

# **Bridgewater Uniting Church**

Worship Service Planning Guide

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## Defining worship – intimacy with God

What is worship? Why do human beings do it? What purpose does worship fulfil?

It is common for people - especially people of faith - to speak of human beings as creatures that were made to worship. Many of our hymns proclaim this. Research reveals that every human culture has had worshipping rituals that they held dear.

This means that worship flows through every part of who we are and what we do. Every word, thought, action, value and interaction is an outflow of our worship. So, if all human beings worship, we need to understand what worship is.

The word 'worship' relates to that which we value most highly, which directs our values and behaviour, which forms our identity, which gives us meaning, and which is the frame of reference for our lives. Whatever does this for us - be it person, object, ideal, activity or 'higher power' - is what we worship.

From a Christian perspective, worship is concerned with intimacy with God. The Scriptures use the intimacy that develops between a man and a woman after they are married as an illustration of our relationship with God (1 Corinthians 6:16,17; Ephesians 5:31,32). The reason for this is that the marriage relationship, when shared selflessly and wholeheartedly, is the deepest intimacy two people can know. In the same way, the worship relationship, when shared selflessly and wholeheartedly, is the deepest intimacy we can ever know with God.

Intimacy changes us. Intimate partners begin to think the same thoughts, hold the same values, speak the same words and act in the same ways. Intimacy really does make two into one. So, when we enjoy intimacy with God, we are changed. As Paul wrote, we begin to reflect God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), we begin to think, speak and act like Christ and we adopt God's values and purposes.

## Three elements of intimacy

If worship is "intimacy with God", how does this work? We can't see, touch or hear God. However, true intimacy goes beyond our senses. It connects the deepest parts of us with the deepest parts of another. The same is true with God. That's why the Psalmist writes in Psalm 42:7a, "Deep called to deep at the noise of your waterfalls" (CEB). Intimacy has three elements.

### God's story:

If someone seeks intimacy with me, I need to be willing to listen attentively to their story - all the details that make up 'you'. As you share your story with me, your spirit reaches out to touch mine and, if successful, we sense a connection. Likewise, intimacy with God calls us to open ourselves to God's Story, and as we do, God's Spirit reaches out to touch our spirits. There are a number of things we do in worship that help us to listen to God's Story. Praise, thanksgiving, the sacraments, Scripture reading - all lead us deeper into God's story if we will only listen attentively.

### My story:

In addition to listening to your story, I must be prepared to share my story. And, again, as I share, my spirit reaches out to touch yours. The same applies to intimacy with God. Confession, intercession, testimonies, baptisms, weddings, funerals, the notices, are all ways of expressing our stories to God. If we engage in these practices mindfully and honestly, the yearning of our spirits for connection with God is met.

### History:

The final element of intimacy is time - deep connection requires a history. The longer we continue to share our stories, the deeper our intimacy goes. The miracle is that, over time, our

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two stories become one. The same is true of our relationship with God. As we share our stories with God week after week we become part of God's story and God becomes part of ours. This is true intimacy, because the deepest parts of ourselves are united in action, thought, values, ethics and purpose.

### **The three levels of worship in order of importance**

So far we've explored the idea of worship as intimacy with God (which has three parts - God's story, our story and history) which changes us so that our lives and actions, our values and purposes all reflect God's.

But if this is true, why don't we see more truly transformed people leaving churches every Sunday? Why are Christians so often seen as hypocritical? The answer is that we have settled for something less than intimacy with God.

Worship is experienced and expressed on three 'levels'. Each is important, but not equally, and they need to be kept in their proper places. When they get mixed up, our worship stops reflecting God's priorities and transformation is less able to happen. Let's look at the three 'levels' starting with the most important.

1. **The Purpose:** There is really only one purpose in worship: to create an intimacy with God that transforms us into his likeness. Worship changes – transforms - us into Christlikeness and sends us back into our daily lives to touch others with God's grace and justice (See 2 Corinthians 3:18).
2. **The Practices:** Intimacy is achieved through worship and praise practices that God-seekers through the ages have discovered and adapted, including a call to worship, adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, hymnody, sacraments, Scripture reading and preaching. These practices, mindfully used, open us to God's presence and the transforming work of God's Spirit.
3. **The Packaging:** These practices can all be carried out in many different ways, according to preferences, situations, traditions or needs. Praise, for example, can be expressed in silence or song, in written or spontaneous prayer, in choir and organ or rock band. The practice of praise remains the same in each instance, but it is 'packaged' differently. Packaging is simply a container for the purpose and practices, which remain the same no matter what stylistic choices we make. Yet, packaging takes most of our energy - and causes the most conflict! So, as we plan and gather for worship our first priority must be the purpose and practices. Then, and only then, we can decide what kind of packaging would be best.

