

Being the Worship Leader for a Sunday service is a unique opportunity for us to grow spiritually and to help lead the church in our response to God as His people. One of the things I love about Union is this opportunity is given to non-ordained people, this isn't reserved just for the pastor but rather those who have an interest, and a gifting, are given the opportunity to lead us in the "drama" of worship. As Greg says, we get to serve "as a host, a guide and a co-participant."

Total Preparation Time for me: 1-1.5 hours

I start my preparation when I receive the Order of Worship email which usually comes on Wednesday or Thursday. I read through the Order, meditate on the "theme" of that week's sermon, and read through the scripture passages. Starting with the Call to Worship (usually a Psalm from the blue hymnal) and then the two scripture lessons I ask God to show me themes that can be reflected in the Prayer of Invocation and the Children's Lesson. At that point I'm usually on my laptop having copied and pasted the Order into a new Word document and I take notes on where the Spirit is leading me through the scripture passages. This usually takes 15-20 minutes and I try to do this the day the Order of Worship comes so that these passages and themes have a chance to stew in my mind and heart over the next few days.

On Saturday afternoon or early Sunday morning I do my final preparation. I have a copy of the blue hymnal at home and I would recommend you borrow one the week before you are the WL to use to review the hymns. There are always great lines and ideas to be pulled into your prayers from the hymns. It's also practical to know what we are singing and where they are in the hymnal!

- My preparation goes in the Order of the service so I start at the beginning. **Welcome and Announcements** is pretty simple to execute but plays an important role in setting the tone for the service. Before you say anything, smile and make eye contact with the congregation and then give a hearty and loud welcome to get the attention of the talking masses ☺ Move swiftly through announcements to avoid getting bogged down between announcements. If you see open spaces in the pews and there are people standing in the back make sure to ask people to slide in to make space for others. I usually close the announcements time with "*Let us now quiet our hearts and minds and prepare ourselves for worship as we listen to the **Prelude**.*"
- There is a tendency for some worship leaders to thank Megan for playing a beautiful Prelude which is understandable, but not necessary. As a matter of fact, she would prefer you didn't. Next comes the **Call to Worship** found in the blue hymnal. I make sure to practice reading the Call so I know where I read/where the congregation reads and so that I know where we sing in response. It's also good to have a bookmark at the spot of the Call in the hymnal so you aren't fumbling trying to find it in the moment. I usually introduce the call by saying something like *Our Call to Worship today is Psalm 34 found on page 800 of your blue hymnal. Megan will play through the sung response so that we can hear the tune, then we'll sing it once as a practice and then go into the reading. I'll be reading the regular font and you will follow with the bold font.* Remember that you are serving as host and guide to the service so explicit directions are helpful!
- The **Hymn of Praise** follows the Call and it is important, again, to give explicit directions. Therefore welcome the congregation *to stand with you and sing # in the blue hymnal.*
- The **Prayer of Invocation** follows the Hymn and you will want to ask people *to remain standing while we pray.* This is "more than an opening prayer. It celebrates and acknowledges God's presence" (Dr. Currie). Therefore I open the prayer with a sentence or two of PRAISE for who God is and usually these praise statements come from the Psalm or the scripture passages. Next I say a sentence or two of **CONFESSION**, again usually based on the scriptures passages for that

day. If we truly believe that we are worshipping a holy and loving God then we need to acknowledge our sinfulness and need for Him and His forgiveness. (Growing up in the Episcopal Church, I appreciate their liturgy of Confession found on page 359-360 in The Book of Common Prayer so if you want/need some ideas for a confession you can look there.) I also try to leave a 10-15 seconds for people to pray their own prayers of confession silently. After the confession it is good to say some sentences of ASSURANCE for what God has done for us through Christ, i.e. 1 Jn 1:8, and I usually try and use something from that day's scripture. Finally, in the prayer I THANK God and these statements usually come from the theme or from the scriptures. I always end my prayer with *in Jesus' name we pray* or *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.* This cues the congregation that you are finishing your prayer and it reminds them our prayers are said in confidence that the Triune God is present and listening.

-I *recommend* you write your prayers out so that you don't wander in prayer and sound like you are disorganized and/or making it up on the spot. Once written practice your prayer out-loud so that you know how loud you need to be and so you can monitor the rate at which you speak. We don't want to be chasing after you in the prayer because you are talking so fast!

