



Worship Manual

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Sycamore Church of Christ
Worship Manual

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The Sycamore elders recognize the importance that God places on worship. This manual is meant to assist those who lead us in worship to make our worship as edifying as it can possibly be, but most importantly to emphasize the adherence to God's word and worshiping in such a way as to glorify God to the best of our ability.

Worship that pleases God is...

... an expression of adoration to Him and an edification to His people.

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, - Ephesians 5:19

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. - I Corinthians 14:26

...always from the heart and in strict accordance to the word of God.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. - John 4:24

...conducted decently and in order.

Let all things be done decently and in order. - I Corinthians 14:40

Our worship should always follow these guidelines. Furthermore, our worship should always be conducted in such a way as to allow all in attendance to actively participate and to be as free from distraction as possible. Those who lead our worship should strive toward the goal of directing the congregation to focus on God and honor Him in a manner that He deserves.

In this manual, we will give an overview of what the elders at Sycamore expect of those that take on leadership roles in our worship services. We can never give an all-inclusive list and we do not intend to; however, good stewardship demands that we clearly communicate expectations of those who lead our worship.

May we strive to always Glorify God in our worship to Him.

- The Sycamore Elders

The Elders' Responsibility in Determining Those Who Lead

Leading the congregation in worship is a privilege and not a right.

Scripture gives many examples of men being tested before they are placed into service in the work of the Lord, and we feel like stewardship demands that we do the same. Because a man has the desire to participate in a certain area of worship, doesn't mean that it is the best fit for him or for the congregation.

The Sycamore eldership feels it is best to test a man by using him on Sunday evenings, Wednesday evenings, or in other devotional situations before allowing him to lead the congregation in the Sunday morning worship. All services are important and none should be emphasized over any other; however, the Sunday morning service is the most widely attended and has the greatest potential to influence those that visit with us during that time.

Men will be utilized in our worship services as determined by the eldership after a sufficient period of testing. It is our desire to give every man willing to use his talents ample opportunity to use them to the glory of God and the edification of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Men Who Lead

Those who indicate that they would like to participate in the worship services are listed according to the avenue(s) of worship that they are willing to lead. This list is given to one of our ministers or ministry leaders who then creates a method of selecting men on a rotating basis to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to serve where he has indicated an interest.

Our bulletin contains a list of the men scheduled to lead the worship for a two-week period. Always check the bulletin to see if/when you are scheduled to lead

When scheduled, please arrive at least 10 minutes early and check in with the men in the back of the auditorium who are in charge of the service lineup.

If you cannot serve:

- Please contact the appropriate person listed in the bulletin and/or get a replacement to fill in for you
- If you are a replacement, let the appropriate men in the back know.

Reverence in Worship

The God of heaven not only deserves reverence, He demands it!

The prophet Malachi very clearly expresses how God feels about those who come before Him to lead His people in worship.

Malachi 1:6-8

This passage is spoken to priests who stood between God and His people, in much the same way that those who lead in worship do in our day. These men were being irreverent to God and they didn't even realize it. They had become so complacent that worship had become "a weariness" to them (Mal. 1:13). They were doing things their own way and not in accordance with God's word, and it felt right to them

We must never attempt to offer to God that which we would not even offer to worldly officials. Presidents, judges, and celebrities should never be thought more highly of than the God of heaven! (Mal. 1:8) The men who lead the worship set the tone for our offering of praise and adoration to God. If the leaders are not reverent, the congregation suffers and God is not pleased.

Reverence from the leaders of our worship demands:

Preparation -

To show proper respect for God, men who lead must prepare themselves for their role. Sometimes, a man is called upon without notice or with little notice, but this is seldom the case. It is a sign of disrespect to God for the brethren to be unprepared to serve.

Understanding –

I Cor. 14:13-18

Paul is very clear about the importance of all worship being understandable and being made available for all in attendance to actively participate. Leaders show disrespect to God and the brethren by leading in any way that cannot be understood by those in the congregation. Preaching or praying in ways that are not easily understood, or singing in a way that eliminates worshippers from participating or being edified is not a glory to God but draws undeserved attention to the leaders themselves. Drawing attention away from God and towards man is irreverent and not pleasing to the Father.

Proper Attire –

It has often been said that “God doesn’t have a dress code”, but that is an opinion not based on scripture. God spent much time describing in detail what the priests were to wear when they served Him on behalf of the people (Ex. 28, Lev. 8, 16). While the days of priestly garments have ended, the principles of honor and reverence represented by those garments still apply today.

Clothing can show our respect or our lack thereof. In our dress, we reflect our preparation for worship and our understanding of the reverence demanded by God. Malachi asked if we would present to our governor what we are offering to God (Mal. 1:8).

