

GUIDE



Leading Christian Worship Services In Corrections Facilities



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*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*

Psalm 29:2 NIV

Whether you have been asked to plan a Christian worship service in a youth facility, jail or prison this guide is created to address matters that worship planners face in the distinct nature of correctional settings. Worship as a term used in this guide includes all aspects (opening comments, music, spoken word, sermon, presentation of the gospel, etc.) of the entire religious service (church service, bible study, or special activity).

The Meaning and Purpose of Worship

Many times worshippers engage in worship without really ever thinking about its meaning and purpose. Therefore, regularly teaching the congregation what is Christian worship is beneficial. Thinking through the purpose and meaning of Christian worship is challenging but a valuable exercise for those who lead or oversee correctional worship services. Please see the recommended resources for readings may be helpful in educating and stimulating discussion with your worship team. You may want to develop a statement about Christian worship for your facility.

Christian worship is a natural response of joy to the invitation of God through the Holy Spirit to praise and give glory to God and his saving work in Christ.

Worship at _____ facility is ...¹

- **Trinitarian** – we address a triune (three Persons with one essence) God, who invites, perfects, and empowers our whole-hearted devotion.
- **Biblical** – we follow the Bible’s instructions, letting the Word dwell in us richly in readings, prayers, music and the arts, while highlighting the person and work of Jesus.
- **Gospel Centered** – we want each worshiper to leave proclaiming that the gospel of Jesus matters to this life and the life to come.
- **Grace Filled** – we understand God’s grace in our salvation and life so we can extend that same grace to others.

¹ Modified from Worship at Calvin College.

- **Holistic** – we bring all ourselves to worship: body and soul, brain and heart, doubt and belief, lament and joy.
- **Diverse** – we make creative use of words, music, drama, and dance from many times, places, peoples, and cultures to enlarge our vision of God’s kingdom, and situate ourselves properly, within it.
- **Reverent** – even when playful, our worship acknowledges that it is *God* with whom we deal when we gather together.
- **Spirit-directed** – we are led by the Holy Spirit in form and in freedom, both in prayer-filled planning and in the surprising moments of worship, expecting great things of God.
- **Participatory** – the full, conscious, active participation of all worshipers, as a fully diverse community. Worship leaders are not performers, but *enablers*, encouraging the full, conscious, active participation of the congregation (not “audience”).
- **Sacramental** – we will engage in joyful and solemn celebration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
- **Hospitable** – we will be warm and welcoming of everyone regardless of their lifestyle or crime.

Christian Worship Leads to Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual Transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us ... for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others. (Galatians 4:19; Romans 8:29; Romans 12:1, 2).²

Worshiping God at _____ should make us:³

- **Humble** - I am a worshiper because Jesus died and rose to make me one (2 Corinthians 5:15).
- **Secure** – in the unchanging love of Jesus (Romans 8:39) and our identity in Christ (Galatians 2:20).
- **Grateful** – Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise (Psalm 100:4).
- **Holy** – Confessing our sins – remembering His holiness and our calling to be holy like him. (1 Peter 1:16)
- **Loving** – This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 15:12).
- **Mission-minded** – Share the good news of the gospel. (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Spiritual formation in worship is a collaborative effort of the Holy Spirit, the worship leader and the worshiper. The Holy Spirit always does His part. God is asking the worship leader to pursue excellence that encourages the worshiper to respond with a more godly life. The worshiper’s roll is to participate in worship and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

²Ruth Haley Barton. *What we Believe about Spiritual Transformation*.

³Bob Kauflin. *Worship Matters*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, 143-150.

Worship Leader Virtues and Qualifications

Worship skills and knowledge are important but God looks at the heart. Worship leaders should have the following virtues and qualifications:

- **Christ Lover** – is a committed follower of Christ.
- **Called** - to lead worship in corrections.
- **Character** – humble; submits to authority – obeys the institutional policies and procedures; welcomes evaluation and feedback.
- **Competent** – has strong worship and musical skills and knowledge; has a love for good theology; handles scripture rightly, wisely and humbly; interested in continuing education; understands the corrections environment and offenders.
- **Chemistry** – works well with the chaplain, worship team members, and congregants; Honors all persons as created in the image of God by appreciating the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and traditions within the correctional environment.

