

Overview of the Worship Scripts
from Dr. Marcia McFee
Creator and Visionary of the Worship Design Studio

In considering what I would create in order to help the churches of the Worship Design Studio community continue in this pandemic with some relief after what will, no doubt, be an exhausting Advent/Christmas season, one word came to me: **simplicity.** I wanted to give churches a bit of a season of "the basics" before diving into Lent 2021. I decided to put together a service of prayer, testimony, and praise. I didn't want pastors and worship teams to have to do a lot of preparation. What I have created is more like a morning prayer service with the addition of reflection and testimony in its structure.

The addition of testimony from others helps us to "see" one another more. And it may serve to offer preachers some respite–alleviating the amount of time needing to prepare a traditional sermon. I have called the sermon a "reflection" to hopefully suggest a different format for this time. Preachers have been under such pressure to be THE bearers of a word of hope for many, many months now. But we are all empowered to speak a word of hope to one another. And this structure encourages that.

When it comes to scripture and prayer, the obvious choice to me was to turn to the Psalms. I looked at the Psalm lections for Year B in the Revised Common Lectionary and **a treasure of hope and comfort** presented itself.

And when I think about artists who know psalmody, my first thought goes to Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, a Lutheran composer-theologian-psalmist whose music helps us enter into the heart of each Psalm. And so this dear friend agreed to write several new compositions for this series–songs that invite us to the essence of each reading. As I have prepared images for his offerings, I have been steeped in the praise, lament, petition, and assurance of the ancient songs of our spiritual ancestors.

Another inspiration came from dear friends of the Order of St. Luke, a religious order rooted in the Wesleyan tradition dedicated to sacramental and liturgical scholarship, education, and practice. Their 2020 publication of *A Lukan Psalter according to the usage of The Order of Saint Luke* is the source of the translation of the Psalms that I am recommending and use in the scripts. It utilizes primarily *The Inclusive Bible* but also some adaptations of their own to provide **the most poetic and lyrical versions I know.** If you want to learn an ancient practice still in use today, this volume includes instructions and notations for chanting some of the Psalms. Included in this series is an interview about this with one of the editors, Rev. Dr. Dwight Vogel.

This overview will give you a sense of **what's included each week in the order of worship**. The package also includes ideas for Visuals, suggestions for further study on the Psalms and a video trailer you can customize for use in publicity (or call it "evangelism" if you want). But also please know that if you want to **adapt these materials 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. Additionally, if a simpler order of worship is not what you want at this time, you can add more hymnody to create the full service to which you are accustomed. We have not made hymn/song or anthem suggestions for this series since the recommendation is to keep the service short. You may want to start the service with a familiar hymn or song of your choosing.

The order of worship is the same each week. This goes with the concept I teach that **repetition is a good thing in ritual 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 that flows**. We have included a communion prayer separately from the scripts so you can insert that 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 **cupped hands**. This is a good anchor image that symbolizes (“point towards something larger than itself”) a place where we are held and that can hold our concerns, our anxieties, and our insecurities. It also offers a very tangible way to pray as you will see in our suggestion for folks to create a simple bowl or box at home to add their prayers to during the service and perhaps also throughout the week. In this way we are reminded to let go into the care of God those things we cannot control. Worshiping online–whether livestream or pre-recorded is helped by ritual actions that keep us present and worshipful in our homes. Cupped hands also offer a wonderful prayer posture to use, inviting us to an embodied expression wherever we are.



My prayers are with you in this time, friends. May this series help you, your team, and your congregation be sustained and assured in this ongoing time of difficulty.

Peace & Passion,
Dr. Marcia McFee
Creator and Visionary,
Worship Design Studio

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

Prelude

A mentor of mine said that “music is a social lubricant” and suggested that as one enters a space (be it physical or virtual), there should always be music to set a mood and tone for the gathering. This is especially true of online gatherings. In this series, I suggest that the “entrance” to the time together be a recorded loop of visuals and music that helps set a tone of calm (because calm, as well as anxiety or any other emotion, can be contagious).

Welcome and Announcements

Do this as is your custom and then move to a sentence that will transition folks into the “threshold moment.” The first week is a longer introduction to the whole series and then I have suggested something like “Let us seek to simplify this moment, slow down for a time. Let us worship, leaning on prayer, reflection and sharing with one another” for subsequent weeks.

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 everything in worship is seen through that lens. This section is one of the video packages that I have created and includes the logo imagery at the very beginning along with the synopsis for the week. Then one of the verses and refrain from the theme song (“God is Holding Your Life”) is sung. The this song has three verses so I have divided them such that the first verse is sung the first two weeks, etc. and the 7th week has all three verses–the whole song for the last week of the series. I have provided two versions of these videos: one with my voice reading the synopsis and one without a VoiceOver so that you can edit your own voice(s) into the video.

