

“Do-It -Yourself Worship”

by Rev. Virginia A. Murray

A resource for congregations whose pastors are away on Sunday morning!

There are times when your pastor cannot be in the pulpit on Sunday morning. COM is providing this resource particularly for those whose pastor may be participating in a Triennial Visit to a sister church in the Presbytery.

This is an excellent occasion for the congregation to provide its own worship service and have a great time doing it! Try one of the following suggestions or come up with your own.

1. Invite a Commissioner from the most recent General Assembly or Synod meetings to come and speak about what they experienced at those gatherings. Both GA and Synod meet to share ideas and keep the denomination moving forward. Take this opportunity to hear at the local level what the commissioners learned.

2. Invite a Representative from a Local Mission to speak. Many of the local missions that you are already supporting will be most happy to come and talk about what they are accomplishing. Your congregation will learn about the good that their mission dollars are doing in their own communities. Most groups/agenices will send someone to speak at no cost if you are already supporting them with your contributions.

If you contribute to a food pantry ask someone to come and talk about hunger in your community.

If you send money to a hospice invite someone to come and talk about managing grief.

If you support a Youth Center find out more about the concerns of youth in today's society.

If you give to Rehabilitation Programs ask someone to speak on the impact of alcoholism on our communities.

Add your own possibilities. The idea is to give the congregation a sense of how their money is being used. Choose some Scriptures and prayers for the rest of the service that will carry out the theme being presented. Your own pastor can help you with this while you are planning your service.

3. Plan for Session to do a service once a year. They are the spiritual leaders of your church. It is meaningful to the congregation to hear the thoughts and ideas of their elders. Ask them to speak about two or three things that show how the church is carrying out Christ's command to love one another and serve those in need. Celebrate a couple of things that are going well in the church. Choose hymns that are favorites of your church.

4. A well planned Hymn Sing can be quite inspirational. Choose a variety of hymns ahead of time that make a point. For example, select favorite hymns and research why and how some of those hymns were written. Or choose a selection of hymns written by one particular song writer and add some biographical information about that person. Or compare and contrast traditional hymns with contemporary praise songs.

Or choose to honor a particular group within the church (such as 50 year members or the Sunday School teachers or the choir) and use their favorite hymns. Or choose hymns with phrases that need explanation such as ("lift mine Ebenezer") and find out what they really mean. But plan ahead so there is some coherence to what you are offering.

5. Use a Narrative Story that carries a Christian theme in place of a sermon. Resources abound. Check the internet or your local library. Many times children's books such as "The Tale of Three Trees" can be

very inspiring to adults when combined in a service with relevant music and scripture.

6. Create a Lessons and Hymns service similar to the Lessons and Carols services used at Christmas time. Choose a theme such as “Christ the King” or “Baptism” or “Giving of Thanks” or something else that is

particularly relevant to the life of your church and then alternate three or four hymns with three or four scriptures on the same topic. This makes a great substitute for the traditional sermon time in the service. The rest of the service is done as usual.

7. Ask someone from another faith tradition to come and speak about some particular aspect of their worship. Ask them to be specific on a particular topic that will relate your faith and theirs. For example ask a Baptist to come and speak about baptism by immersion; how do they do it, why is it important to them? Or invite a Jewish neighbor to come and talk about Passover. Or a Muslim can talk about their use of some of the same scriptures that undergird our faith. Look for the connections that exist among faiths.

8. Use a Skit in place of the sermon and then allow the congregation a few minutes to discuss the meaning of the skit at its conclusion. Add appropriate scripture that carries the main point of the skit. Again the internet has examples. Some of the skits are for sale but some companies will provide a free sample or two. Every congregation has a few natural born actors. Let them read their lines (Reader's theater) and keep the props simple. A hat, a phone, a desk – simple items are sufficient. Most of the skits written for churches will give you a short list of what to use.

9. Suggestions for Parts of the Service other than the Sermon:

Prayers

Use prayers already written out in the “Presbyterian Book of Worship”.

Or for the morning prayer of intercession the prayer leader can make suggestions for silent prayer i.e. suggest we pray for peace and then give the congregation a pause of silence to make their own prayer. Then suggest we pray for our missionaries and pause again. The prayer leader can make a list ahead of time of 6 or 7 topics that will lead people to the

intercessions normally mentioned by the pastor.

Or use prayers written by poets and theologians. Books of prayer are easily obtained through Christian bookstores or libraries. Just be sure to mention who wrote the prayer.

Or ask the congregants to each write down a one-sentence prayer before the service begins and pass them to the worship leader who can then read them as a group prayer during the service.

Invocation and Benediction

Ask the choir to lead the congregation in singing these prayers. The Presbyterian Hymnal has several good choices or use traditional selections known to your group.

Ask the Sunday School children to prepare and sing these prayers.

10. Add Extra Music – choir selections and congregational singing. Most worship services planned and conducted by lay worship leaders tend to be a bit shorter than what our “windy” pastors manage. Folks always enjoy the musical parts of the service so add some extra.

Do-It-Yourself Worship can be a very enjoyable experience. So
let your
imagination take you to the Lord in new and creative ways.

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<http://pbyunny.org/landm/doitself.html>