

Guidelines for Worship Planning, part 1

Assembly Mennonite Church

Thank you for your willingness to serve and share your gifts by leading worship. Whether you are working alone or with your small group, we are grateful that you said "Yes!" This document is a collection of suggestions and resources. Mary Gilbert is available for questions about planning: 574-534-1852, or mgilbert1301@gmail.com.

Specific Responsibilities of the Worship Leader

Most of the time, the Worship Leader is asked to **plan first hour only**, and **find all personnel** for the service other than the preacher and song leader. This typically includes scripture readers, children's time leader, peace lamp lighter and microphone carrier. Please clarify with the song leader whether he/she or you will be choosing the songs.

We value involving many people in worship -- consider asking newer attenders, MYFers, college students, etc. The "worship gifts compilation" lists people willing to help in a variety of ways (this can be found on the AMC website at assemblymennonite.org, under the "worship" tab). Worship committee will provide the main visual elements for each set of weeks, and worship leaders are welcome to bring fresh flowers or other items for the table to highlight the week's theme or texts.

Time tips

We continually face the tension of time for worship. We have all the time we need for the Spirit to move among us, and yet we must pay attention to the clock, especially for the sake of the saints and angels we call Sunday school teachers. **Please begin at 9:30am sharp, even if people are still finding their way in. First hour should end at 10:45am.**

Rule of fives: As you plan, round everything up to a multiple of five minutes to allow cushions for transitions, instructions and surprises. For example, count each song as five minutes to allow the song leader to come up and announce the song, all turn to the page, hear the pitch and sing.

Accounting for sharing, announcements and visitor introductions: Allow a total of 15 minutes for announcements and visitor introductions. Allow a minimum of 15 minutes for sharing and prayer, more if you know of weighty items to be shared. That means, on a morning with sharing in first hour, planned elements should represent a maximum of 45 minutes of the service. Or, to put it another way, think in terms of starting sharing time by 10:15 or earlier in order to finish at 10:45am.

Order of Worship

Our blue *Hymnal* is designed and organized around a basic flow of worship, in the sections listed below. However, do not feel bound to this structure: **we value variety and creativity in worship**. Each section notes what is most often included in our worship service. **Any of the sections could include elements such as singing, prayer, scripture, silence and/or creative expression** (dance, drama, visual arts, etc.)

First hour

Underlined items indicate additional explanation below (hyperlinked with ctrl+mouse click).

1. **Gathering (7-10 minutes)**

Usually includes: [chimes](#)¹, [peace lamp](#)², call to worship, gathering hymn(s), welcome, [introduction to morning](#)³, [introducing children with birthdays](#)⁴

2. **Praising and adoring God; confessing and reconciling (7-10 minutes)**

Usually includes: hymns of praise/thanksgiving, scripture, spoken, sung or silent prayers

3. **Offering ourselves and our gifts (5 minutes)**

Usually includes: [offering \(2% and Window offerings\) and prayer](#)⁵

May also include: covenanting or commissioning, baptism

4. **Hearing God's word (25 minutes)**

Usually includes: Scripture, [children's time](#)⁶, sermon. *May also include:* parent-child dedication.

5. **Responding to the Word (15 minutes)**

Usually includes: silent, sung or verbal response to the sermon, [sharing of joys and concerns and prayer](#)⁷. *May also include:* Communion or other corporate rituals

6. **Sending (15 minutes)**

Usually includes: [introduction of guests](#)⁸, announcements, sung or spoken benediction

May also include: farewells, commissioning, instructions for unusual second hours

Additional information for [underlined](#) items above

The text in **green** is available to copy and paste into your worship leading notes, if helpful.

Chimes: *Even if people are still getting settled, start on time.* Three strikes on the chiming bowl or finger cymbals helps us transition from community-building chatter to joining the community together in God's presence.

Lighting of the peace lamp: please be in touch with Mary about which liturgy is being used.

Welcome/intro to morning: It can be helpful to briefly orient people to the shape and theme of the morning. Including a comment about what is planned for second hour is a good practice, as well as noting special events of the day such as fellowship meals, parent-child dedications or guest speakers. It may also be helpful to note where empty seats are still available in the worship space.

Birthdays candles: The children among us are important to our worship. We acknowledge and bless our children by recognizing their birthdays (birthdays to be celebrated can be found in the current AssemblyLine)... “The candle on the piano this morning reminds us that we are celebrating _____’s ___th birthday. (To the child) *Would you stand? We want you to know we are so glad you are part of Assembly.* (To the congregation) *The Assembly Line today tells us more about _____,”* and there is a picture on the bulletin board by the coffee pots. If the child has not yet arrived, please check again for the child just before children’s time.

