



New Life

CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

Our Worship Services

*Where the majesty of God, the joy of his people,
and the transforming power of Christ and his Word is
evident to all.*

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The Context of Worship Services

Our worship services are set in the context of our daily worship of God who has saved us in and through Christ, amidst the danger of sin, and in the imminent reality of Christ's return or our own passing – either of which will result in a face to face encounter with Jesus.

Jesus himself said that God desires worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth, insisting that their worship is not confined to a particular place (John 4:21). Rather, says Paul to the church in Rome, our spiritual act of worship means to offer God nothing less than our lives (Romans 12:1).

Of course, because of Jesus' perfect and profound act of worship on the cross, our worship is not a down payment for sin – Jesus has already achieved that perfectly on our behalf. Instead, our daily worship is a response to Christ. It is a response which brings God honour.

We must worship with an understanding of the truth of God, which is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through God's word (John 16:14). For this reason, the proclamation of God's word (THE truth) through reading, singing and preaching holds an important place in our Christian meetings, as it does in the rest of our lives. As God reveals more and more of himself through his word, believers will be filled with love and awe, and will respond with humble yet adoring worship (Rev 1:12-17). The greater the appreciation believers have of God's holy character and gracious works the more believers will adore him and praise him.

To worship God in spirit and in truth, with all of our lives, means that our response to God flows from the conviction brought about by the Holy Spirit, not only on a Sunday but every day; not only in the company of Christians, but also in the company of unbelievers.

In a negative sense, this means that unless our lives are a “spirit and truth” response to God during the week, our Christian meetings are meaningless gatherings.

On the other hand however, if we are intent about worshipping God with our lives, our meetings are vital to our wellbeing as Christians. It is in our meetings that we build each other up and interact with God as his people.

Therefore we need to have a mindset of being involved in worship services as contributors to the faiths of our brothers and sisters. We can't simply be consumers. Faith in the living God is active.

Foundations of Worship Services

There are many activities that make up our worship services. Some are not specific to the gathered church (such as Bible reading and prayer which are also done individually), while some are corporate in nature (such as the signs of Baptism and Lord's Supper).

Worship services are an interaction between God and his gathered people, where God ministers to us through his word, and through the signs of Lord's Supper and Baptism, we serve and edify (or build up) each other using the spiritual gifts God gives us and we respond to God through prayer and praise

These foundations are not mutually exclusive, but are very closely interrelated. For example, God ministers to us through the preaching of his word, however this is administered by the person preaching, whom God has equipped with the spiritual gifts to do this. Similarly, singing is a way that we can all minister God's word to each other, and yet in the very same song we can speak to God corporately in prayer.

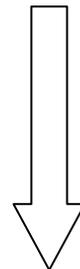
Let's tie together the practical elements of worship services.

God serves us through

Lord's Supper

Baptism

His Word



We edify each other through spiritual gifts, given to us by God.

This might include

Bible reading

Preaching

Singing

Personal testimony

Talking with each other and encouraging each other

Prayer, when we pray for each other

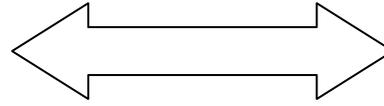
Responsive readings

Visual symbols, poetry, drama

Leading the meeting

Providing hospitality afterwards

Teaching or minding children



These activities seek to strengthen the church to the glory of God (1 Cor. 14:26).

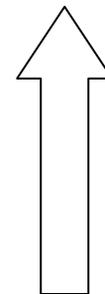
We respond to God together through

Our obedience in meeting together

Prayer

Singing

Responsive readings



It should be evident from our services that God is among us because our engagement in each other's salvation reflects Jesus' love for us. Seeing this could be the turning point in a non-Christian's life – humbling themselves before God in their very first act of worship! (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)

Finally then, worship services, as should our lives, provide an opportunity for non-Christians to see the gospel in action.

Goals for our Worship Services

Our ultimate goal for our worship services is to glorify God in all that we do. We do that by believing, living out, and building each other up in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in our services.

