



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Worship Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

How can a worship band be used in Lutheran worship?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

Part of the church's journey in the renewal of worship has led the church to use more culturally diverse forms of music. The church has grown to see what were once considered more secular musical instruments accepted for use in worship. The beginnings of this can be traced to the acoustic guitar and the use of folk music in the Jesus movement during the 1960s and 1970s. The charismatic movement, coupled with the acceptance of vernacular forms of worship by the Second Vatican Council, set the table for popular Christian music's use in virtually every major denominational branch. It is quite common today for a worship band to offer their gifts in leading Lutheran worship.

What is a worship band?

The term "worship band" is a purposefully generic descriptor for an ensemble containing any combination of rhythm instruments frequently used in modern popular and rock music. Examples of such instruments include drums, percussion, bass guitar, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, electronic keyboard, piano, synthesizer, and vocalists. These instruments form the core of most worship bands. There is no limit to the number or variety of instruments that can be used in a worship band. The possibility of instrumental combinations is sizeable. Other brass, woodwind, and string instruments are also often integrated, including violin, flute, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, and such global instruments as sitar, accordion, rebab, and African hand percussion.

Vocalists in a worship band are often separated into two categories: lead and backing. Lead vocalists are the dominant sound in the audio mix of a worship band and often carry the melodic line of a song. Backing vocalists are less prominent in the audio mix of a worship band and often provide harmonic interest in the song.

Drums and bass guitar form the rhythmic and tonal foundation of the ensemble. Acoustic guitars, electric guitars, and keyboard instruments provide the harmonic and melodic support. The worship band may also be known by other names such as praise team, worship team, or praise band.

Contextual and Cross-Cultural

The [Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture](#) (Lutheran World Federation, 1994) states that Christian worship is “contextual, varying according to the local situation,” and “cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures” (1.3).

There is a great deal of musical variety that can be achieved through the effort of a worship band. With a little direction, an ensemble can give a song a Latin samba groove, a jazzy bossa nova feel, or a bluesy swing. This can send a standard song or hymn in exciting new directions. The variations that a worship band can provide a song are only limited by their imagination. Thus cross-cultural sharing can take place through the music offered by a worship band.

The worship band also allows for contextual worship. The worship band makes room for local cultural flavors to find expression in the assembly. The styling of native music used in the church’s surrounding context can be easily added and adapted among a diverse group of musicians in a worship band. Instead of importing a Euro-Protestant form of worship where it doesn’t exist, a worship band can make music contextual.

What is the role of the worship band?

It is crucial to remember that any instrumental music used in worship has one core function: support the assembly's voice. “In the church, the primary musical instrument is the human voice, given by God to sing and proclaim the word of God” ([Principles for Worship](#), M-2, p. 26). Music for worship provided by a worship band must be done with the same sensitivity and care as any other type of sacred music. The worship band must frame their role in worship leadership as subservient to the assembly’s voice. The popular and rock music idioms warrant special attention because of the use of amplification.

Where does the band set up in a Lutheran church?

The placement of a worship band requires careful thought. There is a danger of “spotlight syndrome” with amplified music and solo voices. The assembly can potentially be discouraged from participation if they are overpowered by decibels or lulled into observation by a presentational format. Additionally, the worship band can suffer from thinking their role in worship is superior to the collective voice of the assembly and potentially think their “hand” is better than the “foot” (1 Corinthians 12).

These pitfalls can be addressed by where the worship band is set up to offer their music in a Lutheran assembly. Platforms, stages, theatrical lighting, and placing the worship band in the chancel should be carefully considered in order to avoid “spotlight syndrome.” Other places the worship band could assemble include the choir loft, the nave (either facing the assembly or facing the chancel), or around the font (using acoustic instruments).

Every space for worship is different and presents its own challenges. Many older spaces for worship were not designed with amplified music in mind. In general, hard surfaces and vaulted ceilings are not acoustically desirable for amplified music. A “dry” acoustical environment is preferred. The integration of a sound system can also affect where the worship band is placed.

Should the worship band be paid or volunteer?

Every church will have differences of staffing strategy and budgetary limitations. Just as some choirs compensate section leaders or hire singers, some churches augment their worship band with contracted musicians. However, a church should not let the absence of any particular instrument keep them from using a worship band. Just because your church doesn't have a drummer or a bass guitarist doesn't mean you are incapable of corporate worship. Sometimes the musical device used for worship can become crippling to worship. "We can't have a service without an (insert name of instrument)." It is preferable to look at your context, see what God has provided you with, and go forward with what you do have.

RESOURCES

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

- ↳ What can we do if we don't have an organist?
- ↳ How is worship traditional? How is worship contemporary?
- ↳ What is the role of music in the Lutheran liturgy?

[Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website](#)

- 📄 *Can We Talk? Engaging Worship and Culture*. ELCA, 2016.
- 📄 *Principles for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in English and Spanish)
- 📄 *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture*, Geneva. Lutheran World Federation, 1994 Published in English, French, German and Castilian.

[Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress](#)

- 📖 Boesenecker, Andy and Jim Graeser. *A Field Guide to Contemporary Worship: How to Begin and Lead Band-Based Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011.
- 📖 *ELW Guitar Accompaniment Edition*
- 🎧 Global Songs/Local Voices CD and Songbook – Bread for the Journey
- 🎧 Global Songs 2 CD and Songbook – Bread for the Journey
- 📖 *Leading Worship Matters: A Sourcebook for Preparing Worship Leaders*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013.
- 📖 *Musician's Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007. (This resource offers guides on leading assembly song and assistance in leading each hymn, song and piece of liturgical and service music in Evangelical Lutheran Worship.

[Other Resources](#)

- 📄 [Christian Copyright Licensing](#) (CCLI): Annual copyright licensing for most worship music produced through the broader evangelical church. The Song Select service provides transposable chord sheets, lead sheets and vocal sheets, plus lyrics and audio samples for top CCLI songs.

- 📖 Faulkner, Clayton. [“Should Churches Hire Their Worship Band Musicians?”](#): A discussion of whether churches should rely on volunteers or hire the band to lead worship.
- 📖 [Jonathan Rundman](#): A pop/rock musician with many songs written for a Lutheran worship context.
- 📖 Lane, Tom. *Worship Musician! Presents The Worship Band Book: Training and Empowering Your Worship Band*. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2012.: Helpful information about many of the issues that worship bands will face.
- 📖 Lim, Swee Hong and Lester Ruth. *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017: A historical perspective of the contemporary worship movement and the various ethnic streams within it.
- 📖 Scheer, Greg. *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006: A guide to building a worship band in a church.
- 📖 Schmit, Clayton. *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009: This book connects worship to the church’s call to mission.
- 📖 [Worship Leader Magazine](#): A monthly magazine featuring articles and resources applicable to worship bands.

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