



HOW TO START A WORSHIP BAND

EQUIPPING WORLD-CHANGING DISCIPLES UMCdiscipleship.org



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WHERE TO BEGIN?

The world we live in is always changing. Church is no different. Traditional worship services that feature congregations singing hymns accompanied by piano or organ still have their place, but more and more churches are finding that a praise or worship band can add a diversity of styles to their worship experience and help them to reach people in their ministry context.

Does your church need a worship band? Before answering yes or no, it is important to read through this booklet. Here you will explore the ins and outs of starting a worship band: communication – both within the band and to the congregation, recruiting, budgeting, band covenant and expectations, the importance of planning, roles of pastor and music director, music selection, your first practice, supporting technology, and taking the worship band outside the church walls. We encourage you to discuss this guide with other key leaders in your church who will help make this decision. Hopefully after reviewing this booklet, you will have a better idea of what is expected and what to expect. Then will you be able to determine if creating a worship band is right for your church.



TRADITIONAL, CONTEMPORARY, BLENDED - OH MY!

TRADITIONAL/LITURGICAL WORSHIP: Typically includes written prayers, call and response readings (written liturgy), sermons based on the Revised Common Lectionary, hymns from a hymnal, piano and/or organ accompaniment, and choral anthems sung by a choir (may sometimes include a bell choir).

CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP: Generally includes a worship band with song leaders, contemporary music projected on screens, more spontaneous prayers by the worship leader or pastor, topical or sermon series, unison readings scored by light music.

BLENDED WORSHIP: A mix of traditional and contemporary worship elements.

EMERGING WORSHIP: Representing the cutting edge of worship for the next generations. Usually described as ancient-future, finding new ways to express old truths and traditions. Multisensory, heavy on imagery/art, candles, and the “smells and bells” of ancient worship. Very eclectic musical styles changing week to week.

What is right for your church? Many churches are finding that regardless of the style, the most important characteristic is excellence (a theme you will see throughout this pamphlet). As you consider whether or not to add a worship band, take the time to talk with your pastor or worship team about the type of service where the band will play. Also talk about the demographics of your church and the type of people your church is trying to serve in worship. If it is a more traditional service, are you hoping to add strings or more classical elements? If you are starting a contemporary service, do you want to build an entire band? Is this a more informal service where simple accompaniment is all that is needed? Are you looking to create a multigenerational service with a more eclectic blended feel? The possibilities are endless, but it is important to first have this discussion to set the parameters of what you are trying to create. Regardless of what you choose, make sure your worship reflects solid United Methodist theology throughout and invites participants into a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.¹

¹ *Be flexible and attentive as you start your worship service; you may find a difference between your target worship group and who actually shows up each week. Be prepared to regroup and shift your worship styles and worship planning in order to best serve those gathered for worship.*



PREPARING THE CONGREGATION

Once you know the type of worship and have decided to start a worship band, begin the communication immediately with the congregation. Your goal is to prepare your congregation for new elements, sharing why they are being introduced and educating them on what they can expect.

CULTIVATING A SELFLESS WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

See this communication with the congregation as an opportunity to build a healthy understanding of worship. Perhaps you could create a fellowship gathering where the pastor and worship team share some of their initial thoughts about adding a worship band. Invite those gathered to reflect on their preferences in worship styles and talk about how a worship service would be fairly different from person to person if each created his or her own. Find ways to help your congregation explore why getting away from personal preference may be a healthier way to approach worship.

Weekly worship is an important part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In worship we find community, time for reflection and prayer, time for praise and thanksgiving, time for learning and study, and time to be drawn closer to God. Worship is the gathering of a group of people - a community. It is not about one person's, or even a small group of people's, preferences. Rather, worship is about "us" – collectively, gathering together. "Us," by definition, always includes a wide variety of people and preferences. It should always include those who are present in the service as well as those who are not yet here. If you are trying to reach a particular group of people based on the changing demographics in your community, share what you are learning about that group of people with your congregation. Consider prayer walks around your church in order to get to know your community better. Ask people that you encounter, if they were to go to a church, what would they be looking for in a worship service.

If you find that changes in worship are necessary in order to better serve the community around you, begin to prepare your congregation for the upcoming changes. Focus on helping your current congregation become more selfless in worship. If you are making a change in the style of worship, or adding more diversity in offered services, encourage worshipers to suspend their judgement when they do not prefer a particular worship style. Ask them to look around and observe who might be appreciating that style in that moment. Invite them to give thanks to God that, although this style or element does not speak to them, it is drawing someone closer to God. Invite worshipers to trust that God is able to speak to them in any style of worship. Help worshipers to recognize the body of Christ is wide and diverse, and this is something for which to be grateful!