### **Worship - the vision of the Kingdom of God**

We have described worship as intimacy with God consisting of three elements: God's story, our story and history. We have recognised that our worship gatherings operate at three levels: Purpose, Practices (the various 'parts' of worship that help us to experience and express our intimacy with God), and Packaging (the 'style' in which we package the practices).

When we keep our focus on the purpose, use the practices faithfully, and keep the packaging in its rightful, subservient place, worship can be a truly transforming spiritual discipline.

Worship changes us in at least two ways: inwardly and behaviourally. Human beings are driven primarily by what we desire or love. Our lives tend to be built around whatever our hearts believe will lead us to a 'good life'. Governments and corporations know the truth of this, which is why, through propaganda or advertising, they constantly present us with images of the 'good life' as they envision it. If these images capture our hearts, we speak, think, spend and

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act in ways that drive us toward this vision of the 'good life'. The problem is that most of these competing visions of the good life tend to fail us in the end.

This is where worship comes in. As we gather in the sanctuary, as we participate in the ancient practices of worship, and as we encounter God, our hearts are filled with a vision of the 'good life' as God envisions it. Jesus said, "My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." (John 10:10b NLT).

We call this 'abundant life' the Kingdom of God, or the Reign of God, and it's different from any other vision of life we may find. Worship shows us what God's Kingdom is like, and invites us to speak, think, spend and act in service of this Kingdom.

As this vision of life takes hold of our hearts, we begin to change to conform with the vision, and we begin to experience and to live out God's Reign in our own lives.

This change of heart is the inward change that worship brings, and it is a powerful and radical one.

### Worship- Kingdom Words and Kingdom Action

We have seen how worship transforms us inwardly by giving us a vision of God's Kingdom that captures our hearts, and leads us toward the 'good life' that God's Kingdom offers. But, we don't just need a vision. We also need a set of practices that teach us to live God's ways. Worship gives us these practices. Every week our worship teaches us how to speak and act as citizens of God's Kingdom. All we have to do is keep speaking and acting outside of the sanctuary the same way we do when we are in it!

**Kingdom Words:** Worship teaches us words that change how we speak. Words of **Welcome** (the greeting and call to worship) teach us to be **inclusive, welcoming** people. **Adoration** teaches us to be people of hope, faith and affirmation. **Confession** teaches us to be people of integrity and honesty who are committed to becoming like Christ. **Thanksgiving** teaches us to be people of generosity and appreciation. **Intercession** teaches us to be people of humility, trust and community, working with God to fulfil God's purposes. The **Benediction** teaches us to be people who bless and seek the good of others, and also teaches us to be people of purpose who are in the world to be life-givers and peacemakers.

We use these words every Sunday and, as we do, we are learning the vocabulary of Jesus. Our communication with others begins to reflect Christ and we become those who bring life, justice, peace and wholeness to others.

**Kingdom Actions:** In the same way our actions –behaviour - are also changed. When we **Gather**, we affirm that we are a community, and that we care for and honour one another. When we **Give**, we recognise the good things that we have received, and we learn to "live simply so that others may simply live," as Mother Teresa said. When we **Serve** one another through playing instruments, or handing out bulletins, or making tea, or arranging flowers, or praying for others, we learn to be people who follow Christ's example of selfless service. When we share in Holy Communion we learn to be people who give and receive dignity through sharing hospitality. When we **Pray**, or share in funerals or weddings or baptisms, we learn to "weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15) and in this way we multiply joy and bring comfort to one another.

As we worship, we are learning the habits of Jesus and our actions are transformed to reflect Christ, and turn us into people who bring life, justice, peace and wholeness to others. If we allow worship to change our words and actions like this, we will find ourselves growing a little more Christlike each day. And in this small, but significant way, we become those who reflect God's glory and participate in God's saving work in the world.

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## A guide to the structure of the worship service:

This guide is intended to help the Worship Leader and team to achieve the purpose of the worship service.

Worship Leaders do not have to prepare and deliver all the elements listed below themselves: they should call on other members of the congregation as necessary to ensure worship fulfils its purpose.

Start planning the service at least two weeks before the day. This will give time to bring all the elements together so that those taking part can prepare their roles.

