



*leading church

the MINISTRY PAPERS

to liturgise or not – is that the question?

For many of us, liturgy (a set form of words, e.g. a prayer book) is an unfamiliar way of running our church meetings. More and more, it's becoming a thing of the past. These days many churches choose a more flexible, contemporary approach to running their meetings.

If you're somebody who's experienced liturgy at its worst you probably find contemporary church meetings quite refreshing. It's awkward to read liturgy and to speak each syllable in time with the rest of the congregation. It's difficult to know when to stand and when to sit, especially if you're a newcomer! I can still vividly remember stumbling through a liturgical meeting I went along to once before I was a Christian. Everybody else seemed to know exactly what to say and when to say it. I found myself mouthing "Pinocchio, Pinocchio" silently just so I wouldn't seem like an outsider. This is liturgy at its worst.

At its best, however, liturgy can model an excellent approach to leading the main meeting of God's people. The words are amazingly passionate and honest, well thought out and inspirational. There is thought put into the layout of the meeting and everything points to God's amazing love for us through Jesus Christ. A hastily-cobbled together contemporary meeting will be shabby and shallow by comparison!

The question we need to deal with is how do we lead church in a contemporary and flexible way without making it seem insubstantial compared to the thought-out Christ-focused heart-felt inspiration of some liturgy. What is the right way to lead our meetings? Let's set out to explore that now through the rest of this 'leading church' ministry paper.

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Our church has two main 'arms': small groups & ministry teams. This 'leading church' paper relates to the **ministry teams** arm. It's designed to help your pastor or leading church ministry leader introduce you to being part of our leading church ministry.



investigate

read Colossians 3:12-17

1. What should God's people clothe themselves with (verse 12)?

2. What should rule in our hearts and why (verse 15)?

3. When should the word of Christ dwell in us richly (verse 16)?

4. Whatever we do, what should be happening as we meet together (verse 17)?



think & apply

5. What are some implications of this for the way we lead church ...for regulars

...for newcomers

Check out what the following passages have to say about Christian meetings:

1 Corinthians 14

Ephesians 5:19

1 Timothy 4:13-14

Hebrews 10:24-25

the service leader role

Your role is to lead God's people through a process as we:

prepare to hear God in his Word

hear God in his Word

respond to God in his Word



start from the end

How should we respond to this part of God's Word? Remember this is what we want: God's Word to dwell in us richly. If we're leading people to respond we need to know how to respond ourselves. You need to be clear about this before you plan the service. Therefore, effective leading requires effective communication between you and the person preaching. You need to be clear about the **big idea**... Don't start planning until you are.

what's the big idea?

There's a well argued case that most people are only really capable of walking away from a sermon carrying one central theme. If the preacher doesn't give one, then the listener will make one up for themselves. No matter how hard the preacher might try to get five separate points across in a talk, generally when asked what the talk was about, a member of the congregation will convey the single concept they took out of the talk.

At church we try to cater for the listener by preparing messages that convey one big biblical concept or one Big Idea, that will be clear and challenging to all who listen. To take it even further still, not just the sermon but the entire church service should be shaped around expressing that biblical concept, to try and ensure the seed of God's word is firmly implanted in the heart of the listener. This means:

the **preacher**: needs to convey the big idea to everyone involved in the service

the **leader**: needs to point towards the big idea with everything they say

the **musicians**: need to be playing songs that convey the biblical concept being taught

the **singers**: need to sing the words meaningfully, modeling understanding of the big idea

the **audio person**: needs to ensure the message is audibly delivered to the congregation

the **prayer**: should be in response to the concept God's word is teaching

Communication between all involved, therefore, will be vital. All of this going well, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the seed of God's living word will be sown in the hearts of the congregation!!

the 'worship' word

Our Sunday meeting is not the be-all and end-all of church (although it is an important platform for the life of our church). It's the same with 'worship'. While our worship of God should be modeled in our church meetings, it is not our definitive worship. True worship involves submitting all of our life to the Lord Jesus. So, referring to our church meeting as "worship" can be unhelpful. It fuels the wrong idea that worship stops at the end of the last song!

a normal service

Think for a minute about the shape of a standard service. There are many things we might include in a service but there needs to be an overall shape. The whole needs to be greater than the sum of the parts. Shape will be best achieved when there is a logic or a flow of preparing to hear, hearing, and responding to God's Word...

morning/arvo church

songs & prayer	}	prepare
welcome & announcements		
prayer		
key verse		
kids talk		
kids song & collection		
break		
prayer focus		
song		
bible reading		
bible talk		
prayer	}	respond
song		
food and home		

night church

songs & prayer	}	prepare		
welcome & announcements				
prayer				
prayer focus				
key verse				
set-up piece				
song & collection				
bible reading			}	hear
bible talk				
prayer			}	respond
song				
question time				
song				
food and home				

The service might vary a little from week to week. But work hard at keeping the overall shape intact. One different thing can keep things fresh and interesting. But more than two different things might become distracting.



putting it all together

You are clear on what it should look like when God's people meet together. You are clear on your role as a service leader. And you are clear on the concept from God's Word that you are trying to communicate. Now it's time to put it all together. You should end up with something that will help you to lead the congregation in giving thanks to God.

what on earth is going on here?

This is the last question we want people asking. Right from the moment our meeting starts to the moment it finishes people need to be clear what's happening and what might be expected of them. Something as simple as knowing why we pray or in-house acronyms are things we take for granted.

Apart from being confused by the things we do, people can also be confused by the things we say. Don't say something unless you think your non-believing friend would understand it. Words like 'sanctification', 'justification' and even 'sin' don't circulate in regular day to day conversation.