Our strategy as a church is to **win** people to Christ, to **build** a committed community of believers, and to **send** well-equipped disciples of Christ to serve him with the gospel.

These strategies articulate what we want to achieve as a church, under God. They also provide some direction to our services.

First strategy: winning people to a living faith in Jesus Christ

To make our services **inclusive** to all,

Welcoming and inviting those who do not yet know Christ

Welcoming newcomers

Encouraging participation

To make our services **accessible** to all, with

A simple structure

Easy to understand language

Content that is uncluttered, and not distracting

Memorable experiences

Second strategy: building a committed community of believers for Christ

To **hear** from God through his Word through
Preaching
Song
Our conversations

To **express** our unity in the gospel of Christ
With clarity (keeping the gospel central)
With a call to repentance and faith, trusting in Christ
With a call to be committed followers of Christ
With a call to love each other

Third strategy: sending well-equipped disciples of Christ to serve him with the gospel

To **strengthen** each other for serving Christ by:
Encouraging one another
Serving each another with our gifts
Spurring each other on to love and good deeds
Training and equipping people
Obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Structure and Flow of Our Worship Services

The Worship Service as Gospel Presentation

The church - from the earliest record – has varied in the way it has structured its public meetings.

However there has always been one constant; that the Gospel shapes the service.

The meeting itself has the opportunity to be a Gospel presentation expressed in the community of God's people, for that community.

The Bible (1 Cor. 14:26) also tells us that the effect of the Gospel ought not simply be thought of in terms of the Christians gathered together; but also by the possibility that outsiders may see the Gospel expressed practically in worship services. God calls us to hope – even expect – that our meetings will affect outsiders by the Gospel seen as well as proclaimed.

The Gospel as presentation ought therefore not simply affect any element that we care to introduce to our worship services – for example, the sermon, or the songs. Rather, it would seem that the Gospel ought to shape the entire meeting and its structure.

Like an arrow, we want to move the community of Jesus – and the outsider gathered with us – from a point of objective truths about God – to the subjective and corporate implications of the Gospel for life lived in service to Jesus, and as his people in a place and for that place.

In this way, we even proclaim the Gospel by the very meeting itself, and trust that God's spirit will work where his Gospel is proclaimed.

The Elements of Worship Services

The following are the essential elements of our Worship Services:

Adoration

Confession

Assurance

Thanksgiving

Petition and Intercession

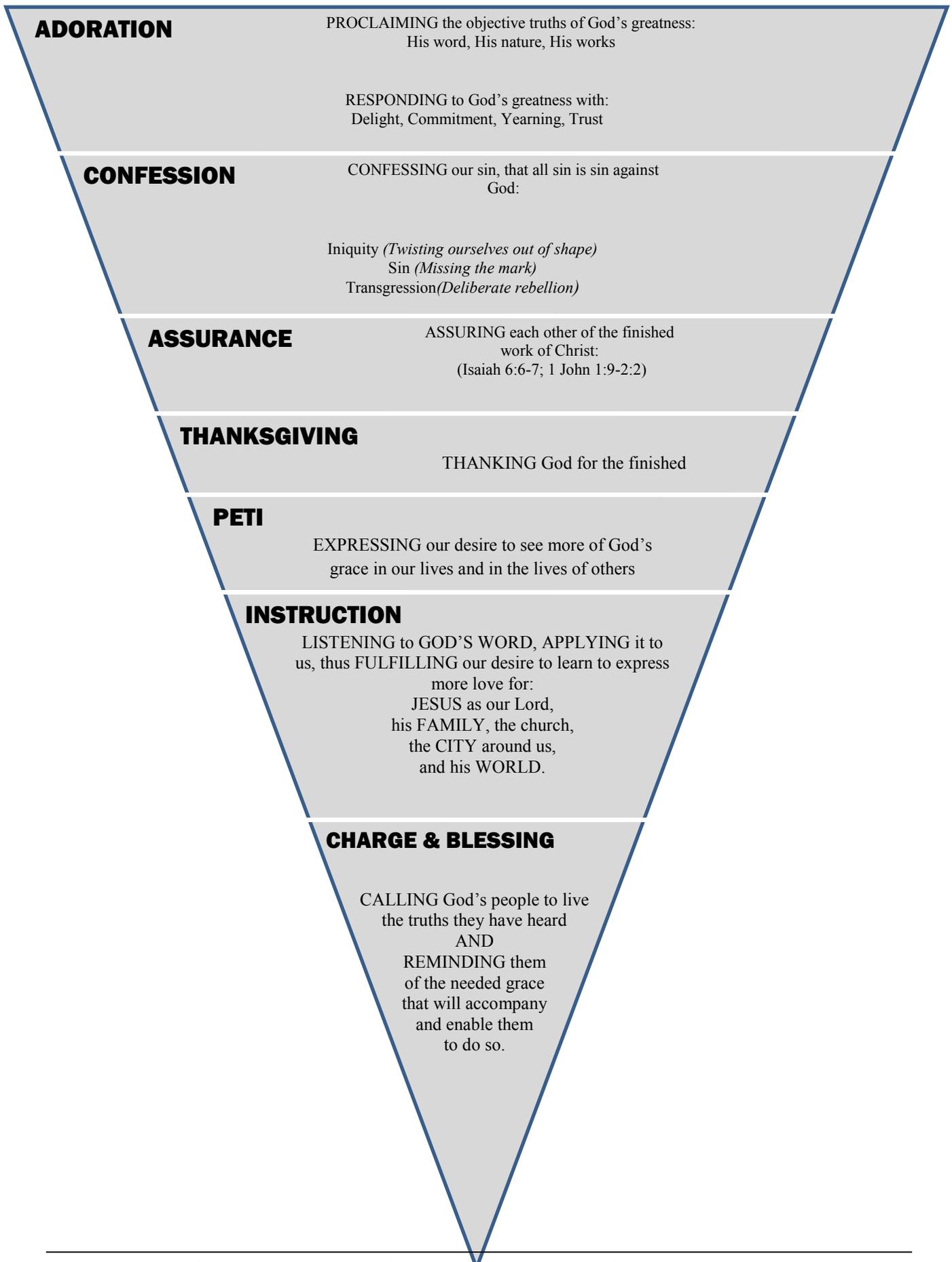
Instruction

Communion

Charge and Blessing

Taken from Chapell, Brian. *Christ Centred Worship* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009: chapter 11.

The Thematic Flow of Worship Services



The Basic Worship Service Format

HO	FUNCTION	WHAT	DETAILS
Musicians	Preparation 9:15am	Background Music	PPT cycle through initial welcome/announcement slides
Elders, deacons, Pastoral carers, Service leader	9:15am	Prayer for the Meeting	All welcome to join in
Service Leader	Welcome 9:30am	Welcome Announcements Call to worship Prayer	Welcome regulars and visitors Announcements Introduce theme of service Suitable Scripture linked to theme
Musicians	Adoration	Singing	Two or three praise songs
Minister/Elder	Communion	Lord's Supper	Celebrated every second month
Service Leader	Thanksgiving	Collection	
Prayer leader	Adoration Confession Thanksgiving Petition &	Prayer	Not all elements needs to be there, depending on whether Lord's Supper is celebrated and the focus of sermon.
Children's talk person	Instruction	Children's Talk	
Musicians	Preparation for instruction	Singing	
Reader	Instruction	Bible Reading	Short prayer asking for a blessing on the reading followed by reading
Preacher	Instruction	Sermon	
Preacher	Petition & Intercession	Prayer	
Musicians	Charge & Blessing	Song	Response to the sermon
Service Leader	Charge & Blessing		Pick up on key application in sermon Recap important announcements Invite people to stay for cuppa afterwards Benediction (a good word from the Lord)
Musicians	Close	Background Music	
Servers in Kitchen		Tea & Coffee	

Leading the Service

There are several different roles involved in leading our services including preaching, leading in music and song, leading in prayer, bible reading and leadership of the meeting.