Developing a Worship Team

Worship planning happens best in collaboration. When possible, the worship team should include the chaplain or designee, volunteers, and representatives of incarcerated congregation. Each member of the worship team should be:

- Growing in their knowledge of and love for God through prayer and Bible study.
- Able to genuinely and visibly engage with God as they lead others in corporate worship.
- Committed to pursuing humility and servant hood.
- Faithful and punctual in attending required meetings and rehearsals.⁴
- A love for the congregation.

Worship Models

Each worship model connects the inside and outside churches developing relationships and increasing aftercare ministry.

- **Rotating Churches**, the most common worship in corrections model, is where each Sunday of the month is assigned to a different local church. Quarterly worship planning should include representatives of each Church.
 - Strength* – Prisoners are exposed to a variety of churches and styles of worship.
 - Limitation* - No continuity between worship from week to week unless quarterly planning is conducted.
- **Cell Adoption Program (CAP)**⁵ is where a church adopts a jail unit (deck, pod) as a satellite campus and offers Christian worship services each week that are supervised by the chaplain. Each church develops a worship team of ideally ten people and each Sunday, three of the ten provide an hour long service in the housing unit during lockdown so that inmates who do not want to attend can stay in their cell.
 - Strength* – Creates a stronger connection between the church and inmates, increases coherency of services, provides an opportunity for all jail inmates to attend worship services.

⁴ Kauflin, Bob. (2008). *Worship Matters*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 231.

⁵ Developed by Chaplain Morris Jackson, Good News Jail & Prison Ministry, Nebraska

Limitation – Inmates are limited to attending the worship service assigned to their living unit which may or may not be their preferred style of worship.

- **Webcast Satellite Campus**⁶ is where worship is experienced live in the corrections setting through internet streaming of the live worship service at the main Worship site. Volunteer worship facilitators attend each service in the correctional facilities and handout the worship guides, prepare communion, pray and mirror the experience from the main facility for the inmates.

Strength – Develops a strong connection between the outside and inside church. Inmates are welcomed and their prayer requests are included in the prayer at the main campus.

Limitation – Cost and technology to webcast service, public website to attend worship online, correctional facility clearance to access online service through technology.

- **Prison Congregations of America** is a denominationally sponsored worshipping community where the inmates are the members of the worshipping community, let by a pastor from the outside who is trained by and accountable to the sponsoring denomination. The prison church or worshipping community is supported financially by churches on the outside who also take turns being worship guests.

Strength – This is truly ministry **with**, rather than ministry **to**, those who are incarcerated.

Limitation – weekly ministry will have a singular, denominational flavor and theological emphasis, variety, and diversity may be limited.

Worship Planning

How can worship be planned so that it glorifies God and helps the congregation to encounter the person of God, the truths of his Word, and experience meaningful worship?

Pre-Planning

- Create a template to guide your order of worship. Sample Order of Service:
 - Welcome and call to Worship
 - Praise Song(s)
 - Prayer of confession
 - Assurance of Pardon
 - Prayer for Illumination
 - Scripture Reading
 - Sermon
 - Clear presentation of the gospel with an opportunity to trust Christ
 - Song of Response to the Word
 - Prayers of Intercession
 - Offering (congregants can write on a paper prayer requests or time, talents, etc. they are offering to God this week.)
 - Song of Dedication
 - Prayer of Blessing

⁶ Northland Church, Longwood, FL

- Create a list of the songs the congregations knows well, coming to know or should know.
- Create a roster of people (volunteers and congregants) with gifts in the areas of Scripture reading, leading prayers, music, drama, creating visual art, or any other role in worship.
- Develop a process for feedback and group discussion. Worship services should never be planned isolation. Ask wise and discerning people in your congregation. What enables you to participate more profoundly? What resources do we have as a congregation to enrich our worship?

