



FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

TECHNOLOGY IN WORSHIP

Do you cringe and run the other way when you hear that phrase? Or are you in a church that has embraced the possibilities of technology in worship and delight in the possibilities it brings?

The truth is that we have already embraced technology in our churches. We use electric lights. We heat our churches with furnaces or boilers rather than wood burning stoves. Most churches also use technology in worship. We have moved from depending on the projected voice to the use of microphones, sound systems, and assistance for the hearing impaired. We have moved from a service where the minister reads all of the prayers with hymn numbers posted on hymn boards to the printing of bulletins so that everyone has their own copy of the service. For printing bulletins,

we have moved from Gestetner to duplicator to photocopiers. We have incorporated the use of opaque projectors, overhead projectors, filmstrip projectors, slide projectors, film projectors, and now PowerPoint technology.

Each church has its own, unique approach to technology and unique resources in terms of people with skills, people willing to learn, and finances available (or not) to make it happen. Yet no matter what technology each church has decided to use, they have all faced situations where the technology didn't quite live up to people's hopes and expectations.

The following articles offer suggestions for using technology in ways that enhance rather than detract from worship.

PROJECTION AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY IN WORSHIP

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The digital projection technology available to us in the church today is both exciting and challenging. Exciting because we are limited only by our imaginations and skills in discovering ways of using projection technology to create and offer worship experiences that are engaging, meaningful, moving, powerful, and relevant. Challenging,

because the very technology which allows us to do all of this can also be inappropriately used.

The suggestions and insights I share here are based on my experiences as educator, graphic designer, and workshop leader. They are also influenced by the ministry I share with a wonderful technical team of volunteers in my home congregation of Knox United Church in Parksville, Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

We come to worship from the realities of our everyday lives, seeking to create a space within our hearts, minds, and souls that will allow us to meet our God.

When we enter the sanctuary for weekly worship, part of the scene has already been set for us. The sanctuary is prepared with appropriate lighting and visual enhancement such as banners, hangings, and floral displays. The mood is often set with either music or silence. And as we begin the worship service, we most often do so with set expectations.

When any of our expectations are challenged or denied even in the slightest way, we find ourselves, at best, unsettled or confused and, at worst, angry or even hostile.

If there is resistance to the use of digital presentation in worship, it is rarely because it's something "new." Often the opposition is because the experience of projection in worship has not been positive. Most likely, it is because of what I refer to as "visual annoyances" – those things which result in a reluctance to embrace the technology wholeheartedly. Some examples of these are:

- Projected words are difficult to read because of poor colour choice for text or background.
- Images (photos, illustrations) are inappropriate and distract rather than enhance the text.
- Transitions from slide to slide are too slow, too fast, or too distracting as a result of using (or over-using) special effects.
- The flow of the service is interrupted by an operator panic – scrolling through a series of slides (forward or backward) in order to get to the correct place in the service.
- There are discrepancies between what appears on the screen and what is occurring in the worship service.
- There are too many lines of text per slide.

With the many software programs available today to assist us in the creative process, it's very easy for the technology to override our good intentions. A seemingly infinite selection of fonts, colours, and special effects is just a simple click away.

but overuse of any one of these elements will detract from the flow of worship. While it may be tempting to use special effects to create a "wow" factor, it's important to be sensitive to the mood, theme, style, and flow of the worship service.

Utilizing technology to support and enhance the worship experience – not to drive it – will ensure that worship remains worshipful. Remember: just because we can, doesn't mean we should.

Understanding and being sensitive to the developed "style" of worship of one's congregation is very helpful when designing and preparing worship elements that will be projected. Using imagery and visual themes which reflect a familiar (or less formal) approach will help create an appropriate mood for worship and enhance the overall experience.

That having been said, don't be afraid to "colour outside the lines" and try new and imaginative ways of using the technology (as long as it remains appropriate within the context of worship).

Background Colour

I recommend using black as the default background for the service presentation.

