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Worship Leader

Session 1 – Group Course

*Material adapted from 'Living and Learning: Pastoral Visiting'
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Introduction

Serving the Church as a Lay Worship Leader

On this course, we explore the importance of worship within the community of the local church. The calling to lead worship alongside the ordained clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers forms part of a range of commissioned opportunities for ministry that are recognized by the diocese. Your own sense of *calling* to this particular ministry needs to be affirmed by yourself and by your local ministry area. The process of participating in this course will give you the opportunity to think and pray this through as well as enable you to have practical experience of leading worship. It is in your subsequent experience of actually leading services in your church under suitable guidance that you will be able to test this calling out and receive further encouragement and training.

The sessions in the course are intended to combine theological and practical considerations. They will also quite consciously draw on your own experience and faith as participants; as we reflect together on the challenges of how to worship meaningfully within the cultural context in which the church finds itself. Hence its style is not 'academic' in nature and for this reason the course will not so much talk to you, as help you learn by doing and then discussing. Worship, prayer and reflection will be integrated throughout.

Worship

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:16-17)

As participants in God's purposes for the world, we aim to provide worship that is honouring to God and helpful to those gathering: to deepen our love for God and each other and to be sent out to serve as part of God's mission.

In our worship as a Church, we aspire to be a dynamic and vibrant community which is alive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, whilst mindful of the rich inheritance we have of his work in those who have faithfully gone before us. So, as well as being creative and forward looking, we learn about what is of value from the past; learn



how to use present opportunities and to manage the process of inevitable change in a gracious, loving and positive way.

Worship is a way of life rather than an activity, nevertheless being together in a specific, regular time of worship of God, in prayer, and for mutual encouragement and learning, is central to the life of the Church. When the Apostle Paul was exhorting the Christians at Ephesus to be careful how they lived, we find that worshipping together came high up on his list of instructions:

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:19-20)

The writer to the Hebrews similarly encourages members of the congregation “to consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together (as is the habit of some), but encouraging one another...” (Heb.10:24-25). These considerations may all seem a far cry from ‘simply’ reading services from the prayer book, but we’ll have the opportunity to discover how they need to be linked with a wider understanding of worship.

It is both our vocation and our joy to be able to spend time with God together as well as on our own; to be in the presence of Almighty God, focussing on him, celebrating our oneness in Christ; listening to his word and encouraging one another in its message to us; giving thanks and declaring our praise of God and his works; praying with one another, both looking out to the needs of the wider world and upholding one another in prayers; remembering Christ's death until he comes again, and knowing his presence with us in the breaking of the bread, as we celebrate the Eucharist or Holy Communion together.

Lay Ministry

1. Signifies that the ministry of Christ is a shared ministry amongst the people who comprise his Body;
2. Can help create community amongst the faithful volunteers that make up the Church;
3. Enriches and enhances the quality and dynamics of the services by using people's evident gifts.



When we consider and encourage Lay Ministry, we're not talking about any kind of new idea. The idea is built into the very fabric of what it means to be God's people. In fact it could be argued that we're not being truly Church if lay ministry isn't taking place and if the gifts of the whole people of God are not in evidence (apart from this being a horrible waste of talent!). We need to use all the gifts found in the congregation, especially as this will encourage people's participation and commitment.

We find this idea throughout the New Testament teaching about church leadership and structure, but it's perhaps most clearly outlined in Peter's Second letter to the Christians in Asia Minor – the area we know as Turkey today.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people; in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9. See also 2:4-8)

So as Christians we are a "chosen people" in a similar sense that the descendants of Abraham were a chosen people, called by God for his special purpose – to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (you can check it out in Genesis 12).

If you do proceed to become Commissioned as a Worship Leader, there will be certain expectations that it is sensible to consider now:

- You will need a clear DBS check and will need to undertake safeguarding training (Level A and Level B or E). These must be kept up to date as appropriate.
- There will need to be an agreement of the amount of time you are willing to give to this ministry – this must fit what you're able to do, but will also need to be consistent so that we can ensure that worship leading is properly arranged. This agreement will be made with the member of clergy or lay person responsible for leading the worship rota.
- You must ensure that you clearly communicate any problems, concerns, or worries you have yourself about this ministry, to the member of clergy or lay person responsible for leading the ministry team.
- As part of the wider ministry team, you will work together with other commissioned ministers, as well as licensed and ordained colleagues. Meetings will be arranged for this team and it is important to attend these.
- You should make every effort to attend any diocesan events for Commissioned Ministers.



- It is possible that as a Worship Leader and therefore someone in a position of trust, you may be entrusted with personal information by some people, and you will need to demonstrate appropriate confidentiality in not sharing this with others in your congregations or community. Remember you should never promise complete confidentiality to a congregation member, as it may be that you need to share any pastoral concerns with a member of clergy, and any safeguarding concerns or disclosures must be reported to the Church in Wales Safeguarding Team.



Session 1: What is worship?

Introductory Reading

Worship is often described as the church's primary act of mission because in worship we offer witness in prayer and thanksgiving to the God who creates and redeems the world. As we join in worship, we become part of the sacred story of salvation. That story is told as we gather to worship God. We hear how God creates and redeems his world and, as we gather as a community of Christians, we experience our own part in the story of salvation, as individuals and as a church.

