for-churches/resources/using-singing-the-faith-plus/finding-hymns-and-songs/.

If you want to take your preparations for leading worship further while you prepare to begin Module 1 here are some suggestions:

Gathering

- Look for hymns of gathering that are not in the Gathering section of *Singing the Faith*.
- Take a prayer of approach from the *Methodist Worship Book* and rewrite it in your own words so that it might be suitable for all-age worship or a café-style act of worship.
- Look for hymns of praise and thanksgiving which are outside that named section.
- Look at the biblical index in *Singing the Faith*, and discover some of the hymns that are based on the Psalms.
- Write your own prayer of adoration, praise and thanksgiving – be clear in your own mind the differences between the three emphases.
- Start a log of good ideas for interactive prayer.
- Begin to develop a bank of electronic images that might be useful aids to prayer.

Hearing God's Word

- Start to gather a collection of sketches useful for worship.
- Take a Bible passage and set it out in a dramatised style.
- Read the same passage of Scripture from the NRSV, *The Message*, NIV and the *Good News Bible*. (If you don't have copies of these different versions, use biblegateway.com.) Think when it might be most appropriate to use each one.
- Try retelling a biblical story in your own words.
- Try phrasing some open questions that would lead to a discussion at a café-style service.

Responding

- Draft some structures for prayers of intercession. For example, focus first on the individual, then the church, the community and the country, and then the world.
- Write a prayer of intercession, then redraft it for a different style of worship.
- Start a list of interactive prayer ideas.
- Think of a different way of making our monetary offering.
- Consider when it might and might not be appropriate to make a 'commitment call'.
- Reflect on where the notices are most appropriately shared and how this might be best done.

Sending

- Think back to when you last heard a call to go to the world that made a difference. Ask yourself, 'Why did it do that?'
- Think of an alternative way to close a service other than a prayer of blessing or the grace.
- Think about what to do after the blessing: how will you leave the worship space? Will you sit down and pray? Process out? Say goodbye to those who have been in worship? Start consciously noting what other preachers do, and think about how what is appropriate may differ from context to context.

Appendix

Planning, using the menu outline

Worship Menu	What are we doing?	How do we do it? (Possible ingredients)
Gathering	Approaching God	
	Adoring God	
	Confessing our sins	
	Offering assurance of God's forgiveness	
	Giving thanks	

Hearing God's Word (Ministry of the Word)	Looking to the Scriptures	
	Listening for God by expounding the Scriptures and interpreting God's Word	
Responding	Giving thanks	
	Praying for ourselves, others and God's world	
	Dedicating our lives to God's service	
Sending	Going to live out our discipleship	

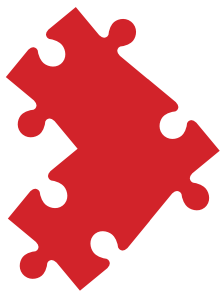
Notes

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Worship:
leading &
preaching



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