

How a Worship Team Got Started

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As the Presbyterian Church in Canada engages in ministry in the 21st century, new models for ministry need to be developed. In response to the changes in the Canadian church environment, some churches have developed worship teams. This is one example of how a worship team can serve the church. This model can also be adapted to suit congregations which are not multiple points or clusters.

Below, you will read about how a worship team was started in the three-point charge of Knox, Cannington; St. John's, Cresswell; and Wick Presbyterian Churches in rural Central Ontario. The author, Rev. Dawn Griffiths, was the minister of The Open Door Cluster until January, 2006. If you have any questions about this model you can contact her at db.griffiths@sympatico.ca

What is a Worship Team?

Our worship team is made up of lay people from our three congregations who lead the regular Sunday worship services in the charge roughly every three weeks.

Purpose

The original purpose in forming a worship team was to encourage the understanding and involvement of laity in congregational worship life and to give the opportunity for people to develop their individual spiritual gifts. Making the team responsible for leading an entire worship service was a long-term possibility. This, in fact, happened quite quickly and the team now takes regular responsibility for pulpit supply.

Our Situation

In our three-point charge, the full-time ordained minister leads worship at Knox, Cannington one week and in St. John's, Cresswell and Wick on the alternate weeks. This means the minister preaches in each congregation every other week. Pulpit supply is provided by various ordained and lay ministers on alternate weeks. We therefore use pulpit supply every week.

How Did We Begin?

The idea came from a *Consultation on Rural Ministry* which was attended by the minister and an elder. The proposal to develop a worship team for the charge was presented to each session. Following their approval and the approval of Presbytery, the minister prepared a short course on leading worship. A general invitation was presented to the congregations, and people with appropriate gifts (as ascertained by the spiritual gifts inventory, *The Three Colours of Ministry* by Christian A. Schwarz) were approached to attend the course. Four people responded to the original invitation.

The course included teaching in the following areas:

- What is worship?
- Why do we worship?
- Theology of worship
- The order of service - Why do we do what we do?
- Praying in public: Preparing to pray; the elements of prayer; the structure of prayer; forms of prayer; the language of prayer; composing a prayer; praying the prayer (based on the teaching of Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris)
- Steps in preparing a service of worship
- Bibliography of helpful resources on worship planning
- The Book of Praise how to use the indices.

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Starting Up

For the first few services, the team under the supervision of the minister, used prepared material from Presbyterians Sharing... and PWS&D. This allowed them to become comfortable with leading worship with a minimum of concern over preparation.

How the Worship Team Functions

The minister meets with the team to prepare for each service of worship. At first we met frequently, usually two or three times before each service. After three years, we now meet about every three months to prepare three services at once.

Scripture is usually based on the lectionary. The team reads the passages, and together discerns the message and a focus to build the service around. Hymns are then chosen to complement the focus, balancing the desire to teach new music with the use of familiar hymns. Ideas for the children's ministry time are shared. People volunteer to lead the different parts of the worship service.

At first the team wanted four or five people involved in leading worship. They have since discovered that it works better with three: one preaches; one takes the children's ministry time; and the third person leads everything else. Now that we have more people on the team, not everyone is involved in every service.

The Sermon

We have three elders in our congregations who have particular gifts for preaching. Some received excellent training for lay preachers through the Certificate in Lay Leadership available at Knox College. The ordained minister provides oversight for these lay preachers. In the early days of the worship team the minister spent a good deal of time with those preparing sermons. The minister would help with Bible study, planning and all aspects of the sermon. The written sermon would be reviewed before it was preached. Sometimes the elder began by preaching jointly with the minister, sharing the pulpit and the sermon. Feedback from the congregations is consistently good, and the tapes of the sermons confirm that the quality of sermons and delivery is high. God is being glorified through the gifts of these people.

Advantages

There is a vibrant understanding and appreciation that worship is the active response of individuals and our faith community to the love of our amazing God. Worship is not passive!

Individuals have been encouraged in their leadership and worship skills. From three small congregations we have three people who prepare and preach sermons on a regular basis. Two others preach on an occasional basis, several prepare and present excellent children's material, and all lead in congregational prayer.

The witness of that original small worship team has inspired and encouraged others to lead worship, including some who had previously been on the fringes of their congregation. Team members have developed close friendships through prayer, study and worshipping together. The congregations are now more open to different forms of worship. The team has presented the message in drama and story on occasion, which has been well-received.

The use of pulpit supply has been decreased, giving the congregations more continuity and, incidentally, reducing our costs.

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Conclusion

The worship team which began in January, 2005 has been a blessing to our charge. We have recently reorganized to become *The Open Door Cluster*, and have hired a half-time lay ministry staff person. This means that in each six-week period the full-time ordained minister leads worship six times, the half time lay minister 3 times, and the worship team twice, reducing pulpit supply to once every three weeks.

While our situation is not the norm, we feel that any congregation could benefit from having a worship team. The ordained minister remains responsible for sacraments and the preaching, but a well-trained and gifted worship team can free up the ordained minister to spend regular time in the Sunday school. During a pulpit vacancy, the team can provide stability and continuity to the worship life of the congregation.

A small church which cannot support full-time ordained ministry could use a worship team when an ordained minister is not available to lead worship. There are many possibilities. The main advantage is spiritual, not financial. The joy of using our God-given gifts, the growth in our knowledge of and involvement in worship, the increase in leadership abilities and above all the spiritual growth of the people in our congregations are the true blessings we have received through this ministry.