



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

WORSHIP LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK

Psalm 95:1-2

“Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. ²Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.” (NIV)

Leading worship is a sacred responsibility. You’re not merely leading songs; you’re facilitating encounters with God. William Leach, former Michigan AG Superintendent, once stated, *“Worship is the act of ascribing ultimate value to something in a way that energizes and engages your whole person.”*

Worship engages our minds, wills, and emotions. Although worship is about God and should always be directed UPWARD, it also profoundly impacts us inwardly. This duality is what makes worship so amazing: its focus is upward, yet it touches the deepest parts of our spirits. That’s why being prepared and leading well matter so much.

This guide walks you through elements of preparation, presentation, and pursuit of the presence of God that is required to lead a congregation into effective and deep times with Jesus. This reminds us to stay humble, prepared, and full of the Spirit as we lead.

THE WORSHIP LEADER'S PREPARATION, PURPOSE AND PROFICIENCY

WORSHIP LEADER'S GUIDE TO LEADING WORSHIP IN A SERVICE

Being an anointed worship leader begins long before the first note of a song is played in a service. Numerous pre-service elements of a worship set can significantly influence the effectiveness of worship.

When we have friends over to enjoy a pleasant summer evening, we prepare by getting food ready, setting the table, and being excellent hosts for the night. This is very similar to the role of a worship leader. You create an environment for attendees to encounter the living, active God. Below are some aspects to consider that can help accomplish this.

1. Personal Preparation. Spiritually preparing for individual worship is the foundation of extraordinary corporate worship experiences. This should be the primary responsibility of a worship leader- to be personally attuned to what the Spirit desires to do in you before He can work through you. You can do this by:

- Personal worship commitment: Your public leadership should flow from your private worship.
- Personal devotional times in the Bible.
- Personal devotional times in prayer.
- Personal sensitivity and openness to the Holy Spirit daily. This leads to sensitivity both in planning the service and in leading the service.
- Personal prayer for your church and for your team. This is when we ask God to stir a hunger, which is evidenced in the passionate pursuit of His presence.

2. Alignment with leadership. Understanding the vision of the Lead Pastor is crucial for maintaining alignment with the direction the Lord is guiding the church. God has given the church a vision. Therefore, we should lead worship that strengthens the church's trajectory toward the experiences and plans God has set in motion.

- Knowing the vision of your Lead Pastor helps to understand how worship enhances the larger church mission.
- This may also play a crucial role in selecting songs based on the church's style, the current preaching series, the church's direction, and the season it is experiencing.

3. Plan effectively. Our role isn't to impress—it's to invite. We create environments where people can meet with God. We must plan with intention but remain flexible to follow the Spirit's direction.

- Connect with the speaker to align the music with the message/theme.
- Plan the songs to match the message's intended focus...reflective, celebratory, solemn, reverent, etc.
- Choose songs that people are familiar with, especially when introducing new songs.
- Consider theological accuracy, lyrical clarity, and ease of singing.

4. Team Leadership. Excellence removes distractions, creates confidence, and allows for more profound moments with God. This is partially accomplished through choosing the right team, team preparedness, and team proficiency. Move toward excellence by:

- **Scheduling a solid team.** More than just talent, a worship leader should also consider team dynamics, like unity, diversity, and heart.
- **Providing team tools.** Use tools like Planning Center to make preparation easy and organized.
- **Musical Preparation.** A well-run rehearsal with the band and vocalists will significantly reduce distractions and allow the team to understand where the service worship set is heading.
- **Heart Preparation.** Encourage your team spiritually through devotionals, prayer, care, and resources that will help them grow deeper in Christ.
- **Emphasizing team health.** A worship leader must lead the way in modeling humility, unity, and service.

5. Technical Excellence. Perfection is an unhealthy pursuit, but excellence is always a healthy choice. Leading with a high level of proficiency honors the abilities God created within us. Strive to honor God by giving your best and encouraging your team to do so...after all...worship is offering God our best!

- **Stage.** The stage should be well organized, clean, and not cluttered. It should be balanced and visually appealing.
- **Sound & Media.** Collaborate with the sound/media team to ensure precise audio, smooth transitions, and any slides/video backgrounds are prepared.
- **Sound & Tech Checks.** Do a sound check and troubleshoot issues before service starts.
- **Team Warmth.** Encourage your team to genuinely love worship and let it show: facial expressions, demeanor, joy, and eye contact are ways to invite the congregation in. Remind the team that they are not performers but worshipers who lead others into worship.

6. Leading the Congregation. A worship leader is precisely that- a leader of people in worship. It is not your job to force people to worship but to guide them to a time when they exalt the name of Jesus. A worship leader can greatly help by:

- **Inviting Participation.** Use language that includes and encourages participation: "Let's sing together," "We lift our voices..."

- **Guiding Transitions.** Think/plan what you might say between songs. Be brief, be brilliant, and be done. Keep it concise, meaningful, and Scripture-centered.
- **Being Aware.** Be sensitive to whether the Spirit is leading you to linger or move forward. Please pay attention to the room, its responsiveness, or lack thereof.

7. Time Awareness. While each worship service will have a feel and direction, it is wise to honor the planned time frames. While we are spirit-led, we also know that other service elements are also crucial for the congregation to experience.

- **Stay focused.** Respect the service plan, especially if multiple services are happening.
- **Be Clear.** Communicate clearly with service coordinators and tech teams about cues and timing.
- **End Well.** When you sense the worship time has ended, conclude with prayer and move on to the next portion of the service.

8. Be Present. A common mistake some worship leaders and teams make is disappearing after the worship set. The greatest leadership a team can provide is to personally connect as part of the congregation. When this connection is missed, it can create the impression that the worship team is merely a group of performers rather than a part of the church.

- **Be Available.** You are part of the church. Don't hide away in a room; be friendly and present in body and mind with your church before and after service when possible.
- **Engage with People.** People will connect better with you as a worship leader when they see who you are off the platform. Encourage your team to connect with, spend time with, and pray for the congregation.

9. Post-Service Evaluation. Every leader should reflect on their leadership. It is wise to assess areas for improvement, celebrate significant moments, and mentor your team to further develop their gifts and talents.

- **Express Gratitude.** Thank God and reflect on the positive impact of the service.
- **Review:** What went well? What can improve? How was worship musically, technically, and spiritually?
- **Move forward.** Do not dwell on what went wrong and overlook what God has done. Similarly, don't take your own accolades too seriously and celebrate to the point of forgetting that everything is about God and not us. It's best to reflect and then move on swiftly because God has something great in store ahead.
- **Remember:** Your most important audience is not other worshippers, but the One we worship.