

Worship Planning Guide



**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
ASSEMBLY**

www.assembly.uca.org.au

Introduction



This guide is designed to assist worship leaders in the planning and leadership of worship in the Uniting Church.

You are encouraged to visit the [Uniting Church Assembly website](#) to explore the wealth of resources for worship, both liturgical and educational, that can be found there. You will find the link to worship resources on the home page.

While the Uniting Church believes that the following format for the weekly gathered worship of God's people is the one that we all should follow in many circumstances, it strongly encourages leaders of worship to be enterprising, energetic and imaginative in the fulfillment of their responsibilities.

We call this “Ordered Liberty”. A resource on the Assembly website entitled [Alive to God in Worship](#) is an excellent introduction to the preparation and leadership of worship that is contemporary and creative.

The worship book of the Uniting Church is ***Uniting in Worship 2***, which is available in hardcover and DVD. UIW2 also contains a wealth of other resources for worship. The DVD offers even more to those responsible for planning and leading worship.

Order of Service for the Lord's Day

An Outline

(Items marked * should always be included)

Gathering as God's People

* Call to worship

Hymn/Song
Greeting

* Opening Prayers

Adoration
Invocation
Confession
Declaration of Forgiveness

Receiving God's Word

Readings from Scripture

Old Testament
Psalm
Epistle
* Gospel

Hymn/Song

* Preaching of the Word / Contemporary Reflection

Affirmation of Faith

The Offering

Announcements: Needs and Concerns of the Church

* The Prayers of the People

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

(items marked * should be included when celebrating Holy Communion)

The Peace

Hymn/Song

* **Setting of the table / Invitation**

* **Great prayer of thanksgiving**

The Lord's Prayer

* **The breaking of the bread**

* **The communion**

Prayer after communion

Being Sent on God's Mission

Hymn/Song

Word of Mission

* **Blessing and Sending**



Explanatory Notes

Gathering as God's People

We begin worship in a way that encourages a sense of welcome and community. We can welcome newcomers or special guests – as may happen, for example, when there is a baptism. In some circumstances an explanation about what is to happen in the service could be very helpful to anyone who is not a regular attender.

Call to worship

It is important that we 'call' people to worship God. That is the primary reason for being together. We invite the worshippers to focus their thoughts on God.

Hymn/Song

There is a huge range of music available today from many different sources. Worship leaders need to take care when selecting songs for worship, asking two key questions:

1. Is this a tune that the congregation can readily sing or learn?
2. Are the words conveying a message consistent with the faith and theology of the Uniting Church?

It is also very important that you have the appropriate copyright licences and keep accurate records of the material you use.

Greeting

If there has been no prior word of welcome, the worship leader can offer a welcome and greeting. For example: 'I welcome you to our worship today and greet you in the name of God.'

Opening Prayers

We can use extempore prayer, or printed words, or words projected onto a screen. Prayers can be said together, or responsively, or by different people. Some hymns/songs are really prayers set to music and can be sung instead of said. It is desirable to include the following themes in our opening prayers:

Adoration

We express the greatness, wonder and power of God in creation and in Jesus Christ. Sometimes we can ask the people to suggest what attributes they want to adore God for, or ask them to call these out in the context of the prayer when invited to do so.

Invocation

We call on God to be present with us in our worship: forgiving, reconciling, calling, healing, proclaiming, sending.

Confession

We say 'sorry' to God for our failure to be the truly loving, faithful, servant people God calls us to be. It is beneficial to allow some silence for people to offer their own personal confession.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Once we have made our confession it is really important to claim and declare the forgiveness and new beginning that God promises us.

Following these prayers, we may sing or say words of praise and thanksgiving in response to God's love and grace.



Receiving God's Word

Readings from Scripture

The [Revised Common Lectionary](#) is recommended. The use of the Lectionary ensures that the people hear a range of scripture and not just the favourite passages of the preacher. We can have just one reading (in which case it should be from Gospels) or more. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended, but sometimes local circumstances mean another translation will be used.

It can be helpful to give an introduction to the readings explaining something of the context of the passage, the circumstances in which they were written and to whom they were written.

Bible readings can be presented in a variety of ways, including drama, song and images. It is good to involve members of the congregation including children in the reading or presentation of the scriptures.

Preaching of the Word/Contemporary Reflection

God's Word can be shared in a variety of ways, including spoken word and drama. A well-prepared preacher can confidently engage in conversation with the congregation or invite the people to talk amongst themselves in response to a question or topic. Videos or other visual material can also be used. The key points of the sermon and/or appropriate images can be projected onto the screen. You can ask several people to come prepared to share their thoughts on a particular topic related to one of the readings, or to share a personal story or testimony.

It is often useful to allow a time of silence after the sermon for personal reflection and prayer.

Affirmation of Faith

This is a way in which the people can affirm their faith in God together. It is another way in which we remind ourselves that we are called to be a community of faith and not just individual believers seeking a personal blessing. In addition to the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, there are many other options, for example in UIW2. A hymn or song with a clear Trinitarian focus can also be used as an Affirmation.



The Offering

This is one way in which we affirm our willingness to participate in the ministry and mission of God through our own local congregation, and the wider church and in the life of the world. It is good to remind the people from time to time of the many ways in which their giving supports the work of God. Try to think of different ways to introduce the offering, perhaps by use of stories from Uniting World or other parts of the wider church or local community. Look at different ways in which the offering can be received, including having people bring their gifts forward themselves to place on the Communion Table or even at the foot of the Cross.

Announcements: Needs and Concerns of the Church

The affirmation of faith, the offering and the notices and concerns of the Church are all ways in which we identify with the faith of the whole people of God and God's mission in the world. That is why these aspects of our worship follow the preaching – they are all part of our response to God's Word. Together, they lead into the prayers for others, the church and the world.

The Prayers of the People: world, church, people

These can be led by a member or members of the congregation. It is neither necessary to give God long explanations about situations and circumstances nor to pray for everything we can think of every week. The Assembly Working Group on Worship has produced a DVD on the *Prayers of the People*. This video can also be accessed on the Assembly website.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

This part of the liturgy for The Service of the Lord's Day is included here even though The Lord's Supper is not celebrated weekly in the great majority of our congregations.

The Assembly Working Group on Worship has produced a DVD on Holy Communion. All of the Orders of Service for Holy Communion approved for use in Uniting Church Congregations have been included in the small; booklet Holy Communion available from Mediacom.

The Peace

From the beginning Christians have exercised this practice. “Peace be with you” is a greeting Jesus himself used with his disciples. The simple “The peace of the Lord be with you” and its response, “And also with you” should never be seen as simply Christians welcoming each other, though it does incorporate that.

Whether used after the Declaration of Forgiveness or Holy Communion, the fact is that as we extend our hand to another, we identify with Jesus, who extended his life to the point of death to make peace with humanity. Importantly, in the midst of divisions we symbolize our unity through this ancient Christian gesture.

Being Sent on God’s Mission

Word of Mission

This reminds God’s people that they are being sent out from worship to participate in God’s work in the world through witness and service.

Blessing and Sending

We are sent out with the assurance of God’s blessing and unfailing presence with us through the Spirit.



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