

Practical input

Using different media to connect different hearts in worship

For most of us corporate worship has become spoken and auditory, and for many of us, largely sung.

There is of course absolutely nothing wrong with this on one level. But research into learning styles and the way that most people process the world around them has revealed that a staggeringly small percentage of people (less than 2 per cent) are primarily auditory. Instead, nearly a third process things by touch, sense and experience, or kinaesthetically, and a two thirds literally see the world visually.

Rhythm and music do connect with us all, but clearly we will release more people into greater worship if we can include a wider range of expressions in our corporate worship. (Read 'Colouring in the dots – liberating different media to express worship' at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-articles for a more detailed discussion of these ideas.)

Media check

Sometimes it can be really helpful to take a step back from our corporate services, and even our personal worship, to review what 'languages' of expression and learning we are using. Are we benefiting from the different media and learning styles available to us? Are there people who are never experiencing their 'first language' in presentation or expression?

Take a few moments to answer the following questions:

1. Over the last year – which of the following media or disciplines have you used, or seen others use, in one or more of your services?
2. How about for worship specifically? (as opposed to presentation in sermons etc)
3. Can you estimate rough percentages of how much you used the ones you did use?
4. Instead of focussing on the difficulties and limitations of some of these ideas, which ones do you think could add something if used in special contexts, or tried for certain sections of your worship?

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ▪ Music – sung performed | ▪ Photography – created | hands, lie)- spontaneous |
| ▪ Music – sung by all | live during worship by | by one or more of the |
| ▪ Music – instrumental | congregation member | congregation |
| ▪ Music – range of styles | ▪ Photography – creation | ▪ Posture variation – whole |
| used | by congregation | congregation |
| ▪ Music – creating | ▪ Dance- performance | ▪ Painting/drawing/crafts – |
| together | ▪ Dance – spontaneous by | displayed |
| ▪ Silence | one or more of the | ▪ Painting/drawing/crafts – |
| ▪ Spoken word | congregation | created live by |
| ▪ Film- presentation | ▪ Dance – whole | congregation member |
| ▪ Film – creation | congregation | ▪ Painting/drawing/crafts – |
| ▪ Photography – displayed | ▪ Posture variation (i.e. | created live by |
| | stand, kneel, sit, raise | congregation |

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- Drama – performed
- Drama – created live by congregation
- Symbols or parables
- Liturgical or written prayer
- Spontaneous prayer – by one person
- Spontaneous prayer – all at once
- Group prayer
- Prayer stations or other interactive/multi-sensory prayer
- Congregation writing prayers or psalms as worship

Different ideas to explore what media might be helpful in your context

- Brainstorm with a few friends from church, your worship group, leadership team, or home-group their different responses to the following questions:
 - In your personal day to day life, what stimuli often prompt you to worship because they remind you of God's character, majesty or love?
 - What media do you use in your personal worship and prayer times?
 - What would you say the principal ways are that you hear from God?(In reference to poverty and justice issues specifically, you could use the exercise and stimuli provided in 'Variety, Creativity and learning styles' in the workshop session *How to get justice into the heart of your church* available at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-articles)
- Consider the members of your church, chat to them, or even send round a questionnaire. What do people enjoy doing or responding to? What are particular individuals gifted in especially? How could you explore trying some of these things in your services, and specifically your worship? How could you release people in a helpful and structured way so that their different talents can inspire or lead the congregation in new ways?
- Take time to consider the pastoral context before releasing people to try new things. Make sure they are affirmed and supported as they step out (see the 'Top tips when experimenting with new approaches' section below) and remember that if things really don't work, you will need to proactively manage this.

Poverty, justice and intercession

Variety of stimulus and input are even more important when you are asking people to engage with outward-focused prayer and worship.

Most people find their own life and immediate context is their default focus for prayer and worship... and find it hard to engage with wider issues without further stimulus – i.e. if people are passionate or very knowledgeable about an issue, particular country, or people group, they may find it easy to spontaneously pray or worship in the context of this without much further information.

