

Overview of the Worship Scripts from Dr. Marcia McFee

"Change is good, you go first!" I love this saying — I used to have a T-shirt that said this. It is so true. We know deep down that life is impossible without change–that change is inevitable. But oh my, the evolutionary resistance to change can be debilitating. We have inherited this natural tendency to feel apprehension about change from our ancestors who *had* to be suspicious of difference in order to survive. But this part of our psyche can cause us, and others, no end of frustration and fear. And it can keep our communities stuck in a way that prevents us from our joy and our passion for ministry.

I have received so many requests for a series that would address changes of all kinds: a pastoral change, a merger with another church, changes for churches that are to be celebrated and those that must be mourned. While I've had an old series called "Ready for a Change" in the Worship Design Studio "DIY" library for Lent, I wanted to create a fully-scripted one that could work for any time of year and any situation, no matter the circumstances of change. Certainly we are in the midst of big changes after the disruptions of the pandemics of our era. Embracing change and letting it "animate us" toward new possibilities is the work we must do in our day. I have created an auxiliary document about creating rituals to commemorate various kinds of change that you can use and adapt as a complement to this series.

This series doesn't start by assuming that we are "ready" for a change. Only in the fourth week of this series do we take the first step. We spend the first three weeks of this four-week series steeping ourselves in the idea that change is what we are made for…that we are actually made and equipped by a Creator that knew we would need to be partners and agents of change throughout history. We must be called to change. We must spend time discerning and deepening our understanding of the call that is luring us until we are ready to let go of "what was" in favor of the new creation.

The first week we hear biblical metaphors connecting us to the “clay” anchor image (most easily explored through Play-Doh but actual molding clay is also ok if you want to go that route). This malleability is in our DNA. Our neurological makeup equips us to adapt and change and explore and innovate. “Change or die” is not just a cliché, it is a mandate for our physical bodies and our spiritual, mental, and emotional health.

The second week reminds us that any change is first in “inside job” as we prepare our spirits for openness to change. Each week has an iconic children’s character reference to remind us — all children of God — of the lessons that help us grow. Gumby makes an appearance the first week, and in the second, we reference the amazing film, *Inside Out*, that personifies our inner emotions, fears, and dreams.

“Let it go” (a la *Frozen*) is what we’re after in the third week. Change can only happen when we are invited to let go of prior expectations and attachments to the things of life that really do not matter the most. Jesus tells his disciples that they must let go of their lives to really live it fully and make room for the deepest matters.

The last week, as I mentioned, is the one in which we affirm “first steps.” Elmo’s friends sing “Take the First Step” when he needs to embark on a difficult journey. Like Peter in the boat when Jesus calls him out on the water, we need to be reminded that we are not alone in this journey of life changes.

We are thrilled to have partnered with Rev. Lillie Brock on a series of interviews about The Change Cycle™ – a wonderful tool to help us understand what our brain and emotions do as we move through change. So many “aha’s” in these videos that will set up great conversations. See more about this in the Sermon Fodder and Small Group Study documents.

Jason Moore of Midnight Oil Productions created our logo and trailer animation. It is my pleasure to be collaborating with him in this series and also in the worship planning retreat we aptly named “Re-Shaped.” I highly recommend Jason’s new book on hybrid worship as you continue to discern how to hone “Both/And” techniques for reaching people in this new virus-susceptible environment. We learned so much about the joys of offering space and rhythm-flexible worship during the Covid-19 pandemic. We also learned **we CAN survive HUGE change**. Let’s keep it going!

Friends, the rest of this document lays out the order of worship for this series. As always, you are encouraged to adapt any of the materials and suggestions to make it a good fit for your congregation. Many blessings in this wild ride of life and faith. Never forget that you are not alone!

Peace & Passion,
Dr. Marcia McFee



This is me standing on a glacier in Alaska recently. Sometimes change can feel as slow as this… sometimes not!

Downloads
What's included and what to do with it

This Overview - have your whole team read this to get a good foothold on the theme and order

Scriptures and Synopses - this is your at-a-glance look at the movement of the series and the scriptures highlighted

Four Worship Scripts - you WILL adapt these for your context (tip: do this in one fell swoop before the season begins and you'll feel amazingly prepared and your team will thank you)

Children's Time Scripts - decide who is doing this and get it into their hands early so they can have fun with it, adapt it, and connect it to what children are doing in other settings like education

Communion Script - incorporate this into whatever weeks you are doing communion as you adapt your weekly scripts

Sermon Fodder - scan it pre-season so you know what is there then use it to help jumpstart your own sermon preparation each week

Visual and Media Ideas - make some time early in your planning process to go through the ideas with your team and land on how you'll apply the main images to your space then get folks working on it (the earlier, the more fun they'll have)

Music Documents and Files - there are two original songs that repeat weekly ("thread items") so have your musicians try it out (or decide to use the recordings) and then get together to actually try them out as you adapt the scripts for your context

Logo and Trailer - put your own branding on these early (directions in the Visual and Media Ideas doc) so you can begin to get the word out pre-season

Rites of Passage in Times of Change - if you are utilizing this series related to important changes in your community, take a look at this document that can help you create a specific ritual for your needs (pastoral change, building change, merger, etc) and decide what you need to create to help your communities mark the passages of change.