If people are confused or intimidated in the 'preparing' phase of church, the chance of getting the message of God's Word across to them in the 'hearing' phase is substantially reduced.

The service leader leads people. People know what's going on because the service leader has made it clear to them.

keep the beat...



Try to keep things flowing throughout the service. We are trying to convey one big idea, not just a series of small ideas. So it's important to keep everything connected.

Maybe it's helpful to think of this as pace and flow. It doesn't take long to get distracted. So try to keep the opportunities for distraction limited.

This means being thorough in your own preparation. It also means thoroughly briefing everyone who's involved, whatever their role. Everyone needs to know what's happening when, e.g. the bible reader knowing to come up to the lectern during the last verse of a song, ready to go.

starting the meeting

it's important to get everybody's attention here. Until now people have probably been milling around and chatting. What we say at the start of the meeting should let everybody know exactly *why* we are meeting together.

introducing the songs

the songs should point to the big idea being taught from God's Word. Ask people to stand as we sing and let them know how the song points to the big idea. For example 'we're going to sing a song now that reminds us how Jesus humbled himself for us...'. A prayer between songs can pick up on language in the songs and relate it to the big idea.

the welcome

it's polite to welcome everyone especially newcomers. It's a bit like when someone comes into your house. You want them to feel comfortable. Let them know there's creche available during the service, that there are refreshments available, etc. Make them feel welcome. Take the opportunity to tell people what we're learning today from God's Word.

the newsletter mailing list

during the break or after church the welcoming team will be coming around with the newsletter mailing list. We should clearly announce this to people. We also need to tell people why we want their details – it's not to sell them over the internet! We want to stay in touch with people. As a church, relationships are our focus.

the announcements

should be concise and effective. The announcements can easily become like ad breaks on TV – people just change channels. We need to work hard at communicating these in a clear and engaging way. Let people know at the end of the announcements that there's more info in the service sheet.

the prayer

introduce the person praying and the prayer. Be careful to avoid language such as "Sue is now going to pray for us", as if she is praying on our behalf. Rather, she is leading us as we all talk to God.

the collection

regulars need to know when to get their money ready. Newcomers need to know why the collection is taking place and that they aren't expected to give money. This will help people feel more comfortable.

the setup piece/kids talk

require a lot of preparation and should clearly set up the big idea. See the set up piece ministry paper for more info.

after the talk

less is best. The preacher puts a lot of work into leaving the congregation with a clear message – don't undo his good work.

as we head out

remind people of the need to respond to God's Word. A prayer, key verse or simply restating the main challenge can be helpful ways of doing this. It can be helpful to leave people with a question to discuss over coffee. Make sure they know what to do or where to go next (eg morning tea/supper).

preparation

As we've seen so far, there's a lot to take into consideration when you're leading church. In order to make the most of leading, a lot of time and thought is needed. Good preparation is the key.



scripting...

It's so important to script your leading notes. This helps with two main things:

- saying the right words at the right time; and
- not making others think that you have to be superman in order to lead church. If people can see that you're relying on your notes, the prospect of them doing it doesn't seem so overwhelming.

The way you script your notes is obviously subject to personal style. It is helpful to make sure you have short sentences and that each line of text perhaps contains one sentence. This helps with delivery.

It is also helpful to ensure the text is in a large enough font. You may want to vary things like italics, boldness, case and underlining to indicate different emphasis in your delivery.

words...

At the risk of stating the obvious, preparation is mainly a matter of preparing WORDS. We want to make sure that we're saying the right words and saying the right words well. We need to put a lot of thought into what we say. A few good words can really build us up but a couple of thoughtless words can quickly undo any good teaching or encouragement. Think about your words... and use them wisely my friend.

variety...

Variety is mainly achieved through the distinct character of the day's message. Church is not a place to be coming to so we can be entertained. Church is a place to come to where we can be challenged and encouraged to live under God's Word according to his will. We don't need to feel like the TV variety host battling to keep the audience tuned to our channel.

This doesn't mean that everything always stays the same. We are not restricted in the way that we corporately worship God. We can help point people towards the day's message with "items". Dramas, musical items, interviews, testimonies, book reviews, short talks and many other things can be useful aids for preparing people to hear and be changed by God's Word.

mic placement

Imagine it: you've prepared the perfect leading script and you've delivered it perfectly. There have never been words spoken that prepare God's people to hear God's Word the way yours have.

It's a shame no-one could hear you because you weren't speaking into the microphone. Make sure you check the lapel mike is clipped in the right place on your shirt before church with the sound man. If you don't have a lapel mike, make sure your always speaking close to and into the mike.

Don't waste those wise words!



it's always the same...

It's very easy to feel like you're always the same or boring people with your leading. When you stand in front of a large group of people you become particularly sensitive to what they're thinking.

It's good to listen to people but it's also important to be discerning. Unfortunately people often come to church seeking a particular sort of emotional experience. It's good to expect our meeting together to be special – but it's bad to expect emotional ecstasy every time.

We meet together to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Notice the use of the term 'one another'. It implies serving 'others'. The best way to spur 'one another' on to love and good deeds is to point them to the sword of the spirit – the word of God. This is our role as leaders.

Always the same is good if it always points people to God's life changing Word. Variety is good if it always points people to God's life changing Word.

If 'always the same' or 'variety' don't do this, it's definitely time for a change.

The introductory paper, '**the ministry training church**' set out some key goals for all believers shown in the table below (there, in the context of small groups). The preacher will be mindful of these goals in their application. Your leading should seek to re-inforce the key application.

a growing relationship with **God**, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer

growing relationships with **other believers**, especially in the small group

growing relationships with those in their **family/household**, as servants

growing relationships with unbelievers, especially through **personal evangelism**

growing relationships with the **whole church** in mission, serving in a ministry team