I Tim. 2:8-10

This passage demands that our worship be performed with holy hands and in modest apparel. Holy means “in accordance with the will of God” and the word modest in this context means “that which is appropriate for the occasion”. When we stand before the Lord to lead our brethren in worship, we should be appropriately dressed for the occasion – in a way that God is glorified and all attention is placed on Him and not on us.

For some, any discussion of a “dress code” causes a negative reaction and usually ends with “shouldn’t we just be glad people are here, instead of worrying about what they are wearing”. It is absolutely true that we are glad to have anyone in our assembly and all are welcome to come as they are; however, this manual is not written for those who are newcomers to our assemblies or ignorant of scripture, but to those who are charged with leading our congregation in worship.

Those who lead have the responsibility to teach those they are leading by the example they set and help them grow closer to the Lord, especially the young people in our midst. As elders, it is our responsibility to maintain an atmosphere of holiness, modesty, and reverence in our worship assemblies.

We ask the men who lead in our worship to help us maintain the proper decorum by dressing appropriately to stand before God and the congregation. If you wouldn’t wear it to the funeral home, the court room, or the governor’s office, would God be pleased with it being offered to Him? (Mal. 1:8)

May we serve our God with reverence and strive to please Him in all that we do.

Order of Services

Since the bible gives no definite order of services, each congregation is left to create an order that best fits its members.

The current order(s) of services at Sycamore is as follows:

Sunday Morning Worship

Call to Worship/Prayer
Songs (2)
Prayer
Songs (2)
Offering Message/Prayer
Song
Lord's Supper
Song
Scripture Reading
Sermon
Invitation Song
Announcements/Elder Prayer

Sunday Evening Service

Announcements
Songs (2)
Prayer
Song
Song
Scripture Reading
Sermon
Invitation Song
Song/Dismiss to Lord's Supper
Closing Prayer

Wednesday Evening

Announcements
Devotional
Invitation Song
Prayer/Dismiss to Class

Note:

The items in bold in the lists above are when the congregation should be encouraged to stand.

The elders have decided on the above order of worship and it should be used during our regular worship services.

There will be times that we have special services and alter the regular order, and when that is the case, the order will be clearly communicated to those who will be leading.

Sound Crew / Screen Operators

“Strive to be ignored”

- This should be the goal of everyone working in these areas of our worship.
- Each man should strive to do his job so well, that no one notices the job being done at all.
- Our best-case scenario is a day that everything looks like it operates itself and God is glorified without distraction.

Sound Crew

The sound is essential to our worship. Many of our number have a hard time hearing and it is critical that the sound system be properly and effectively operated in order that all will have equal opportunity to worship the Lord.

- Train thoroughly on the equipment before participating in the worship services.
- Arrive early and test the equipment to be used – including the podium and lapel mics.
- Be attentive to those leading the worship and adjust the sound accordingly for songs, prayers, etc.

Screen Operators

The screen is not essential to our worship, but in the age of technology, many have come to rely on it as their song book and even their bible. So, a large responsibility comes with the operation of the screen.

In reality, the screen is a convenience that does not enhance our worship; however, due its size and its placement in the auditorium, it can definitely detract from it when not properly operated. Errors are inevitable, but operators must strive to keep them to a minimum.

- Train thoroughly on the equipment before participating in the worship services.
- Arrive early and prepare/test the equipment as possible.
- Prepare adequately by getting songs, scriptures, and sermons well in advance of the start of worship.
- Always be attentive and avoid any distractions in/around you during services.
- Strive not to distract by getting ahead or behind those who are leading or allowing stray images to pop up on the screen.
- Things will go wrong and unexpected events will occur – have a plan for emergencies.

Again, strive to never be a distraction to the service. If things occur that cannot be quickly and quietly fixed, abort the screen rather than cause undue distraction to the congregation.

Avenues of Worship

Call to Worship/Prayer

This is a time to be welcoming and friendly. The men who welcome us to worship should be genuinely glad to be in worship and glad everyone else is here also.

- Welcome all to worship and remind them of the blessing of assembling to worship God.
- (Optional) - Share a scripture to turn our thoughts toward worship.
- This is a good time to remind about the men in the back who will assist those who need guidance in the building.
- Lead a prayer to open our worship
 - This should be a short/direct prayer focused on our worship.
 - It's a call for God's blessing on our worship and those leading it.
 - This prayer is not one for the sick, bereaved, government, troops, etc. These subjects will likely be covered in other prayers offered during the service.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

- Psalm 122:1

Avenues of Worship

Singing

Only the preacher stands before the congregation longer than the song leader, so song leaders play an extremely important part in our worship to God.

Because our song service sets the tone for our entire worship service, it is imperative that the song leader is prepared and excited for the opportunity to serve the Lord and His church.

Successful song leading goes beyond pitch and tempo. It also includes maximizing the ability of everyone in attendance to worship God to the best of their ability, and giving every member of the congregation the opportunity to succeed should be a primary goal of all who lead our singing.