Children’s time: With the number and age span of our children, we encourage short, focused children’s times that explore one idea in a fairly concrete way. **Please be very direct and clear with the children’s time leader that five minutes is the maximum.** It does not serve any of us well when we stretch the children’s attention spans beyond that.

If you choose a book, time the reading in advance and edit the story as needed. Dramas, conversations, object lessons and songs are also excellent ways to engage with the children. Since childcare begins after children’s time, please put **children’s time after the offering, so that children can participate in the offering time.**

Before children’s time begins, announce the availability of childcare for children 3 & under (up to preschool age) following children’s time. Call children ages 3 and up to the front for children’s time, and dismiss children **age 2 and younger** to the childcare room for Little Children’s Time.

On the first Sunday of month, children’s time **could be** the collection of food items for The Window (see details in the offering section for other ideas on how to do The Window food collection). If you’d like to do the food collection during children’s time, here is a suggested way to do it:

Children’s time leader says:

When Jesus was asked which commandment is the most important, he said, “Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second most important commandment is like it: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” When we share what we have with our neighbors, we show our love for God and for each other.

There’s enough food in the world to feed everyone, but sometimes some of us have more food than others, and then it’s our joy to be able to share it. The food we gather today will go to The Window so that everyone in Goshen who needs good can have enough. May these gifts that you collect for The Window remind all of us to love our neighbors and share with them, whether food, or friendship, or other ways of caring. And may God also bless you with loving neighbors who will share with you.

We can bless this food that we’re gathering because it is sacred to share out of our abundance. [prayer, which the children say together with the children’s time leader:] *For apples sweet, for bread to eat, we thank you God. Amen.*

To all:

The children will now collect our offerings for our neighbors as we listen while ____ offers us his/her gift of music (or a song can be planned during the collection time). Please pass your items to the closest aisle. Children, please take your basket to the library when it is filled and then you can return to your seat.

Offering: Assembly's pattern of bringing the offering forward invites us to think of all that we offer and do as a joyful response to God's generosity.

Here is the **offering prayer** that we have been using for a number of years. You do not need to use this prayer, but it is available and you may feel free to adapt it to the current worship theme:

"Great and loving God: You have given us Your first and Your best. We wish to follow in Your way, and we know that these gifts are one way to start. Deepen our love. Grow in us grace and generosity so that these gifts become more of our first and more of our best. Make us also good stewards of the rest we have kept for ourselves. Some of this money we are giving today will go to (name a local budget item) and some will go to (name a global budget item). Receive these gifts and use them to speed the coming of Your Reign. Amen."

If you are leading the **first Sunday of the month**, please also announce the 2% offering.

"On the first Sunday of the month we have two baskets for offerings -- one for our regular offerings; and the other for our 2 % offering -- 2 % of our income which is disbursed to impoverished people locally and in the 2/3rds world. We do this as an act of restitution for injustices in economic distribution. May our offerings reflect the generosity and the justice that God wills in our lives."

On the first Sunday of the month, we also collect food donations for The Window as a response to hunger in our community. Ask the adults to please pass their items to the aisles and remain seated so the children can easily find the items to collect. The children collect the food donations, take the baskets to the library, and return to their seats or go to childcare. A song could be planned for during the collection time. This collection could happen during children's time, or it could happen immediately after children's time. Feel free to be creative and include this in another part of worship, as well.

Sharing of joys and concerns and prayer: Like announcement time, sharing of joys and concerns is a free-flowing time in the otherwise structured service. This is time that can be used to respond to what we have experienced in worship, share experiences or prayer requests from the week, or both. The worship leader must tend this space carefully, giving clear instructions, allowing enough silence at the outset for sharing to emerge, and stepping in with grace when the allotted time is coming to an end. Prayer can happen several ways, but it is best to avoid repeating a laundry list of concerns and joys already spoken. Some options include:

- inviting the congregation into a spirit of prayer, and leading in a response after each sharing, "God, hear our prayer." Conclude with a brief prayer that expresses the breadth of our connections to the broader world, each other and God.
- preparing a prayer connected to the morning's theme with spaces for a variety of categories, longings, thanksgivings, etc. When you pray, name succinctly the people or situations shared that morning.
- Not everyone is comfortable praying in a large group setting, so you may wish (in advance) to ask a pastor or someone else to close the time of sharing with prayer.

Introducing guests: Guests may be introduced toward the beginning of the service, or just before fellowship time. Please convey our warm welcome.

Again, please remember that this document is meant to be a resource, not a script.

A final note: Naomi Roots is available to copy the order of service for you. **Please send her a formatted, ready-to-copy order of service by Friday at 8am.** Please send the file as a Word document, **not** as a PDF.

If it is not in by this time, you will need to do the copying yourself (140 half-sheet copies). **In the case that you make your own copies, please have finished, printed copies in the worship space by 8:30 Sunday morning, so that the set up crew can distribute them and know which hymnals to put out.**

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