Planning

- Pray that the Holy Spirit would guide the planning process.
- Study the scripture text that will be used for the sermon.
- Brainstorm ideas on the worship elements (Reading Scripture, images, prayer, music, etc.) so that they support the Scripture text or sermon theme and engage the congregation.
- Order worship elements. Select an order of worship that balances out worship actions and has an intentional flow that contributes to the purposes of worship.
- Plan for the predictable and be ready for the unexpected.

Worship Service Elements and Skills

Spoken Word

At _____ Facility, when we speak in worship ...

*We do not **instruct** people what to do next; we **invite** them to participate in the act of worship.*

- When introducing a song or reading, give a foretaste of the next text, or refer to the preceding one.
- Let people know how each act fits into the dialogue of worship and the theme of the service.
- Attend to the emotional contours of the service, what is happening in your heart and in the congregation's hearts.

We read Scripture with intelligence, passion and hospitality

- Prepared and practiced ahead of time.
- Paced: read slowly, but use some variety in the pace.
- Spaced: allow time for the text to be heard and absorbed.
- Grace: read with expression that makes scripture come alive, yet not so much drama that it calls more attention to the reader than the message.

We pray ...

- To God, Three-in-one. Sometimes we pray to all three persons simultaneously; at other times, we pray to one person of the Trinity.

- A common pattern is
TO God the Father
 BY the power of the Holy Spirit,
 IN the name of Jesus the Son.
- As a community: using “We” instead of “I”.
- For a variety of reasons: to adore God, to confess sin, to give thanks, to petition/ask God for something.
- At a thoughtful pace (more slowly than we normally speak), and with space for attentive, reverent silence.
- Without using verbal filler (“just,” “um”).

We preach...

- Biblically based sermons.
- Culturally relevant messages.
- Major doctrines and not denominational beliefs or controversial topics (speaking in tongues, role of women in the church, end times, etc.).

“If I hear one more sermon on the prodigal son,
I am going to puke.” (prisoner)
“I don’t like “beat-up” sermons where I am told how bad I am.”
(formerly incarcerated person)

We share our testimony to bring glory to God, not us.

- Prepared and practiced. This prevents rambling and helps to stay within the designated time frame.
- Clear and concise. Follows a natural progression of how God met you in a crises or life before Christ and after Christ. For example, if you felt emptiness and hopeless before you gave your life to Christ, discuss how Christ has given you hope, meaning and purpose. Specifically, how did you receive Christ? Moreover, today what struggles do you continue to face with the power of God?
- Avoid using terms that Christians understand but others do not. Replace saved by grace and born-again with received the free gift of eternal life or knew I was going to heaven because my faith in Christ.
- Allows for transparency and a genuine witness of what God has done in your life.

Music and Song

At _____ Facility, we select music that ...

- Enhances the worship theme
- Has an identifiable theological theme
- Has flow
- Our musicians have the skills to play
- Connects with the congregation

At _____ Facility, when we sing or play music ...

*Our primary work is to **support the congregation***

Players:

- Use a consistent tempo, a clear bass line, and room to breathe
- Give obvious cues for when the people are to begin singing
- Make the melody stand out, especially when introducing new songs
- Allow the text of the song to guide your accomplishment
- Drop out occasionally so that the people can sing unaccompanied

Singers:

- Sing with expression of face and voice
- Be aware of body language; make eye contact
- Avoid idiosyncratic embellishment that a congregation can't sing

Visuals

At _____ Facility, the visuals ...

- Include both art and space that is purposeful
- Engage us through our senses and imaginations for worship
- Communicate God's beauty and creativity
- Speak theologically and are a witness
- Are more of community rather than individuals

Drama

Drama and Bibliodrama are effective tools to facilitate worship. It is critical for an observer to hear information emotionally, as the goal is to hopefully propel the listener to "do" and not merely "hear." In relationship to God, all information, whether it is a sermon or a bible study, is designed to accomplish two things; build trust and/or build obedience.

At _____ Facility, the drama ...

- Is used to teach, not entertain
- Help congregants to emotionally identify with a character of an issue.

Offering

The incarcerated congregation is not allowed to carry money. They may donate through their account or may want to have congregants write on a piece of paper what they can give (time, talent, prayer, etc.)