Individual and Small Group Study Suggestions and Ready-Made Guide - These are wonderful complimentary sessions to worship to help people dig deeper into the "why" and "how" of our processes of change.

Order of Worship

This series is designed to give you everything you need–all words, hymn and song suggestions, anthem and band/soloist suggestions, leader introductions, etc. But also please know that if you want to adapt to fit your current order of worship, you can easily lift any of the suggested material out of my scripts and place it in your more familiar structure.

The order of worship is the same each week. This goes with the concept I teach that repetition is a good thing and a solid foundation is necessary in order to be creative within it. Doing series can give you the opportunity to try on a slightly different order of worship or a different way of doing an element of the service for a season but keep it the same during that season, therefore offering some sense of familiarity and a rhythm. We have included a communion prayer separately from the scripts so you can fit that in whenever you have communion. If you do communion weekly, adapt by using that script as a model for how you might edit according to the theme each week. As always, adapt the communion prayer to fit your tradition.

The “Anchor Image” (main metaphor) for the series is molding clay like Play-Doh. You will see this image referenced in the liturgy, especially in a contemplative time after the sermon each week. See the Visuals and Media document for ideas about adapting the ideas in the script and creating a worship setting to highlight this theme’s messages and spiritual metaphors.

Music for Gathering

If you are a church that can play recorded music as people come in, we’ve curated a list of secular songs about change in the Music Document (there are a lot of them!) that you could choose from to play as people are gathering. Even if you do a traditional “Prelude,” think about having music playing as people gather to lighten the mood… because we are about to talk about change (ooooo…. scary).

Welcome

If you are new to Worship Design Studio series, you know that I’m a fan of being really hospitable and welcoming and having a couple (only a couple) of announcements (if you must) at the beginning before diving into the “threshold moment.” If you have Play-Doh containers in the pews/seats, you might let people know that this is for ALL the children of God, so don’t just hand it to families with children! I’ve written an example Welcome for the first week in this series in order to introduce the idea we all get to remember what it was like to be a child again, re-igniting our imagination and dreams for the “what’s next” of life, especially if it looks like it will be shifting and morphing beyond what we expected! Actually, I believe the “Welcome” starts as soon as people

enter the building and as you design your Worship Guide (what I call a bulletin) for each week, think about putting the main series synopsis on the front so visitors who come in the middle of the series can see “what’s a-goin-on!”

Enter the Play Zone

(Threshold Moment)

This concept of a “threshold moment” that I teach introduces people to the journey and the theme of the day at the beginning of the service so that every part of the service is seen through that thematic lens. I have created a threshold for this series with some of the elements that Worship Design Studio churches have come to know well–a spoken synopsis of the theme for the day, a theme song, and an opening prayer. I am thrilled to be collaborating with two of my favorite collaborators on the theme song (Chuck Bell) and prayer song (Mark Miller) for this series. The congregation will learn these right away! We are including recordings (with vocals and without) for churches that need that kind of help.

Opening Hymn/Song

We have chosen hymns (for more “traditional/classic” worship) and songs (for more “modern/contemporary” worship) as suggestions. But you can also feel free to adapt our suggestions if you choose. Just look at the hymns/songs we have chosen and try to find something that keeps the “essence of the message” but is something more beloved by your congregation. Here is the key to the abbreviations of songbooks we use:

GTG (Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA)
ELW (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)
LW (Lutheran Worship)
UMH (United Methodist Hymnal, UMC)
NCH (New Century Hymnal, UCC)
Chalice (Chalice Hymnal, DOC)
VU (Voices United, United Church of Canada)
VT (Voices Together, Mennonite Church USA/Canada)
FWS/STF (Faith We Sing/Sing the Faith, UMC, PCUSA)
W&S = Worship & Song (UMC)
W&R = Worship & Rejoice!
SP&P = Sing Prayer and Praise
MV = More Voices
URW = Upper Room Worshipbook
CMP = Convergence Music Project
Songselect (the database of CCLI)

Children's Time

This time draws on some well-loved animation characters to help us talk about change. These scripts are in a separate document from the main worship scripts.