Preparation:

- Choose songs well in advance and make a list. Include additional songs “just in case”.
- Arrive early to the building and deliver the list of songs (and verses planned to be used) to the screen operator.
- Be ready for technology failure. Often, leaders will use songs that are not in the songbook, so be ready to revert to the songbook in case the screen does not work for whatever reason.
- Be ready to add a song (or repeat verses to extend a song) if the situation calls for it (i.e., responses, baptism, unexpected interruption in the service, etc.). Prepare to fill unexpected “gaps” in the service.
- We must always make sure that we adhere to copyright laws. If you want to use a song that is not in our songbook or Paperless Hymnal catalogue, communicate with Kevin Rush to make sure we are covered by our licensing agreement. If a song is not covered, or if there is any question at all, use another song.

Performance:

- Clearly communicate all information about the song to be sung (number, verses to be sung, any “special” instructions, etc.).

- Song choice:
 - New Songs
 - All songs were new at one point, so the use of “new songs” is how we learn and add to our list of known songs to utilize in worship.
 - However, because the introduction of new songs inherently limits our ability to worship as effectively during the learning process, song leaders should use new songs carefully and sparingly.
 - Generally, it would be better to introduce new songs on Sunday evenings, and it is best not to introduce more than one per service.
 - Even if the song is in our songbook, if you have not heard it at Sycamore, we may not know it, so you might ask someone first.

 - Modern Songs
 - There is a trend in recent years to use what might be called “modern” songs in our worship. Many of these are songs that have been used on the radio or in concert and have become popular.
 - Some of these songs can translate well to congregational four-part harmony, but others do not.
 - These songs are often sung with different melodies and different harmonies when learned and sung by youth groups or college groups.
 - Song leaders should be aware that this can cause confusion in a worship service. Some are singing the song in the way they have learned it and always heard it, while everyone else is trying to follow the notes on the screen.
 - It is likely that those using the screen are the majority.
 - Many of these songs are beautiful and have great messages; however, leaders should research these songs and make sure that they properly translate into congregational harmony to allow maximum participation without confusion.

- Invitation Songs
 - Song leaders should choose “old standard” songs for the invitation.
 - This song is unique in that it is used to assist the congregation to reflect on their lives based on the lesson/devotional that they just heard. The song should never detract from this purpose.
 - By using well-known songs, it allows the maximum participation and focus on the words of the song. It also allows the song to be an extension of the lesson/devotional and a time of reflection.
- Limit the time the congregation stands
 - Song leaders often like to have the congregation stand during certain songs. However, this practice should be used sparingly.
 - Some in the congregation should not stand; however, if asked, they will feel obligated to do so even if they shouldn't.
 - Also, in our building, when we stand, the view of the screen is blocked for some.
 - So, we have decided to stand for **the song before the scripture reading, the reading itself, and the invitation song.**

Our elders respect and appreciate the job that song leaders do and especially the wonderfully talented men who lead here at Sycamore. The suggestions above are not meant to take away a song leader's individuality or stifle him in any way.

The eldership has the responsibility of being stewards of our worship; therefore, it is our duty to try to develop services that encourage and allow everyone in attendance worship as effectively as possible without distraction. We feel like the suggestions above give us the best opportunity to achieve that goal.

Thank you for considering and implementing these steps and for assisting our congregation to worship our God in song.

What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.
- I Corinthians 14:15

(See also I Corinthians 14:26-33, 40)

Avenues of Worship

Prayer

Christians are privileged to be able to communicate with our God in prayer, and it is an additional privilege to be able to lead a congregation of God's people in prayer.

Public prayer is different than private prayers in that they are worded by one man on behalf of all who are in attendance. As such, the man leading prayer should be mindful of the responsibility he is taking on and the occasion of the prayer being led. One should be reminded that this is not an occasion to preach or recite, but it is a time to open our hearts before our Father.

The various prayers led on behalf of the congregation should be specific to the situation.

Call to worship:

- This prayer is specific in asking God to bless our worship and those in attendance.

Opening Prayer:

- This is a general prayer and would naturally be longer in nature. The man leading this prayer should try to pray for those things which would be of interest to the congregation as a whole (i.e., our blessings, the sick, the country, our blessings, etc.). It is good for the brother leading this prayer to plan and prepare as much as possible for this privileged duty.
- Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6 is a good guide to the leading this prayer. While it is generally the longest prayer in our service, it still should be kept brief and to the point. It should not be an oration, but a communication with the God of heaven.

Closing Prayer:

- This is a time to thank God for our time together and to watch over us until we meet again.

Prayer for one who is restored:

- It is a privilege to lead this type of prayer. It should be directed to God specifically on behalf of the brother or sister who has asked for the prayer.

Avenues of Worship

Offering

Giving to the Lord is worship.