- A black background provides the best contrast for text and images on the slide.
- A black background provides a visual flow to the service and does not detract from the images or text on the screen.
- A black background provides what I like to refer to as a "safety net." Should the situation arise where the screen needs to be blacked out while an adjustment is made to what is to be projected next, the black screen provides a seamless visual transition from one element of the service to the next. Because the default background has been consistently black, the congregation will likely perceive this situation as a visual pause rather than an interruption to the flow of worship.

Text Colour and Visual Cues

With a seemingly infinite colour palette from which to work, choosing a colour scheme might seem daunting. Keeping the colour scheme for worship both simple and consistent will go a long way toward maintaining a worshipful feel to the service.

For congregational worship, I recommend the use of a two-colour scheme for text—white as the "congregational" colour and a contrasting colour such as yellow for the "leadership" colour. I refer to these as visual cues. Our natural visual tendency draws our eye to recognize colour before text. The use of white as a text colour for congregational responses (prayers, songs, litanies, etc.) facilitates participation by providing easily readable (and recognizable) visual clues.

Select an equally easy-to-read contrasting colour for text spoken by worship leaders. Medium yellow and light green work well. Avoid light blue—it does not provide sufficient contrast to discern it easily from white. Other colours to avoid for text include reds, deep blues, and purples.

Colour, brightness, and contrast will rarely appear the same on a screen as they do on a computer monitor. Therefore, it is a good idea to preview the prepared presentation on the screen or projection surface from which it will be viewed. This practice will avoid unnecessary "surprises."

Alignment and Phrasing

In order for worship to have a smooth visual flow it is important that the information projected on the screen be as effortless to read as possible.

Using consistent colours for congregational and leadership participation is a good start. Consistent alignment of words for prayers and songs is also important.

When text is aligned on a slide, it forms a strong, unified, and organized appearance. Visually ordered text is easy to read and creates a secure and calm feeling. It is generally best to stick to the guideline of flush left, flush right, or centred as follows.

*This text is
flush left
or left aligned.*

*This text is
flush right
or right aligned.*

This text is centred. If you use centre alignment, make it obvious.

The text in this paragraph is centred but it is difficult to tell whether this was intentional or accidental. The line lengths are too similar. A good guideline to follow is if it

isn't visually obvious that the type is centred, avoid this alignment.

This text is justified. It is sometimes referred to as blocked. The text lines up on both the left and right margins. It's not advisable to use justified text unless the line length is long enough to avoid awkward gaps between the words.

Use flush left alignment for prayers and responses, as well as hymns in which the lines are of similar length. Use centred alignment for hymns in which the lines are of varied length. Use flush right alignment sparingly.

Give particular attention to the manner in which text is aligned as slides make transitions from one to the next. If a centre alignment is used, ensure that the lines are vertically aligned as the transitions occur. If alignment is flush left, the text should be aligned at the top left from slide to slide. It is not possible (or desirable) to align text for the entire service presentation, but it is important that all slides within one particular hymn, prayer, or response are aligned.

Another consideration is phrasing. Even though we are aware of punctuation and its role in the cadence of what we read, there is a natural tendency, when reading aloud, to take a breath break at the end of a line. Whenever possible, try to make line breaks consistent with the natural cadence of speech.

Phrasing is particularly important when projecting text for singing. Generally, when we project words for singing, we do so without the addition of the musical staves and notes which provide a musical road map for singers. If the singer is familiar with the tune, then participation is relatively effortless. But, if the song music is unfamiliar, the reader will tend to rely on the visual phrasing for musical cues. Whenever possible, try to make line breaks consistent with the musical phrasing.

Fonts

A font is a set of type of a particular design. There are thousands of fonts available today, but some are more appropriate than others for use in digital projection. Generally, serif fonts are easier to read than sans serif. Script style fonts should be avoided,

One of the best ways to determine which fonts work best is to test them within the worship setting. Try a few different fonts to determine which is the most readable and friendly from a place in the sanctuary that is the farthest from the screen or projection surface. Use this same test for establishing font sizes. Be aware that font sizes are not consistent from font to font. For example, 80 point in Arial is larger than 80 point in Times New Roman. Once the best combination of font, size, and colour is established for the worship space, stick with it. Using the same fonts and sizes throughout will help to maintain a visual flow to the service.