The role of the service leader is vital to set the spiritual tone of the meetings. We want people to be relaxed, but at the same time aware that God is present among us as we meet as his people.

We also need to be aware that non-Christians are present and watching on, so as much as possible we should ensure that what we do is understandable to them.

The following guidelines are to assist service leaders in their task.

Preparation

Prayerful preparation is vital.

You will receive a running sheet from the office. You need to identify the points at which you need to be involved welcoming, opening, leading in to other elements, announcements, closing etc, and prepare your commentary.

It is vital that you familiarise yourself with the text for the message which will provide the theme for the service. You may want to speak to the preacher and ask about the theme.

The songs selected will also focus on the theme especially the song after the message.

Good preparation will enable a smooth flow of the items in the service.

Immediately before the meeting, check with the song leader regarding any late changes to the songs to be sung.

Prayer before the service

The leader on duty will need to remember to be involved in a time of prayer before the service. This is a vital part of the preparation, and provides an opportunity for exchanging last minute prayer points and announcements for in the service.

Things to Note about Worship Leading

(1) Start on time

Service leaders are to ensure that meetings start on time, regardless of the numbers there. This is so that we will encourage people to come on time, and so our meetings don't go over time because of a late start, which is unfair for the people who do come on time or early.

(2) Keeping the meeting flowing

Service leaders are reminded to think about the little things that will enable this to happen. To do this well you will need to prepare from the running sheet and make sure people listed to be involved are all present before the meeting (Bible readers, prayers, etc)

(3) Keeping it tight

Introductions to the service, collections, prayer, close etc need to be clear, short, well-focussed and purposeful. Again this hinges on adequate preparation. Reading long sections of Scripture, by way of introduction and in the closing, generally loses people, whereas short passages can generally be more easily explained and remembered by people.

Where services include additional items such as Lord's Supper, multiple announcements and a Ministry Focus Spot, service leaders need to ensure that their commentary is biblical and to the point.

(4) Informal, yet dignified

The informality of our services is attractive in our Australian culture, and we want to see that continue. We also want our services to be dignified and God-honouring. That balance is sometime hard to strike, but we need to work hard on this.

(5) Referring to church newsletter material in the service

We want to encourage people to read their bulletins, but it is not the intention that service leaders take up time by repeating all the material in the bulletin. We must remember that a lot of what is in the bulletin is not relevant to visitors and first-timers etc.

(6) Checking readers & prayers are present

The service leader should check the running sheet and make sure the people reading the Bible and praying are present and to re-allocate those tasks is necessary.

Opening the meeting

(1) Welcome

(a) Welcoming visitors

This is a vital part of welcoming. We want new people to be warmly received into our meetings and community. We do this so they will experience Christian love and fellowship and that no unnecessary barriers will hinder their hearing of God's Word in our meetings.

(b) Welcoming back people from a mission work

It is very important to welcome back people who have been on mission trips. It is very encouraging to faith to hear a little what people have been doing.

(c) Announcing births, death and marriages
These are important announcements that build community, and are best done at the very beginning of the service. They are part of the ebb and flow of real Christian community.

(d) Welcoming new members publicly in the meeting
This is a good thing to do. But if we do it we need to make sure we include all. This is difficult to do in a larger setting. We inevitably miss people. If we are going to miss people, we ought not to do it at all in the public meeting. We do of course welcome through letter and in a note in the bulletin when they become members. Also some people may not be there at the time it is announced, which becomes awkward. Our emphasis is to welcome them as partners in the gospel serving Christ with us.

(2) Opening Scripture & prayer

It is important to open the meeting with a suitable Scripture reading where possible linked to the theme of the service as determined by the text of the message calling people to corporate worship. This ought to be short and will help focus people on the Lord. This is followed by a short prayer asking the congregation to focus on God usually preceded by a time of silent prayer.