Contemporary Reading

The first reading is one from contemporary literature that helps us in the journey of learning more about change. This reading my help you with your sermon or if you find something else that you'd rather have read in this slot as you work on your sermon, feel free to change from the one I've suggested. After all, this is all about change :)

A Word in Music

As with congregational song selections, we offer a classical/traditional choral option as well as a soloist/band-style option. You may wish to listen to the suggestions we made in the scripts and decide if they suit your choir or band. As always, please choose from your existing repertoire if that makes your preparation more doable. If you are a small church with very limited music resources, be sure to stay tuned into this Series Resource in the Worship Design Studio website to see if other churches are sharing recorded resources (or go there to share your own)! **Playing for Change??? option?**

Ancient Reading

This series is based on biblical readings that are not drawn from a lectionary. We have chosen one scripture per week that illuminates a concept about change but you could feel free to use another scripture if you think it makes the point in a better way, or add other scriptural readings as well. The WDS website series resource is a great place to start a conversation with other churches who are doing this series if you want to bat around more scriptural ideas! I have chosen The Message as the translation for this series in the scripts because I like the way Eugene Peterson's interpretation highlights being changed (even using that word more than other translations). But as always, feel free to change the translation you utilize.

Sermon

The Sermon Fodder document offers some insight for each week to help jumpstart your sermon preparation. We also offer a discussion group in the series resource on our website where you can connect with other preachers who are doing (or have done) this series. Check out the Small Group Suggestions document for other ideas of resources to supplement our notes and your own exegesis.

Play-Doh Contemplation

Each week we have suggested a tangible activity that people could do as a kind of hands-on meditation with Play-Doh. The leader part invites a question or metaphor about change that relates to that week. If you will not have Play-Doh in the pews/seats for your folks, think about creating space in the Worship Guide for journaling or come up with some other way for people to interact, such as prayer stations with Play-Doh.

Prayers of the People

Wipe away these tears, Lord, and end my night of weeping,
wash away the old ways, replace my pain with your joy!
Lord, I'm ready for a change, only you can make me change,
Lord, I'm ready for a change, only you can make me change,
only you can make me change, Lord, I'm ready for a change.

"Ready for a Change" is an as-yet-unpublished song from WDS favorite composer, Mark A. Miller. He has graciously given us permission to use and share (with credit) in our worship and online instances of worship. Two verses come before the intercessions (written out but, of course, adapt for your context if needed) and then silent prayer, confession and assurance, and Lord's Prayer. The intercession categories are the same each week but the confession wording is different based on each week's theme. Then the song returns with a bridge and verse to close. This is a gorgeous song that your congregation will love.

Offering

The call for offering ("Offering the Possibilities and Praise") would be a good time to highlight a new ministry or collaboration with another organization for change in your community. This is not scripted since this will be different for each church and the ways you are now collecting offering vary widely. The "Song of Commitment/Doxology" suggestion is an easy refrain, "Jesus, we are here," or use one that is more familiar to your congregation. Remember, in the face of several new and different things in a series, having some very familiar components can be stabilizing for some folx. I've written an offering prayer that changes slightly each week as the theme progresses.

[Communion]

This is the place where you can insert the communion script I have written on the weeks when that is appropriate for your tradition. Again, please adapt what I have written (this one is based largely on the ecumenical standard from 2nd century Hippolytus prayer) as needed to fit your tradition of the prayer before communion. If you commune weekly,

you may want to adapt the language I have written to include references from that week's scripture or message.

Closing Hymn/Song

Like the opening hymn/song, check out our suggestions for "classic" or "contemporary" choices and then discern if one of these work for your context!

Benediction

The blessing at the end of the service starts with a quote from our featured animation character followed by a triune blessing that is the same each week. Here is the Benediction from the first week as an example:

From the Gospel According to Gumby,
"Blessed are the flexible for they shall bend but not break."
Remember you were made to survive and thrive–especially during times of change.

Go into the world knowing
that the Potter God is still shaping and reshaping you as you were made to do;
that the Teacher Jesus is inviting you to a change of heart,
making it all so very possible;
and that the Adventurous Spirit is luring you to
more play and curiosity in your precious life."

Go in peace,
Stay in courage,
Amen!

Postlude

Let the Postlude in this series send people out in joy!

I hope this helps you get an at-a-glance feel for the scripts!

See the synopses for every worship experience in the series HERE

If you haven't purchased the series yet (free to WDS members), click HERE

If you'd like to get access to ALL our series, check out a Worship Design Studio subscription HERE