Typeface

Most typefaces fall into the following categories: regular, *italic*, **bold**. I recommend using a regular typeface for all text projected for worship.

Leading (led-ing)

Leading is the term used to refer to the spacing between lines. I recommend using point size (a system of measurement inherited from the printing world) for leading rather than the default line spacing setting of most presentation software programs. This allows for more flexibility.

1. The leading in this example is too tight. The lines are too close together which makes the text difficult to read.
2. The leading in this example is too great. The lines are too far apart.
3. The leading in this example is well chosen. The lines are spaced a comfortable distance apart for readability.

Unified by One

It is a good idea to test a variety of fonts, sizes, and leading to determine which is easiest to read. Once it is determined which font, size, and leading work best, use that combination as the "default" setting for your worship space. The use of one font, one typeface, and one colour scheme throughout the service will contribute toward cohesiveness and visual flow.

Images

The use of images to support and enhance text for sung and spoken word can result in a very powerful experience. Images behind or alongside text can enhance or augment the text's message.

When placing images behind text, make sure that the text is easily read and does not become lost in the image. To increase the contrast between image and text, try adding a drop shadow behind the text, adjusting the opacity of the image, or adding a screen over the image. Be certain, however, to preview the presentation on the projection surface in the worship space. Always remain aware that the appearance of images on computer screens will likely vary when processed through a digital projector.

It is often desirable to allow the imagery of the text to stand alone without the addition of images. Sensitivity to the text will help determine when to add images to enhance or support it.

Slide Transitions

Choosing the appropriate style and speed of transition is one of the most important considerations in ensuring that the visual flow of worship is seamless and unobtrusive. Be sensitive to the mood and pacing of the hymn or prayer, and choose an appropriate style and speed of transition. During the worship service, the slide change should occur just before the last word of the slide is spoken or sung. It's important that worshippers aren't kept waiting for words to appear in order to continue with spoken or sung responses. If the transition timing is not carefully

planned and rehearsed, the congregation will be taken off balance. The visual component can then become an awkward distraction resulting in the *audible* flow of worship being disrupted by the visual flow.

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Emergency Response and Rescue

It is inevitable that despite careful preparation and checking of equipment there will be times when problems will occur during the service. Being prepared for mishaps and miscues will make recovery from them smooth and unnoticed. The suggestions which follow may be useful in helping an operator weather any technological storm:

- Remember to turn off your computer's screen saver before starting the service.
 - It's a good idea to plug the projector into a battery backup unit. This will ensure an uninterrupted power supply to the projector in the event of a power outage or interruption. This is an important consideration for prolonging the life of the projector bulb, which requires a fan to run during the cool down period.
 - It's advisable to copy the service onto the computer's desktop or hard drive and run it from there rather than from a CD or flash drive. This will avoid any lag time in transition from slide to slide or in the projection of media such as video clips.
- When using PowerPoint and many other popular presentation software programs, embed images and other media into the presentation to ensure that these elements are projected as part of the service and transportable with the file.

Building a Team

Whether you are just beginning the adventure of using digital presentation as part of your worship experience, or have been doing so for some time, I recommend developing a team of volunteers for this ministry. It is important that the responsibility of preparing and presenting material for worship using this technology not fall on the same person or persons week after week. Putting out a call for volunteers from the congregation is a beginning step in developing a team to work with worship leaders. Working in teams is helpful (and highly recommended) when proofreading the prepared work.

Avoid being overwhelmed. Begin by preparing only what is manageable for your particular setting. Perhaps starting with projecting the hymns only is what your beginning group can realistically manage. As the team and its expertise expand, more visual elements can be added to

the service. Invite congregational ownership. It's helpful for all if both the congregation and technical team understand that the use and development of this technology in worship is an ongoing process.

Encourage the congregation to offer feedback— both positive and negative. It's only with feedback that the team can fix problems. The invitation for congregational feedback can also provide encouragement and appreciation for the work being done by the team.

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