WORSHIP in CORRECTIONS

Leading worship in corrections offers unique issues, challenges and opportunities. It is hard to find a more spiritually hungry congregation than those who attend worship behind bars. Worshiping with others who are broken, genuine and transparent is refreshing. But there are also many limitations that must be considered when planning worship. It is like worshiping in a different culture. Leading a worship service the same way you worship on the outside will not connect with your congregation. What you should know about leading worship in corrections.

Policies

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) is a federal statute that was passed in 2000 to provide stronger protection for religious freedom in the land-use and prison contexts. It requires that the religious needs of prisoners be met and all attendance to religious programs must be **voluntary**; they are NOT a captive audience. Most facilities have a general Protestant category for all Christian religions.

No proselytizing. *For example, Chaplains, contract Chaplains, religious program volunteers, other staff, members of the community, and offenders may not initiate unwanted, or forceful attempts to persuade another individual to convert from one religious belief to another religious belief or criticize the religious beliefs of others within the grounds of any Department facility. Nothing in this provision will prohibit the sharing of information regarding an individual's religious belief (State of Washington, DOC 560.200).*

- Do not criticize other religions or denominations
- Share Christ with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Ask for permission to share Christ in one-on-one conversations.

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). Corrections are often motivated by fear of legal repercussions. Many institutions have a no hugging policy and now some have a no touching policy. You are not allowed to shake hands and no laying on of hands when praying for someone. You must receive PREA training and comply with all PREA regulations.

The Environment

Facilities

The type of correctional facility (youth, jail, or prison) impacts who is in the congregation, the worship space, and what resources are available and allowed.

Youth Facilities – The youth population ranges in age from 9-17 and may include both males and females. There may or may not be a designated worship space.

Jails – The jail population is very transient. Therefore, it is challenging to establish a sermon series or worship theme for more than a few weeks. The Gospel should be presented creatively each week and strong connections with churches on the outside.

Worship space – most jails offer worship in the living unit (Pod, dorm, deck). Some meet in a classroom or designated space outside of the living unit.

Prisons – The prison population typically serves a year or more which creates a more stable congregation. Prisoners come from different living units to attend services in a separate space (chapel, gym, spiritual center, classroom, etc.)

Worship Service Structure

Time – worship services have a designated time that is not flexible. When the service time is expired, prisoners must return to their unit and the volunteers must leave. This limitation inhibits follow-up and hospitality. Create a prisoner prayer and hospitality team to follow-up with new attendees or encourage prisoners to attend existing Bible Studies.

Baptism – the type of baptism allowed in a corrections facility, mostly in prisons, will vary. Unless the inmate is incarcerated for several years, you may want to encourage him or her to get baptized in their church after returning to the free world.

Lord's Supper – limited by type of correctional facility (how it is given, how often, type of elements)

Open and Accepting – Most worship services are a place that is welcoming of everyone. Prisoners with sex-offenses or engage in homosexuality feel safe in worship.

The People

Corrections Staff

The top concerns of corrections staff are always security and safety. Your worship service is NOT a priority to them. You will encounter some staff who believe chaplains and volunteers are wasting their time and that prisoners cannot “change.”

Nevertheless, there are other staff who are courteous and support your efforts.

TIPS: Submit to authority, do not try to bring anything in or out of the facility without permission, think about security and safety, and be loving toward staff.

Chaplains

Worship services are one of the many responsibilities of overburdened correction chaplains. In many places, worship services are on autopilot. Giving focused attention to worship renewal is an opportunity for a volunteer or intern to assist the chaplain.

Volunteers

Volunteers are critical to worship services. They should be carefully vetted and trained. Volunteers should NOT teach denominational beliefs such as a version of the bible, type of baptism, role of women, eschatology, speaking in tongues, etc. Female volunteers should dress modestly so as not to be distracting and flat, closed toe shoes to be able to move quickly in case of an emergency.

Incarcerated Congregants

Why the incarcerated attend worship?

