



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Worship Committee?

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.

A congregation that is fully alive seeks lay involvement, especially in its worship life. Many Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations involve lay people in worship, by encouraging them to work with the pastor(s) and other staff through worship committees. These committees are organized in a variety of ways. The size of the congregation or the number of professional staff can affect the duties assigned to the committee. Larger congregations give worship responsibility to pastors and other staff members, and smaller congregations often rely more heavily on lay participation. The suggestions given here need to be carefully adapted to local situations.

Liturgical Links

The worship committee will want to work from the assumption that worship is a unifying event in the life of a congregation. It is the one time when all members join together in a common purpose—to worship and thank God for God's grace given to all in Word and Sacrament. The liturgy can connect all parish programs and committees: evangelism, stewardship, education, property, music, the arts, youth, seniors, social ministry, fellowship, and more. Because worship is a unifying event within a congregation, one committee should oversee all worship in a congregation. Local circumstances may require subcommittees for planning, but all worship should be coordinated and operate out of a single set of principles.

Communication

Because worship is at the heart of a congregation's life, the decisions made by the worship committee ultimately affect all. Effective communication is vital. Not only do decisions have to be made clear for those who must carry them out, but the committee also may need to educate those charged with worship responsibilities. Even the service folder may need attention, so that the liturgy is clear and inviting for all participants. Poor communication not only produces poor worship, but also may lead to frustration and confusion. Responsibility for communication with all worship-related organizations (such as ushers, office staff, musicians, altar guild, and so forth) and other committees should be explicitly assigned to particular members and carried out efficiently.

Membership

Worship committees need not be large. In most cases, however, the committee should include:

- the pastor(s).
- the musician(s).
- a chairperson who consults with the pastor(s), musician(s), and others to prepare an agenda for each meeting, facilitates meeting, seeks clarity about implementation of committee decisions and coordinates the work of individual members to ensure implementation.
- a secretary, who prepares and distributes minutes from each meeting and cares for all official correspondence.
- coordinators representing worship-related organizations, such as choirs, other musicians, artists, altar guild, ushers, greeters, acolytes, assisting ministers, lectors, parking attendants, and nursery care.
- liaisons to other congregational committees.

There may be value in several "at-large" members whose primary role is to represent the congregation. These members should also have specific duties.

Organization

Many tasks commonly assigned to a worship committee are too cumbersome to be carried out efficiently by the entire group. A system of subcommittees working independently and reporting back to the committee is an effective means of organization.

Responsibilities

The entire committee might be responsible for the following:

- visioning (based on mutual learning and involvement in the worship life of the congregation)
- policy making (including making recommendations to council)
- overseeing subcommittees
- evaluating regular liturgies and special events
- receiving feedback from the congregation
- coordinating with other committees

Individual or subcommittee responsibilities might include the following:

- training and coordination of particular lay ministries (lay assisting ministers, readers, altar guilds, acolytes, etc.) (see also, [“How can lay people participate in worship leadership?”](#))
- planning worship (which may normally be done by pastor(s), musicians(s), and at most several additional members)
- environment and seasonal decorating (see also, [“How do we make decisions about art and materials used in worship?”](#))
- coordinating arts events (recitals, exhibits, and the like)
- arranging for event receptions and regular fellowship
- managing publicity for liturgies and other events
- preparing explanatory and/or inspiring articles in the congregational newsletter or on its website about particular services and times in the church year

A comprehensive list of duties for each subcommittee is beyond the scope of this article. This list of responsibilities, however, can assist your committee as you construct your

own list. Worship committees are often responsible for selecting and maintaining worship books, vestments, paraments (see also, [“What are vestments and paraments and Why are they used?”](#)), communion vessels, and musical instruments; purchasing candles, bread (see also, [“What kinds of bread are used for Holy Communion?”](#)), wine (see also [“What kinds of wine are used for Holy Communion?”](#)), flowers, music, seasonal needs and decor; recruiting members for organizations such as choirs, altar guild and so forth; providing worship education; caring for the committee budget; reassessing worship times; designing clear and attractive service folders; providing opportunities for community singing; staying aware of liturgical trends and concerns within the synod, the ELCA, and among ecumenical partners.

RESOURCES

[Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

- ↪ How can lay people participate in worship leadership?
- ↪ How do we make decisions about art and materials used in worship?
- ↪ What are vestments and paraments and Why are they used?
- ↪ What kinds of bread are used for Holy Communion?
- ↪ What kinds of wine are used for Holy Communion?

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

- 📄 *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997. (Available in English and Spanish)
- 📄 *Principles for Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in English and Spanish)

[Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:](#)

- 📖 Mueller, Craig. *Preparing the Assembly’s Worship: A Worship Handbook.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.
- 📖 Burke, Suzanne and Martin Seltz, eds., *Worship Matters: An Introduction to Worship* Augsburg Fortress, 2012. (Leader edition and Participant edition also available separately.)
- 📖 Burke, Suzanne, Julie O’Brien, Melinda Quivik and Martin Seltz, eds. *Leading Worship Matters: A Sourcebook for Preparing Worship Leaders.* Augsburg Fortress, 2013.

[Other Resources](#)

- 📖 Miller, Barbara Day. [Encounters with the Holy: A Conversational Model for Worship Planning.](#) The Alban Institute, 2010.
- 📖 de Waal Malefyt, Norma and Howard Vanderwell. [Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning.](#) Alban Institute, 2005.

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