

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

I was a senior in high school when "Urban Cowboy" came out and we all started singing along with Johnny Lee, "lookin' for love in all the wrong places, looking for love in too many faces…" Well, as the saying goes, "story of my life!" But isn't it the story of most of our lives, whether or not we've had hiccups with our relationships over the years? We've looked for "love"–for meaning, purpose, satisfaction, security (however you describe it) in so many things that actually haven't given us the depth of "what we're dreaming of," so says the song.

Lent is traditionally a time to revisit our priorities. I hope this worship series will give your community a lens through which to do just that. The lectionary scriptures for RCL Year A mention "love" and "heart" over and over. And so I went searching for what our faith narrative was saying about true love. Each week offers us a model of love based on the stories of Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection. And each week we consider the opposites that show up, often valued in our culture, in those things that are distracting us: fame, money, control, possessions, power, certainty, unhealthy relationships, or addictions. When we look to these things for the love we crave, we are sorely disappointed. And yet, as another song goes, "what the world needs now is love."

This overview will give you a sense of **what's included each week in the order of worship**. 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.

The order of worship is the same each week (with the exception of Palm Sunday to accommodate a processional). 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 Scrabble tiles: a symbol of searching to make sense, make meaning. Often, we can't see what to make of the mess of letters we draw in this game, just as sometimes it is difficult to see how to make sense of the mess of our lives. But if we keep at it, we can be surprised at the clarity that comes. When we turn toward God's LOVE, we see all kinds of possibilities emerge.

For this series, we have made several different suggestions for your small group study or individual devotions. Because the categories of ways we are distracted will resonate differently for various folx, you will perhaps choose to offer different subject-related groups: such as healthier relationships with partners, or money, or technology, or possessions. You know your community best, so take some preparation time to figure out what offerings will be the most beneficial.

My prayers, as always, are with you. Thank you for all you are and do on behalf of the faith community and its work in the world.

Peace & Passion,
Marcia McFee, PhD

Creator and Visionary
Worship Design Studio



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 from the RCL, Year A.

Nine 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 songs that repeat weekly as "thread items," so have your musicians try them out, and then get together to actually try it in the space 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.

Small Group Suggestions - Take a look at our myriad suggestions and decide if you want to organize study groups. You'll want to look at these early to dream about and plan for the possibilities for your context.

Individual Reflection Journal Pages - We like to help you facilitate the reverberations of the theme throughout each week, so we have created pages for individual journaling. These pages are not dependent on being in worship, so feel free to share them with the wider community in creative ways.

Access to the wider Worship Design Studio Community - You are never alone in your work of worship preparation. You can be in conversation with others doing this series for resource and idea sharing!

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

WE GATHER

Music for Gathering (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. We leave the choice of “feel” and content to your musicians/ musical curators.

Welcome

We suggest a brief welcome at the beginning to start worship, but save your announcements for the end of the service if possible (see the “Nurturing Love” section towards the end of this worship order).

Threshold

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. For our theme song, one of our beloved WDS musical collaborators, Mark Miller, has created an arrangement for you out of his stunning anthem, “Show Us How to Love,” that your congregation will come to…well, love. This song is woven with the synopsis introduction to the theme for the week. Listen to a recording of the song HERE.

Confession and Assurance

This series features a prayer of confession that invites us to take an open and honest stance before God, made possible by knowing that God’s love is not dependent on our merits. The theme of the day and the Psalm for the week help us to “turn around” (repent) and move toward love. If you are celebrating Holy Communion and your tradition places the confession nearer to the Great Thanksgiving after the Word Proclaimed, move this liturgy to that position.

Peace

We suggest a repeated motion in this series for passing the peace. Cross arms across your chest (similar to the sign language for “love”) and then as you open your arms out, make the “peace sign” with two fingers. This is especially helpful if touching or hugging

is not desired for health reasons in this “post-ish” pandemic time. See my demonstration HERE.

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)
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)

WE PROCLAIM

Children’s Time

These scripts are located in a separate document that makes the ideas easy to access for those who are preparing to lead. Children’s Time focuses on what it means to be “Resister,” “Helper,” “Thirst-Quencher,” “Shepherd,” “Liberator,” “Unexpected,” and “Winner” for Love.

Song of Preparation for the Word

We are suggesting a thread song to weave throughout the proclamation of the Word by another friend of Worship Design Studio and prolific hymn composer, Dan Damon. “Love Us Into Fullness” is easy and each verse is brief, allowing the message to continue even in transitions of worship when people are making their way to microphones for reading scripture.

First Reading

Each week, a scripture from the Hebrew texts have been chosen, often (but not always) the Psalm. The translation we have chosen is listed in each script, but feel free to use other translations as you see fit.

Video Testimony

We have created a beginning and ending for a testimonial video, and you are encouraged to make your own video recording of someone talking about something they do that has created more love in their lives. Each testimony could begin: “I have found an expression of love in _____.”

Second Reading

This is the Gospel reading from the lectionary. Again, adapt the translation as necessary. Many of these texts are narrative texts, making them good opportunities for several voices, or to give the congregation the voice of Jesus (week 1) or Nicodemus (week 2), for example.

The 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.

Sermon

We offer you Sermon Fodder to help jumpstart your sermon preparation. The Worship Design Studio website is also a place where preachers who are working on this series can connect and collaborate!

WE RESPOND

Prayers of the People

I love a good “Kyrie,” and there are so many to choose from. For this series, I have suggested my favorite with a nod to a beloved mentor, Pablo Sosa, who passed away not long ago. His lyrical refrain has longing tones in it as we ask for God’s mercy. It is woven between four sets of intercessions. Each week the categories are the same (prayers for the world, our communities, our homes, our selves), but the wording is unique for each week. The Prayers of the People conclude with the Lord’s Prayer. If you celebrate communion every week, you may decide to edit the number of times you sing based on length of service. You may have a favorite Kyrie musical setting that you prefer to use. Remember, adaptation is welcome with our scripts!

Offering

We suggest that the format and manner of doing the offering can be one that is familiar to your congregation in this moment.

Communion

I have written a communion liturgy based on an ecumenical format that can be inserted whenever your community celebrates the Eucharist. As always, adapt my liturgy to align with your denomination’s communion practice. The prayer incorporates the hymn “All Who Hunger,” but the liturgy is fine without its incorporation as well.

GO FORTH

Nurturing Love

For this series, we suggest sharing your announcements just before the closing hymn. We think this will help you discern which announcements really are necessary and how the life of your church outside worship is contributing to more love in the world!

Closing Hymn/Song

Again, adapt as needed by looking at what I have chosen and determining if it feels like what I have chosen will work for your congregation. Most of the choices in this series involve generally familiar tunes.

Benediction

The Benediction combines a call and response based on the week's theme and then you are encouraged to finish it with language as is your tradition. Here is a preview of Week One:

Go forth into the world, looking for love in all the right places!
We will look for signs of The Resister,
working against injustice wherever we find it!
And now… *[your traditional Benediction language]*

Postlude

As with the Prelude, we leave this choice up to your musicians.

We 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