Inmates are motivated to attend worship with sincere and insincere reasons. One study found sincere inmates were genuine and serious about their religious beliefs while insincere inmates were involved for manipulative purposes.⁷

Sincere inmate motivations for religious involvement

- It provided motivation, direction and meaning for life
- It gave them hope for the future
- It gave them peace of mind
- It gave them a positive self-esteem
- It helped them make changes in lifestyle

Insincere inmate motivation for religious involvement

- Protection from other inmates. Muslim and protestant religions were most often used for protection.
- Racial affiliation
- Past criminality. Sex-offenders are often subject to verbal and physical abuse. Religious services provided a form of a “safe haven” for them.
- Social Reasons. It provided an opportunity to meet with friends or “see your home boy.”
- Pass Contraband. Most contraband passed was food, candy, written messages and cigarettes.
- Women Volunteers. It provided an opportunity to meet women volunteers with the goal of developing a relationship that would lead to regular visits or as pen-pals.
- Prison Resources. Free goods received such as coffee, cookies, and donuts
- To enjoy music.
- To obtain favors from chaplains such as phone access or transfers.
- In some prison settings, choir practice provides an opportunity for inappropriate physical contact.

Other motivations for attending worship include:

- Want to get out of the living unit.
- Curious.
- Create a disturbance.
- Use corporate prayer time to subtly promote gang identification.

Reasons for NOT attending:

- Don't want to appear “square” – (doing what is right)
- Don't want to be labeled a sex-offender (male responses)

⁷ Dammer, H. 2002. Reasons for religious involvement in the correctional environment. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*. 35 (3), 35-59.

- Believed religion was for the weak
- Christians are hypocrites – not wanting to be a hypocrite

“Let’ em come.”

(Chaplains and worship leaders)

Understanding the Culture

- Many in the congregation are spiritually hungry. They long to be fed feed meat (discipleship) not just milk (sermonettes-evangelism is not milkevangelism)
- Congregants represent a wide range of biblical knowledge. Keep this in mind with comments about bible knowledge and finding passages.
- The prison code is one of don’t talk, don’t snitch, don’t feel, and don’t take personal responsibility.

Know Your Congregation

Questions you may want to ask your congregation to help you understand who they are include:

- Before I came to worship I was thinking about...
 - *My case*
 - *My children*
- How do others in the youth facility, jail, or prison view those who attend worship?
 - *Bible thumpers*
 - *Weak*
 - *Hypocrites*
 - *Spiritual*
- I view God as ...
 - *Someone who takes care of things while I am away*
 - *Someone who shows up only when I am in my worst place*
 - *Someone who can get me out of a “jam”*
 - *Someone who lives in the jail*
 - *Someone who stays in the jail*
- How does your church feel about you?
 - *I will always be judged*
 - *I am always watched and followed*
 - *No one will ever trust me in my church*
 - *I feel more shame when my church does not accept me*
 - *I don’t have a lot in common with the congregation*
 - *I felt like I was in a pit*
 - *The “sour” face when you tell someone you were in jail.*

Worship Service Space

Worship services may be held in a chapel, worship center or gym (typically in prisons), or classroom or pod (typically jails and youth facilities). This space is also shared with all other religions. The worship space is often visually uninspiring and with very poor acoustics.

Worship Resources

Safety and security issues are unique to each correctional facility. Such issues as the type of writing instruments, musical instruments, staples, handouts, bibles, etc. will be determined and monitored by the institution. Everything brought into and taken out of a facility **must be approved** by the corrections staff. The technology (microphones, overhead projector, LCI projector, DVD player, CD player, etc.) will also vary from facility to facility. Instruments allowed will vary by availability and security levels.

Challenges

- Bridging the transition between the inside and outside church when prisoners will be released to a location far from the prison.
- Grassroots resistance to programs or change (from volunteers and congregants). Include those who will be affected by the change in the planning and transition.
- Ongoing varied levels of facility staff cooperation in facilitating religious activities.
- Competing facility programming, some of which is mandated by facility staff for inmates to move up in levels and/or complete program graduation requirements.

Resources

IPM website – Worship Renewal (resources, links) go to www.bgcprisonministries.com

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (grants, resources, links)

Ten Core Convictions About Christian Worship - For a description of each of the core convictions go to <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ten-core-convictions/>

Books

Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out by Lennie Spitale

Worship Matters by Bob Kauflin