

The Care and Keeping of a Parish Worship Committee

By Susan Briehl

1. Begin a worship committee

Even though a pastor and a musician are capable of planning worship, it is more fun to include others in the work. The worship that ensues might be richer, but more importantly the people will have a greater ownership of this their “work.” Pastors and musicians have an important role—they are the ones most likely to have training in the area of worship—but others bring important gifts as well, including the experience of sitting in the pews.

Who might serve?

An artist who thinks in pictures and can help with the worship environment. Someone who loves and understands children and can help introduce them to and incorporate them into the ritual action and work of the liturgy. A person who is fairly new to your church or the Christian faith and another who has been steeped like strong tea in the tradition for many years. Someone who has an eye and a heart for the wider mission of the church and either sees or is willing to see the connection between what we do on Sunday morning and our work of peace-making, mercy-bearing, and justice-seeking in the world.

What gifts are needed?

A passion or longing for God. A desire to learn. A commitment to the worship life of the parish. A love of the tradition and an openness to the future. A willingness to dare and do, fail and try again. An ability to invite others to share the tasks, for the committee will need the participation of many others if liturgy is to be the work of the whole people.

2. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one worship committee

Even if your parish needs two different musical styles on a given Sunday, the worship of your Church is one. The differences between the two liturgies are small compared to what they hold in common: lectionary readings, the basic shape of the rite, the liturgical calendar, and most often the physical space for worship.

3. Take off together

Begin the year with an annual day-long or two-day retreat.

- a. Pray and sing, play, cook, eat, and do the dishes together. Nurturing community within the committee contributes to its sense of identity and builds good working relationships among the members.
- b. Teach. Do more than tell people how things “should be done.” Share the biblical sources of our liturgy, the history of practice, the meaning of what we do on Sunday morning. The more people know about worship, the more they enjoy planning.
- c. Introduce worship planning resources.
- d. Review the seasons and the festival and ferial days of the liturgical calendar.
- e. Include an overview of the major scriptural themes for the coming year.

4. Plan seasonally

Consider using one setting of the liturgy all through Advent, another during Christmas and Epiphany tide, another during Lent, and so forth rather than using one setting on the first and third Sundays and another on the 2nd and 4th. This helps worshippers experience the particular texture and meaning of each liturgical season. Choose a setting befitting the lectionary texts, themes, images of that season.

5. Look behind as well as ahead

Good planning includes thoughtful critique of worship. At the close of a season, ask one another: What went well? Why? (here’s another opportunity to teach!) What is worth repeating another year? What needs to be improved, changed, not repeated? Make good notes on these comments. You will be delighted to find them when planning that season rolls around again.

6. Share the Meal

Move the parish toward weekly Eucharist at each Sunday liturgy. This has been the basic shape of Christian worship for 2000 years. This is the source and center of our life together in Christ Jesus.

7. Love one another

Open the meetings with scripture and prayer. Pray for one another. Eat together; you need to be companions on this journey. Sing new songs and old, cherishing the gifts of the past and receiving the gifts of the future.