Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Hicks Memorial Chapel

WORSHIP PLANNING GUIDE

Dates of Worship Service:

Liturgical Season:

Special Observances (Feast Days, Communion):

Worship Team:

Worship Team Mentor:

TIME TABLE

Suggested week for brainstorming session:

Suggested week for organizing session:

Suggested week for liturgy planning session:

Bulletins, Hicks Reader blurb, AV-requests, name of celebrant due:

Suggested date for walk-through of service:
PLANNING

The following questions are meant to guide you in your conversation. Each heading might ask for a separate planning meeting. At the beginning of your planning, assign a scribe to take notes.

I. Brainstorming about the texts/themes

If your worship team breaks up into small groups each focusing on one day of your week, this session should be held before that and involve everybody involved in the service.

1. What are the texts or is the theme for your week of worship? Why did you decide on these texts/this theme? If you start from a theme, how will you go about deciding on texts?

2. Thinking about the theme/texts: What words and phrases do you hear? What images and themes are evoked? What surprises you?

3. What emotions are generated by these readings/this theme? How do you feel (comforted, joyous, concerned, angry)?

4. What do the themes and images look, sound and feel like (bright, dark, loud, lonely, smooth, jagged, etc.)?

5. What other senses are engaged by this text?

6. In these readings/this theme, how do you see the relationship between God’s acts and our response?

7. How might we understand these images and themes in the context of the liturgical season?

8. What might these images and themes mean for our community?

9. Based on this conversation, how do you see your week of worship shape up? What might be the rhythm of the week? How do God’s speaking to us and our speaking to God relate? What might be the place of the Lord’s table?
At the end of this meeting, distribute planning notes to Kendra, team members and team mentor. Assign possible tasks (e.g., looking for resources). If the group splits up in sub-groups for each day of your week of worship, design a process for all sub-groups to stay in touch with each other so as to design a coherent worship week.

II. Organizing your thoughts

In this session you work on translating the ideas gathered above into forms of worship. The questions below can be discussed for the whole week together, but also for each worship service separate. This is where the rhythm of the week will become more concrete.

1. Looking at the notes of the last meeting, which ones are the most important ones to lead the assembly into worship? What additional ideas did you have? If this worship team is based in a course, how will you avoid making your chapel services “class presentations” and rather be a moment of listening and praying?

2. What sounds do you hear in worship for this day (Is the music lively? contemplative? festive? What words and phrases from hymns and songs come to mind?

3. What gestures and movements are summoned by our reading of the texts? A solemn procession? Standing, sitting or kneeling? Dance? Moving to front for prayer?

4. What visual expressions are suggested by the texts? Does it call for darkness or light? An arrangement at the entrance? How will you arrange the space in which we worship?

At the end of this meeting, distribute again planning notes to Kendra, team members and team mentor. Assign further tasks.
III. Planning your liturgy

1. Out of the ideas from last week, which ones are the most effective in conveying the message of the service?

2. What hymns, songs, acts of praise, prayers, and etc. do you want to use? What liturgical resources (prayer books, worship books) can help you? Check out the resource center in the library!

3. Can you use music from more than one cultural background and more than one time period? How is the balance between old and new songs?

4. How do you imagine the flow of the liturgy? Does it allow for people to get into the right place? Is there always a clearly visible worship leader? Is there a natural flow between readings, prayers, and songs? When do you want the congregation to sit or stand? Why do you want that? Is the congregation standing too long or too short?

5. Is there a call and response feeling to the service? Is the congregation involved in worship or just spectators?

6. Does each component of worship point to a common theme, feeling, image, etc., and does each day of worship during the week fit in a larger progression?

7. What images, language, etc. do your texts, prayers, and hymns, use for God? Do they reflect the full reservoir of biblical imagery for God?

8. Does your liturgy use “inclusive language for the people of God and expansive language for God”?¹

9. What is the balance in your liturgy between God’s acts and our acts? Is it clear that our worship and speaking to God is embedded in God’s gracious speaking to us?

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¹ As is the position of the PC(USA) with regard to liturgical language. The former implies that we ask you to refrain from referring to all humanity as “man” or “mankind” and language that can exclude or stereotype people. The latter implies that we ask you to think carefully about using gendered references to God, and to use the full reservoir of Biblical imagery for God and God’s gracious acts. The official language statement of Hicks Chapel reads:

All human language fails to represent God fully. Yet, God is revealed to the church in the language of Scripture. The church lives within this tension and continually seeks to shape its language for God more faithfully. The Seminary affirms the position of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that “the church shall strive in its worship to use language about God which is intentionally as diverse and varied as the Bible and our theological tradition . . . [Moreover, this language should not inadvertently exclude] people because of gender, color, or other circumstance in life” (Book of Order, W-1.2006).
10. Read aloud through the complete liturgy and time it. Do you stay within the time limits for our worship services – 20-25 minutes for regular services, 35 minutes for communion services?

11. How many worship leaders, musicians, and ushers do you need? Can you involve people who have not previously been involved? Who do you discern as having gifts for reading, praying, singing, preaching?

12. What help will you need from our chapel musician (Michael Wallace), AV coordinator (Maxwell Muska), or chapel coordinator (John Magnuson)?

At the end of this session you should have a full fletched liturgy proposal. Take this to your worship team mentor to be checked out, involve the necessary volunteers, and send a worship blurb for the Hicks Reader and the liturgies to the worship coordinator (Kendra Smith).