- Right after the prayer is the **Congregational Greeting** time so welcome people to, instead of sitting down, turn and greet their neighbors. This is an important time in the service for regular attenders/members to connect with visitors and we want to give ample time for this, while at the same time not taking away from the momentum in the service. People will naturally begin to sit down as the band comes forward for the **Worship in Song** portion of the service.
- After the singing, and as the band sits, you can call the kids forward for the **Children's Lesson**. Use the sermon theme and/or the scripture passages for the basis of your Children's Lesson. Remember, this is a Children's lesson so gear it for the range of kids that are usually up front and not for the adults. Also, expect and plan on them looking at you with silent stares therefore have a few questions to draw them out into the message. Using a concrete example with some sort of visual that they can see, touch, smell, hear, taste, etc also helps. Simplicity is a virtue so keeping it to one main point or theme and around five minutes long is a beautiful thing. At the end of the lesson, *end in prayer* asking God to reinforce/inspire/help with the message the kids just heard. Ending in prayer also gives a solid conclusion so that you aren't trailing off while they squirm back to their seats.
-Check out <http://www.textweek.com/> for lots of ideas on the scripture passages, prayers and ideas for children's lessons. This can almost be overwhelming because there are so many resources so be ready. Also, some of this material has a Liberal theological slant to it so make sure to be discerning and to test what you read on the site against scripture (Acts 17:11).
- As the kids head back to their seats you can call the ushers forward to collect the **Offering**. Hand both baskets to the ushers and then stand there in the front. While those moments standing there can feel awkward, use it as a time of prayer for the people of the church, the offering, for the missionaries these monies support, the programs and life of the church, the local community of Magnolia, etc. Megan is excellent at knowing when to start playing the **Doxology** so invite people to stand with a simple raising of your arms, sing the Doxology, and then pray a short prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts and offerings that were given. Pray that God would put them to good use in the furthering of His kingdom here in Magnolia and in the world. Scriptures to maybe incorporate in your prayer are: Dt 14:22-29, 26:12-19; Malachi 3:10; Mt 6:1-4, 9-13, 19-34; Lk 12:13-21, 18:1-8; 1 Tim 6:17-19.

- After the offering, and as you make your way back to the pulpit, you can say *at this time, all children 6 years old and younger may leave to go to the nursery*. The **Scripture Reading** is the final part of your duties as the WL for that Sunday. I like to announce the scripture reading and reference the page number in the red pew Bible and ask people to turn there with me for the reading. (And I would recommend you wait for them to do it! For some people, this will be the only time they will open their Bible all week so I want to make sure they know exactly where and what we are reading. If we believe that the Bible is God's Word then we need to live that out in the service.) You don't have to do this but another thing I gleaned from my growing up in the Episcopal Church is how they gave a short "pre-light" of what was about to be read. Randy Isaac did a fantastic job last week setting the context of the passage historically and geographically and I LOVED it! I had such a better idea of how that scripture passage fit into the flow of the book of Mark. Remember to read slowly, loudly and end the reading with some sort of statement so that people know you are finished. *The Word of the Lord* or *This ends the reading of God's Holy Word*. Unless directed by the person preaching, make sure to read the NIV since that is the pew Bible that everyone else will be reading. It's frustrating to try to follow the NIV when the WL is reading the Message or the NLT.
- Finally, after you announce the scripture reading/page number, and maybe give a short "pre-light," announce that there will be a time of **Silent Reflection** so that visitors know why there is a time of silence after the reading. Once you are finished you can return to your seat to sit with your spouse, friends, family or you can sit in the front pew with the person preaching.

This might seem like a pretty formal and labor intensive process but it should only take one hour to a maximum of one and a half hours. As Margo said, "if we as WL are well-prepared, then the casual and relaxed feel of our service is what the congregation gets. So, the preparation actually allows it to be comfortable and relaxed, rather than rehearsed and formal."

Also, always try to keep in mind "the visitors." They are the ones who might not have a working knowledge of what a hymnal, a bible or what a doxology is so our role as the WL is to try and welcome them into the service, and into God's presence, without confusing or frustrating them. Some of the things you say may seem really basic, but they are helpful!

Lastly, PRAY! Pray for the service. Pray for your prayers that will be said. Pray that God's Spirit would inspire the scripture readings. Pray that the person preaching would connect with the congregation in such a way that they are challenged and encouraged to live out the Word preached that day. Pray that the service would be glorifying to God and spiritually nourishing for the people. Pray!