

A TEAM APPROACH TO WORSHIP DESIGN

Audrey Wells, director of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, describes how the use of non-professionals enriched the film crew's effort to tell their story. For scenes in the town's piazza, local people who walked there every day were asked to serve as "extras." For the food scenes, a nearby restaurant cooked the meals. After its release, many local participants gathered at the movie theater, which itself had appeared in the film, to enjoy the story they had helped to tell. From the director's perspective, non-professional involvement only served to enhance the filmmaking experience.¹

The same can be true for worship. Appreciation increases when everyone, professionals and non-professionals alike, take part in the preparation. In this method, the pastor gives up the role of solo operator to recognize the part that worship leaders can play in "producing" the worship service. Though more complicated than working alone, it can also be more spiritually rewarding. Len Wilson and Jason Moore, writing for the context of contemporary worship, offer a model for worship teams that can be adapted to a variety of worship styles.²

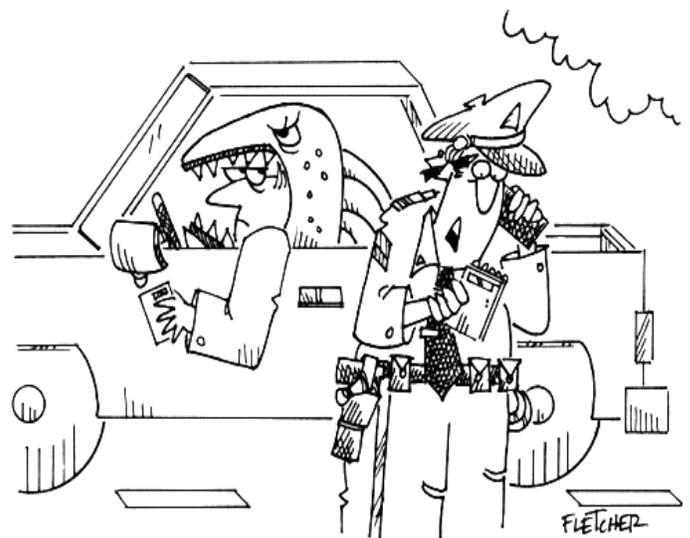
Recruiting Team Members

A worship team does not have to be large to be effective. In fact, large teams may be more complicated to manage and more prone to conflict than small ones. The best size for brainstorming appears to be between four and seven persons. In recruiting, seek generalists rather than specialists, and try to represent the church's demographic makeup such as age, gender, race, and cultural or political perspectives. People who get along well with others are always a plus.³

Team Member Roles

To facilitate planning, roles may be assigned to certain team members. The **pastor** selects a theme and interprets the Scripture lesson that supports it.

However, the role of **producer** (or team leader) is better filled by a lay person. Though this role is frequently overlooked, the producer manages the team and acts as the point person in all stages of implementing the worship plan. The key purpose is not to act as the decision maker, but to implement decisions that were made as a group.⁴ The **band leader or music director** ensures that the music selections align with the team's design for the service. Some churches opt for full team involvement in selecting the songs, while others will leave this entirely up to the music leader. A **writer** develops language and metaphors that express the theme set by the pastor. This can be a call to worship or more informal opening remarks by the person who opens the service. For leaders who prefer not to read from a script, "talking points" can be used so that the speaker can then improvise. A **technical director** is needed to deal with various aspects of media, including sound, lighting, and projection.



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How Often to Meet

Worship planning can be time intensive. Team members' available time and the team's scope of responsibility are important considerations when determining how often to meet. Most churches select one of three options.

Some churches use a **single team meeting once per week**. One advantage of this approach is that frequent meetings tend to be an aid to relationship building. This arrangement can often seem better suited to paid staff members than to volunteers with busy schedules to navigate, and it can be wearing over time.

To alleviate the burden, some churches spread responsibilities out by creating **multiple teams that meet weekly** or on rotation. In the rotation option, different teams take responsibility for one Sunday out of three or four, meeting one time ahead of the service to do planning.

Finally, some churches hold a **single team meeting once every few weeks or monthly**, gathering for several hours to plan multiple services. This model may work best for a small church or one in which volunteers, not staff, do much of the work. In this approach, the team may find it necessary to focus more on the big picture by brainstorming themes, metaphors, songs, and other creative elements without worrying at this point about how it will all fit together. Some of the details may need to be left up to individual team members to determine outside of the meeting.⁵

A Weekly List of Team Decisions

No matter how frequently it meets, every worship team or its appointed leader must make a series of decisions:

1. the Scripture lesson on which the service is based
2. the central theme or main idea of the service expressed as simply as possible
3. a statement of the human condition, the real life issue that the good news of the service addresses
4. a visual metaphor, a single image that expresses the main idea in a way that the congregation can connect with
5. the goal that the team is trying to achieve
6. the creative elements to include in the service to get the idea across, which could include photos, video clips, graphic images, or anything else that

worshippers can see, hear, feel, taste or touch that might help them experience the message.

These decisions, when made by the group, become action items to check off and report back to the group about.⁶

Organize Loosely

Cathy Townley, a worship consultant, offers another way to think about worship teams that emphasizes building relationships over filling specific roles based on skills. Based on her experience in starting a new church, she advocates organizing loosely, allowing newcomers to seek their own level of participation, and resisting attempts to be locked into a set pattern. As a church planter, she discovered that she was really a one-person team, and that she spent much of her time networking with a variety of people, building relationships with them, and asking them to take one piece of a particular week's worship plan to help her with. The result may be a worship service that is not highly produced, but immensely satisfying for participants, and it can spur member involvement and church growth over time.⁷

A Richer View from Many Perspectives

Marcia McFee, a worship consultant, compares the congregation's experience of worship to a circle of people viewing a beautiful sculpture from the perimeter of the room. The experience is richer from many perspectives than from only one or two angles. In the same way, worship planning using teams can create a fuller, more meaningful experience than if only one or two persons are involved. That fuller experience is what congregations are all about.⁸

1. Marcia McFee, *Think Like a Film Maker: Sensory-Rich Worship Design for Unforgettable Messages* (Truckee, CA: Trokay Press, 2016), 43.

2. Len Wilson and Jason Moore, *Taking Flight with Creativity: Worship Design Teams That Work* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009).

3. *Ibid.*, 25-29.

4. *Ibid.*, 39-48.

5. *Ibid.*, 49-55.

6. *Ibid.*, 79-92.

7. Cathy Townley, *Missional Worship: Increasing Attendance and Expanding the Boundaries of Your Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011), 61-79.

8. Marcia McFee, *Think Like a Film Maker*, 65.