Item	Element	Description
<p>The purpose of <i>worship</i> is to put in place a discipline that is intended to change us into Christlikeness, to transform us into disciples of the Kingdom of God, and to send us back into our daily lives to touch others with God's grace and justice.</p> <p>This purpose is accomplished by developing intimacy with God. We do this through learning God's story of love for us, and sharing our stories of our journey with God.</p> <p>The elements of the worship service that develop this intimacy with God, listed below, have been part of Christian worship since the early church. The Worship Leader's task is to give them a contemporary update, make them relevant for today, and make them engaging, interactive, and memorable.</p>		
a.	Start preparation at least two weeks before the service:	Read the lectionary readings for the day. Contact the preacher (contact details on the website) to establish the theme for the service. These themes should be published on the website under 'Looking ahead – worship services'.
b.	Scan the worship resources:	There are many free resources available. The UCA website has a list of them which can be accessed using the links provided below and on our website. You will find music and song suggestions, prayers, stories, drama, and images. You do not have to use these resources. Feel free to source or write your own.
c.	Worship plan:	Start to fill out the worship plan, available on our website and on page 9 of this guide. This helps you plan the order of service with names of participants. The worship plan template is a guide only. Make amendments as necessary. Try and make the service interactive.
d.	A call to worship:	This is often a short Bible reading showing our relationship with God, his saving power, his love and consideration for us. The reader should be able to project their voice.
e.	Adoration:	A clear and powerful message of adoration of our God. Perhaps a well-chosen song or a reading of a hymn, or a prayer.
f.	Welcome:	A welcome for all members and, especially, for visitors. Perhaps a short time where we greet each other in the name of the Lord. People who have brought visitors – or the Worship Leader - should introduce them.
g.	Thanksgiving prayer:	We thank God for all his blessings and gifts to us. This is often responsive, or with two or more people taking the prayer.
h.	Confessional prayer:	We confess we have fallen short of God's ideal for his people and seek strength and faith to accomplish his work in the future. Often responsive, interactive and involving the congregation.
i.	Intercessory prayer:	Prayers for those of our congregation who are dealing with problems or ill health. The congregation will identify these people, if necessary. Also prayers for those people around the world who are suffering through war, persecution, famine, disease, neglect. Perhaps responsive, or two or more people taking part.

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Item	Element	Description
j.	Hymnody:	More than any other element of the service, songs have the power to create 'thin places' where the Spirit of God breaks through into our human world to reveal the love of God for his people. Songs that are known and loved can be powerful in creating 'thin places'. It is the Worship Leader's responsibility to prepare the slides for the songs. Musicians may help out with new songs from time to time.
k.	Music:	May have other instruments in addition to the piano. Could also appoint a song leader and have choir or solo items. Ensure the musicians for the day have the selected songs by the Wednesday before the service.
l.	Drama:	Drama is a powerful medium for revealing God's purpose for his people. Drama creates immediacy, heightened interest, and turns a Bible reading or theme into a memorable visual story. Excellent medium for young people (and young people should be players in the drama).
m.	Sacraments:	Our acceptance of Jesus' invitation to share a meal with him. The words of the gospel should be used or follow the UCA service guide (on the website). Variations on this service are welcome. This is the preacher's responsibility, who may ask the Worship Leader to plan special service requirements.
n.	Scripture reading:	A powerful medium for revealing God's intimacy with us and his salvation purpose. Readings may be done by one, two or more people. Readers should be able to project their voices and read so as to engage with the congregation. Drama can be a powerful scripture reading medium. Have the scripture readings before the children leave.
o.	Children's time:	May include a story, drama, videos, music and songs. The preacher may want to be responsible or may ask the Worship Leader to organise. This part of the service is very high importance! We have talented people available when it comes to engaging with children. Use them if necessary.
p.	Preaching:	Contact the preacher at least two weeks before the day. What is the worship theme(s), special requirements? These will be posted on the web well in advance of the service. Incorporate these into the worship service and planner. The preacher may ask the Worship Leader to plan service requirements, eg, drama, props, people interactions, videos, media etc.
q.	Complete the worship plan:	Complete the plan and send it to the preacher and musicians at least a week before the day. If necessary, the preacher will make contact to discuss the worship plan and suggest amendments to suit the service.
r.	Rehearsals:	If drama or special musical items are being used it may be necessary to hold rehearsals to ensure participants know their parts. Do everything necessary to make the whole service fulfil the worship purpose.
s.	Communications team	The Communications team is responsible for helping worship leaders put the service elements together so the projector PowerPoint presentation is professional and flows unobtrusively throughout the service. The team will also give suggestions and provide images and backgrounds if required. The team require at least five days to assemble the worship presentation so get the worship plan to them in good time.

### **Young people and the worship service**

The children's Sunday Club is suspended during school holidays so children stay in the worship service at these times. This information is clearly noted on the worship schedule and worship service outlines.

The Worship Leader should ensure that these combined worship services are planned so as to engage the children and maintain their interest throughout.