Giving should not be considered a contribution, but an offering of praise and gratitude.

The returning to God a portion of the blessings that He has given to us is commanded, but it is also a great privilege to be able to remember the One who has given us all things.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

II Corinthians 9:11

The man chosen to preside over the Lord's Supper will also offer the prayer for the offering.

- As a reminder, the offering is not a part of the Lord's Supper and a proper separation should be made between the two avenues of worship.
- It is always good to include a scripture to emphasize this avenue of worship.
- The prayer for the offering should emphasize gratitude for what we have been given and what we are able to give.

Note:

At present, our members may offer to God in various ways: in the boxes provided in the foyers, by mailing or delivering offerings to the church office, or by giving online.

When special offerings are declared by the eldership, those offerings will be collected by the traditional method of passing the plates in order to keep these funds separate from the weekly offering.

Avenues of Worship

Lord's Supper

Christians are commanded to remember the Lord's death and the example in scripture is that it be done on the first day of the week.

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.
- Acts 20:7

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.
- I Corinthians 11:26

The Lord's Supper is a solemn observance of the sacrifice that the Savior made for us on the cross of Calvary, and it should be approached with the reverence and dignity befitting that sacrifice.

The passing of trays containing the emblems of the Lord's Supper can be a chaotic time due to all the "moving parts" during the observance. It is the duty of the men taking part in serving the Lord's Supper to seek to maintain the proper focus on the importance of the observance of this avenue of worship.

The man presiding:

- This brother should prepare for the duty ahead of time by assembling his thoughts and any scripture that he plans to use.
- The presiding brother should share a short thought to help assist the congregation in focusing on the cross and Jesus' sacrifice.
- He should pray for the bread first and after the congregation has partaken of the bread, then pray for the cup.

The men serving at the table:

- There will be six men in the front and six in the back and each will have two trays each.
- They should move efficiently and quietly so as not to disturb or distract from the observance of the Lord's Supper and the focus of the congregation.
- One of the men in the front that is closest to the podium (usually one of the men in the middle) should serve the man presiding.
- When the men from the front meet the men from the back and everyone has been served the bread, the men from the back will collect all the trays and take them to the back of the auditorium. The men from the front will return to the front for the prayer for the cup, and once everyone has been served, the trays should be returned to the back of the auditorium and the men serving will be dismissed to their seats.
- While you are an integral part of the observance, the goal when serving the congregation is to perform the task without being noticed.

Avenues of Worship

Sharing the Word of God

All worship must be centered firmly in scripture and be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Adherence to sound doctrine is man's way to salvation.

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. - I Timothy 4:16

Reading Scripture

God's word is to be revered by His children; therefore, the opportunity to read the sacred word before the congregation is a privilege that should be taken very seriously.

The scripture to be read during worship will be selected by the man preaching during the service to go along with his lesson. The reader should attempt to get the passage to be read early and be able to become familiar with it prior to the service.

If not received prior to arriving for worship, the reader can get the scripture upon arrival. If this is the case, he should read over the passage before the service begins.

The scriptures shown on the screen in the auditorium are from the New King James version. It is preferred for the reader to use this version in order to avoid any confusion with the words shown on the screen. If you do not have a NKJV, there is a copy on the podium or front seat, and there are copies in each song book rack.

Preaching

A preacher has a primary task when entering the pulpit:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. - II Timothy 4:2

The man who fills the pulpit at Sycamore must focus on this task whether he be the regular minister or one who delivers a lesson from time to time. He must prepare bible-centered lessons that are unquestioningly sound in doctrine, deliver them with

love and concern for souls, and preach the whole counsel of God without reservation or partiality.

No man shall preach from the pulpit at Sycamore unless first approved for the task by the eldership; therefore, anyone wishing to address the congregation should make request of the elders or have such request made on his behalf.

Devotional Messages

From time to time, men of the congregation are asked to deliver devotional messages in various settings and for various purposes. These messages are shorter than sermons: however, they must still be bible-centered, scripturally sound, delivered with love, and intended to stir the brethren to consider their spiritual condition.

Devotionals should be focused on the specific purpose of the setting where they are taking place and should follow a simple pattern: introduction, application, invitation. This pattern will remind the speaker to keep the thoughts brief and to the point.

Wednesday Evening Devotionals

These are the most common devotionals at Sycamore and are very ably shared by many of our men. Beyond the importance of the soundness of the message, there are two things to remember about the delivery of these messages:

1. The message on Wednesday evening should be kept to a length of 5 to 7 minutes. This is not to stifle the creativity of our men, but to ensure that the teachers and students get the maximum amount of time in class.
2. The man delivering the devotional and offering the invitation on Wednesday evening should stand and face the congregation in order to receive anyone who responds to the invitation. This man will not be expected to take the confession of the responder, but simply to greet him/her. An elder or a minister will come forward and take the responder's confession.