All worship has a common underlying structure. This may be reflected differently in different traditions and denominations, but essentially we gather together, bringing with us the busyness of our daily lives.

As we gather, we prepare for worship, as individuals and as a community. Often at this stage there is an opportunity to reflect on the mistakes that we have made and confess the sins we have committed, 'in thought, word and deed, and in what we have left undone' and we hear God's forgiveness. Sometimes that opportunity comes later and in a different form. We then encounter God's Word, through readings from the scripture, possibly a psalm, a sermon and an affirmation of our faith. There will be prayer which will include intercessions for the church, the world, the local community, and for those who are sick, remembrance for those who have died, and often thanksgiving for the gifts God has given us. There will then be a conclusion through which we are sent back out into the world. This may include a blessing and a dismissal. And there will often be music, hymns and/or songs of praise.

Each section of our liturgy is effectively a theological statement, telling us about our God and his mission for us and for the whole of creation. Therefore, we encounter him through our liturgy as a God who forgives, a God who teaches us his ways, a God who cares passionately for his world and a God who calls us to journey with him and to witness to him in the world. Liturgy is an unfolding drama which proclaims how God acts and how we may respond.

We express our worship through adoration, worshipping of the being of God, God's wonder, beauty, power and might; through thanksgiving, offering thanks for God's gifts both personal and universal; through praise, the believers' outward expression of their worship and adoration of God; through supplication and petition, asking for particular gifts and graces from God for those in need; and through repentance,



saying sorry to God individually and as a community. We also reflect on God's word and affirm our faith together.

In worship we recognise that there are sacred places. Corporate worship is most commonly held in church buildings and even within these churches there are spaces marked out that are of particularly spiritual significance. These spaces commonly include the chancel and the sanctuary, the space around the altar. There is sacred time. Sunday is a day traditionally associated with Christian worship and that remains important for many people. However, within services there are times or moments of particular focus or significance. Traditionally the 'words of institution' when the priest repeats the words of Jesus at the last supper are one such moment. There are sacred people. These are the people who usually dress up within the Anglican tradition to take worship, indicating that they have been 'set apart' for a particular task. Traditionally the sacred person has been the priest or minister who performs actions that others cannot perform. These are sacred actions like making the sign of the cross during absolution or raising the chalice and pattern during the Great Thanksgiving at the Eucharist.

In traditional liturgies sacred places, sacred time and sacred actions are all associated with the priest or minister who is the sacred person. In modern liturgies, this is no longer the case. Church buildings can be used in new and creative ways. Everybody present can take part in the service and new liturgies often provide sacred actions (e.g. lighting a candle) that involve everybody and look to create sacred moments at different points in the service.

In worship we experience many different kinds of encounters. We will encounter God through all our senses. We will encounter God through others in the community. We will encounter the traditions of the church that have helped form our liturgy and we will encounter the present hopes and aspirations of our church community in mission and service. Therefore, there can be nothing passive or reluctant about worship. Although no two people respond in exactly the same way to any act of worship, authentic worship will usually be vibrant and able to reflect the emotions, experiences and needs of those present. Whatever its form, worship will often be at its best when it is dynamic, challenging and nurturing.



Worship has been defined in various ways. Archbishop William Temple claimed:

'To worship is:

To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God

To feed the mind with the truth of God

To purge the imagination by the beauty of God

To open the heart to the love of God

*To devote the will to the purpose of God.'*¹

In worship we become bound up in the story of salvation. We encounter the living God in word and in sacrament and we witness to his saving presence in our world today. In worship we truly become the body of Christ and part of his mission in our world. In worship we are gathered together to hear God's words of salvation and encounter God's presence in and among us so that we may be sent out in mission and service.

If worship tells the story of our salvation and teaches us about God, so the way in which we lead worship says a great deal about our own faith and who we believe God to be. And this is true whether we are reading a lesson, taking the prayers or leading 'all age worship'. That is our challenge.

¹ <https://theologyandchurch.com/tag/william-temple/>. Accessed on 11th January 2019.



Group Work Discussion

1. Gathering

Spend a few minutes in silence, offering any worries or concerns from everyday life to God, and acknowledging God's presence among you as you meet together.

**Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness and truth
to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.**

2. Reflecting

In groups of 2-3, describe an act of worship that you have experienced that was positive, meaningful or significant to you.

- What made it so?
- How did you respond to it and what made you respond that way?

Next, each describe an act of worship that you have experienced that was unhelpful or unsuccessful, using the same questions above.

As a whole group, discuss together:

What makes an act of worship 'successful' or 'unsuccessful'?

Consider the importance of:

- practical considerations;
- personal experiences and preferences;
- the ways in which God is reflected and portrayed.



3. Exploring

Look through some booklets, outlines or notes from services regularly taking place in your ministry area. Work together to identify these different elements in each service:

- Praise
- Thanksgiving
- The Word
- Intercession
- Repentance
- Affirmation of Faith

Then discuss together:

- What role is each element playing in the unfolding drama of the whole service?
- What is each element telling us about who God is and what God does?
- How might you lead each of the different parts of the service effectively to express its particular role in the service?

4. Responding and Concluding

- a. Each share briefly one particular thing you have learned from this session.
- b. Plan your preparation for the next session.
- c. Finish by saying the Grace together, or some other form of prayer.