We want our meetings to be places where the majesty of God, the joy of his people and the transforming power of Christ and his Word is evident to all.

Announcements

Announcements must be clear and to the point. Do not repeat announcements printed in the bulletin or on power point unless there is a special urgency about them.

Encourage people to read the bulletins and use the editorial and pastoral & prayer notes during the week in their devotional time.

Avoid in-house assumption or jargon. Explain things so that the first time visitor understands what you are talking about

Closing

We want people to be thinking about the Word of God that has been preached and the song that's just been sung in response to the Word. Therefore in closing pick up on a key application from the sermon and reinforce it briefly (don't preach another message!).

Encourage people to discuss what they heard over coffee and fellowship after the service.

Remind them of any key announcements needing their action (if any).

Rather than saying "Thanks for coming" which tends to tap into the consumerism of our age, say, "It's been good to be together this morning."

Select a closing Scripture (one or two verses maximum) to close the service with. Benediction literally means, "A good word from the Lord." It need not be one of the 'blessings' often read out of the Bible.

Music & Singing

Biblical Rationale

Like many of the biblical psalms, Christian songs tell us what God is like and what he has done. They will encourage us to respond to God with faith, repentance, love, hope, obedience and gratitude. Corporate singing is an expression of the unity that we have in Christ.

Christian singing should engage both our minds and our hearts. This means that all the songs that we sing, whether long or short, whether they express a breadth of theology or simply respond to one of God's attributes, should have clear meaning and allow us to engage with God and each other using our minds and our hearts.

First Direction of Corporate Singing: songs that speak to us – singing the word of God to each other

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs...” Ephesians 5:19a

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”
Colossians 3:16

With the primary Biblical emphasis for the gathering of God's people being their edification, our songs must primarily convey meaning as we minister God's word to each other through song.

The meaning may be doctrinal, or it may be in the form of application, or both. As with preaching, we aim to sing a variety of songs that convey the rich breadth of Scripture, in its various contexts and we rely on the Holy Spirit to use this to build up the church of Jesus Christ.

Second Direction of Corporate Singing: songs that speak to God –prayer in song

"...Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:19b-20

"...And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:17

Singing also provides an opportunity to respond to God. For example, we sing songs that are prayers. Both texts indicate that our response to God is to be one of thankfulness, for *everything*.

While songs may operate predominantly in one of these two directions (songs that speak to us and songs that speak to God), many songs operate in both directions – for example by encouraging us to respond to a certain aspect of God's character.

It is in fact impossible to entirely separate singing to each other from singing to God.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit helps us to transform truth about God into response to God. And so we trust that as we sing about God to each other, the Holy Spirit will help us to respond to God, not *only* through our singing but with our very lives, even when we are *not* gathered as God's people and as we proclaim God's good news to unbelievers.

Guidelines for Song Selection

- ♪ We sing God's Word to each other, and therefore all songs we sing must accurately convey the truths that we find in the Scriptures. Paul pleads: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you sing psalms hymns and songs with gratitude in your heart.*" (Colossians 3:16)
- ♪ We use a broad range of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)
- ♪ The words and music of songs used should be contemporary.
 - ◇ The songs selected must be easy for the congregation to sing
 - ◇ In the language of the day eg changing 'thee' to 'you', 'art' to 'are' etc as appropriate.
 - ◇ In the music of today (broadly speaking), not the music from a narrow cultural fringe but the generally accepted music of the day. This would include some of the older hymns that are known and loved in today's context, as well as newer songs.
 - ◇ Old hymns may still be sung with explanation or modification and to new tunes as appropriate.
- ♪ The songs selected must be meaningful and in different ways should express thankfulness to God, promote spiritual growth, touch the emotions, and must teach and underscore truth and encourage response.
- ♪ Where possible selected songs should support the theme of the meeting as determined by the Word of God selected for preaching.