In all services at least one of the songs should be for children – repetitive, good chorus, and easy to sing.

Children should be given roles in all services. For example, children should take part in drama, do scripture readings, help with the offerings, welcome people at the door, and take up offerings.

The Communications team should suggest images, media, videos and other IT elements that will appeal to children.

Our Youth attend the entire worship service twice each month. These services are clearly noted on the worship schedule and worship service outlines. The Worship Leader and preacher must ensure these services are relevant and interesting. Keep the language and message simple, use multi-media where possible.

Young people who are not members of the music team should be invited to be involved in the services in other ways such as in drama, readings, taking up offerings, assisting in the sacraments, welcoming members and visitors, and in as many ways as possible.

### **Music and the worship service**

We have a mixed age congregation. When selecting songs try and include both the new and the traditional to cater for all preferences.

Ensure the musicians receive and review your PowerPoint presentation of the songs no later than the Friday before the service. If necessary, the Communications team will put these typed up versions into the song database for future use.

Worship Leaders are encouraged to introduce new songs. This can be done in any service. Our congregation picks up new songs readily. Select new songs, including the music, either from the music resource books, the song database or from any other source. Discuss with the musician, and ask a vocalist to lead the song during the service. The song may be played before the service and during the offering to aid in familiarity with the tune.

When the youth band are the musicians for the worship service, the selected songs must be discussed with Zonya two Wednesdays prior to the service. This gives time for the musicians to rehearse and practice.



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## Order of service

In the sample order of service below the underlined items indicate those parts of worship that could be the Worship Leader's responsibility. The preacher may want variations in both the order of service and the responsibilities. It is often necessary to vary the order of service below. For example, a prayer of confession might fit better if it followed the address. Not every worship service will include all the elements listed below. Remember, it is the Worship Leader's responsibility to plan the service and the elements of the service – but not to do everything themselves. Ask other members of the congregation to take part as necessary.

Item	Element	Description of how this will be done	Who
1.	Prayers for the worship service	The preacher, Worship Leader, & members from the prayer team pray for the worship service to fulfil its purpose.	N/A
2.	<u>Prelude</u>	Song leader introduces pre-selected songs before the service begins	
3.	<u>Call to worship</u>		
4.	<u>Welcome</u>		
5.	<u>Song 1 and maybe 2 songs depending on length</u>		
6.	<u>Prayer or reading of adoration</u>		
7.	<u>Notices</u> (before children leave)		
8.	<u>Prayers of thanksgiving and confession</u>		
9.	<u>The Lord's prayer (could be followed by a short song)</u>		
10.	<u>Offering and offertory prayer</u>		
11.	<u>Song 2</u>		
12.	<u>Scripture reading</u> (before children leave)		
13.	<u>Children's time – children MUST leave by 10 AM.</u>		
14.	<u>Song 3 must be a children's song</u>		
15.	Message		Preacher for the day
16.	Response/reflection by congregation		Preacher for the day

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Description of how this will be done</b>	<b>Who</b>
17.	Intercessory prayers		Preacher for the day
18.	<u>Song 4</u>		Worship leader
19.	Benediction		Preacher for the day
20.	Doxology	Usually 'May the feet of God...' but variations welcome	Preacher for the day

### Resources on the web

<http://www.wa.uca.org.au/worship-and-spirit/resources/links-for-preparing-worship/>

[The Text this Week](#): this is an excellent website for worship resources including commentaries on Scripture and services.

[Lectionary](#): links to online text for all Bible readings from the lectionary.

[Bill Loader's Homepage](#): visit this website for lectionary resources and reflective writings.

[Liturgies Online](#): contains liturgies written by Moira Laidlaw for the Uniting Church.

[Laughing Bird Liturgical Resources](#): contains liturgies and Scriptural paraphrases.

[Project Reconnect](#): offers a unique worship resource sponsored by the local congregations in the area ([www.milman.uniting.com.au](http://www.milman.uniting.com.au))

[Bruce Prewer's Homepage](#): resources for worship can be found at this site, created by retired Uniting Church minister Bruce Prewer.

[Worship and Preaching Resources](#): created by retired Uniting Church minister Rev David Beswick.

[The Billabong](#): worship resources from Rev Jeff Shrowder, Uniting Church Minister.

[New Zealand Liturgy Resources](#)

[www.togethertocelebrate.com.au](http://www.togethertocelebrate.com.au) – David McGregor's website suggests songs that go with the lectionary readings – about four weeks in advance.

Seasons of the spirit: BUC subscribes to this resource which contains prayers, and suggestions for children's talks. The Seasons of the Spirit worship material will be emailed to you two or three weeks before the day by the worship team.