But there are many issues or countries which people don't know much about. They sometimes need some help catching God's heart for something – this might come simply as you pray for him to move, or it might be appropriate to give people some input through different media which can help them empathise, and pray into the specifics of a situation. Again, bear in mind that different things will catch different people's hearts.

However, often if we spend a lot of time providing information and facts, we use up prayer time, and it can make it awkward when praying for a number of different issues, if you are needing to break the flow of intercession by doing a mini-presentation before every new issue that needs prayer.

- Try wherever possible to use a striking image and an exemplary story, or a film which fulfils the same type of role, and then bring out more general prayer points that resonate with elements of the story or film.
- Try producing one slide to project with a number of different types of stimuli on it – an image, a short quote, a Bible verse, a statistic or factual statement etc... and allow people to use the ones that work for them...
- Changing everything at once is difficult, so try helping people by giving them a new stimulus and context to bring to a familiar prayer or song. This has the added bonus of not needing to introduce new and specific material to pray and worship in a different way. (For more ideas on this, see *Practical input – Exploring contextualisation to bring through justice themes* at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-articles)
- (Also see *Bringing outward focus to personal and small group devotions* at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-prayer for a few further ideas to try in smaller settings. Some of these ideas would work well converted into a series of prayer stations for your whole congregation to use, or work round, during an extended intercession time.)

Top tips when experimenting with new approaches

- **Go slow**
It's an obvious thing to say, but don't try everything all at once, or indeed even something every time. Remember that you are on a journey towards fuller expressions of worship. You will build something far more sustainable, and actually begin to impact the culture of your church far more, if you work at a slow pace. Remember that one dynamic of leading worship is pastoring – where is your congregation at? What pace and level of change is appropriate? How can you take your existing context and work with it to bring new things through.
- **Experiment small**
Try small steps first, and consider trying them out first in a safe context with a group of friends, small group, or your worship team. That way you can incorporate feedback and learn about what level of explanation is required to make any particular work.
- **Explain what you are doing and give permission**
It's important that new things you try don't simply leave the congregation feeling completely baffled, or unsure of what they should be doing. Make sure you give adequate explanation so people feel confident and safe, and remember to give permission. People need to know it's ok for them to step out of their usual approach, or your church culture, to try something new, and stating this releases people. Be patient with people too – like any of us learning a new language, we may well struggle to understand or engage with what's going on at first. Don't be frightened about the first steps towards other expressions becoming more normal feeling a little awkward to begin with. (Equally, remember these are just tools to help people meet God, and express their worship, so if something isn't working after you've tried it two or three times, be relaxed about letting it go.)
- **Affirm others who are stepping out**
If you or others in your church are releasing new arts or expressions of worship, and this involves other people stepping out to – perhaps a dancer, painter or photographer – make sure that these people are supported, encouraged, and given constructive, specific feedback. Ensure you build a sense of corporate journey, and recognise that these people are experimenting with how to do something different in what is largely a mono-culture. You will probably need to try a few different approaches to incorporating what they do, and it's important throughout this that they are secure in what they are doing, and remain focussed on who it's for.

▪ **Get trusted prayer support and feedback**

Stepping out into new things is challenging, and not everything we try works – especially not first time. You may well receive mixed feedback. It's important that you establish people who will pray for you as you step out, and also be there for you if you receive difficult comments. Try to also remember that whilst it's important to respond to feedback, you must also sometimes be willing to do what not everyone finds comfortable at first in order to move things forward. Do all things with love for others, but remember that it is for God first, and stay true to what you feel is right before him.

▪ **Don't let using different media become the goal of your worship**

Like everything, balance is important. It's important to liberate creativity for both the sake of your whole congregation, and the people who are gifted to create. But this should never be at the cost of theological balance, flow, freedom in the Spirit or continuity and stability. We have all witnessed times where novel ideas have inhibited rather than released people in worship, or simply proved more distraction than discovery – the purpose of our planning and leading must always be glorifying God, helping people meet him, and enabling them to better express their worship in response – sometimes that will mean trying something new, and sometimes it will mean staying with the familiar.