Opening Collect Prayer

After the video, I have written a prayer for each week that is in an ancient prayer form called a “collect.” This prayer form has five parts: 1) name for God; 2) why we call God by this name; 3) a petition asking God for something; 4) why we are asking for this… “so that…”; 5) a sentence of praise. This is one of the most meaningful ways to teach people to write simple prayer liturgy (my seminary students always have fun with this). If you are holding a small group associated with this series, it might be fun to invite people to try their own hand at this form. Here is an example from Week 1:

Leader: Holy and Just God,
You have shown us what is right and good.
Open us this day to a vision of the world made all-right
so that we might follow your ways and know the peace of your reign
on earth as it is in heaven.
***People:* We praise you for your steadfast presence,**
holding our lives together in love.
Amen.

Psalm Reading

We dive now into the Psalm for the week. The translation, as I said above, is from *The Lukan Psalter*. You may choose various ways of reading this–one voice, several voices taking turns at line breaks, or even chanting some of them (see my interview with Dwight Vogel about this). Because the following song has images included, it is a good idea just to feature the reader(s) visually for this series.

Psalm Song

Richard Bruxvoort Colligan has written new songs featuring the Psalms in our series. These songs are preceded by an introduction from Richard himself! Then the song follows with imagery to help us enter visually into the "feel" or "ethos" of the text. The refrains to Richard's songs are easy to catch onto so those who want to sing along will do so easily. I am also including a version of the song video in the downloads that does not have Richard's introduction so you could post it to your YouTube or Facebook page and encourage people to watch it throughout the week, perhaps as a daily prayer.

Reflections and Testimonies

This is where the typical "sermon" would be in the order of worship. Hopefully by calling it something other than "sermon," the expectations will loosen a bit to offer a break for the preacher. A short reflection by the pastor about the Psalm could be followed by testimony by members about how they have felt God "holding their lives" in this last year and moving forward. You may choose to ask one person to speak (live or prerecorded) or you may make a collage of short statements from several people (solicit written or video testimonies to weave throughout the series). Again, I urge you to do what is "do-able" for YOU and your team and resources–not too complicated–just heartfelt.

Sung Reprise

The refrain of the theme song is repeated–either once at the end of the Reflections and Testimonies or as a woven thread between reflections and testimonies.

"Selah" Moment

The Psalms have a repeated direction throughout–the word "Selah." Scholars are not sure exactly what it means. Perhaps because the Psalms were to be used in worship, we can surmise that the word indicates a pause, or an invitation for a musical instrument to be played. In this worship series, we will use this mysterious word to denote a time of settled silence and sense of being held. You will use an instrumental sound of some kind (chime, bell, gong, singing bowl, rain stick) to take a pause and settle in silence for a bit. The instrumental sound will indicate the end of the silence.

Prayers of the People

Each week the beginning of the prayers of the people includes a moment of writing concerns on small pieces of paper and placing in a bowl or box that acts as a stand-in for cupped hands (it can have a photo or drawing of cupped hands on it as we have suggested in the Visual and Media document). You can do this where you are (Zoom live or pre-recorded at home or sanctuary) and your folks can do this at home. Then the continuing prayers could be done as is familiar to your folks. We all need the comfort of familiarity in these times. However, I have also provided an intercessory litany of concerns if you'd like to incorporate that into the prayers.

Sung Prayer Response

A beautiful song by Fred Kaan, "Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands," has been a favorite of mine for a long time. It seemed perfectly suited to our series with its hands anchor image. David Horton, WDS Trainer-in-Training and musician extraordinaire, has created music tracks that you can use for this song. You will need a OneLicense streaming license to post this song in public (https://onelicense.net/how-it-works#podcast). Substitute another public domain prayer song if you do not have, or cannot get, this license.

The Sung Prayer Response incorporates a Passing of the Peace by extending cupped hands in the direction of the camera (for Zoom live),

Communion Liturgy

I have written a communion liturgy for this series that draws on the idea of "Selah." Insert this whenever your community celebrates the Eucharist. It also features a soundtrack by David with the same song as the prayer response or use the words of the liturgy without the song woven throughout. As always, adapt my liturgy to align with your denomination's communion practice.

Benediction

The blessing at the end of the service is the same each week, reminding us that we are held and we are called to hold each other:

Now go in the knowledge that
God is holding your life
even as we hold each other.
You are not alone.
You are loved.
Amen.

Postlude

The postlude is at your discretion. Again, if you want to make this a fuller service, you would add another hymn/song before closing.

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