As you begin to communicate to the congregation, make sure you communicate early and often using all forms of communication (pulpit, newsletter, e-mail, Facebook - however your congregation communicates). Consider helping those interested in the worship band to express their hopes and how they think it will enhance worship. Talk about being able to involve more people in worship, using their various musical talents to God's glory. Do not assume that worship preferences are strictly generational; when all styles of worship are done with excellence, we find that older generations grow to love and appreciate contemporary elements, AND younger generations grow to love and appreciate traditional elements!



FORMING THE BAND

mu•sic (ˈmyū-zik) noun. *vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion.* (Google definitions)

Music is a universal language that has the power to move us in remarkable ways. Whether one is a follower of Christ

or not, chances are, when asked about a favorite musician, singer, or band, everyone has an answer. When creating a worship band, the most important characteristic of the band members is for them to have a love and appreciation for both music and for producing excellent, beautiful music. Even if the musicians who are asked to be a part of the band are not all disciples of Christ, do not underestimate the power of God's grace working through moments of worship to influence the journey of each band member.

RECRUITING

Everyone either sings, plays an instrument, or knows someone who does. Recruiting is about asking and looking around! For those with access to the church Facebook page, take note of members who post pictures showing themselves playing an instrument or singing. Look at photos around the church building. Ask around for those who may sing in the community choir, school choir, or play an instrument in the school marching band or orchestra. It is perfectly fine to start small and add musical elements one at a time. Do not feel like you have to start with a full band. If you only have a good singer and a guitar player, start there. Every time you lead worship, make sure you communicate what you are looking for next (we are looking for a drummer, a bassist, a sound technician, etc.). You will be surprised how often people either step forward to volunteer or mention someone they know who might want to join.

As the band grows and you mention the band's needs, you will also discover who in the congregation are supporters of the band. These folks may readily offer funds for the new sound board or microphones. Thank these band supporters publicly and with a note every time they contribute to the music program! Their positivity is invaluable to your musicians doing a new thing in worship, and their excitement may be infectious across the congregation. Work with the support you have, encourage it, and build upon it.

FOCUS ON EXCELLENCE

When forming a worship band, begin with an emphasis on excellence in music quality. Excellence will draw talented musicians to the program and, as mentioned above, will unearth members who want to contribute to the music program budget. Just as high quality music will move musicians to want to be a part of your worship band, poor quality will deter talented singers and musicians from wanting to join your band.

Why excellence? When we think about gathering to worship God, should we not bring the best that we have to offer?

And He (Jesus) said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38, ESV)

We should be loving God with all that we have and with all that we do – including how we share our gifts in worship. Therefore, we must take the time needed to produce excellent music at every worship service. This will involve regular practices and an honest approach by all band members to be dedicated to keeping the music quality high (see section on practice). Why? Because excellence in worship creates the space where God can move in the lives of people. Excellence in worship draws people closer to God and closer to one another.



COMMUNITY BAND, WORSHIP BAND, BOTH?

Be intentional early on about wanting to create consistent excellence in worship. If you are not careful, it is easy for the band to be seen as the place where *everyone* can sing and play regardless of talent. Although this in itself is invitational, and indeed church is the place where people should be able to explore and share their gifts, when it comes to creating a worship service that draws people closer to God, having

mediocre musicians or singers will not help you reach that goal. At the same time, the worship band can be a place where new talent can work alongside those with a higher level of skill with the intent of mentoring them in leading worship with excellence. Some people may be learning band-related skills and may develop into good musicians. Encourage these folks to practice and take lessons in order to improve their skills. If they continue to improve, you should make efforts to incorporate them into the band. Some people, although they may love music and your worship band, may fall short of excellence in musical talents. Find a way to allow them to support the band in other ways (sound technician, powerpoint operator, tambourine, etc.). Whatever you do, be honest and work gracefully with all who express interest. Ultimately, if your worship service becomes the performance venue for the outcasts from *American Idol*, people will stop coming to worship.



BAND COMMUNICATION

Communication within a band is extremely important. If band members are not communicating properly, there is no way they will be on the same page (literally) when worship starts. Here are a few questions to ask: Do the band members use e-mail, Facebook, text, or phone calls to communicate? It will be important for the band leader to set a standard communication method for the team:

1. **BEFORE/DURING:** Have the band agree to one form of communication. Whether it is email or a private Facebook group, the band has to agree that the method chosen will be for the good of the band AND that they will be sure to check that source frequently to receive updates and give feedback.
2. **AFTER:** Is the agreed-upon method working? Once the early enthusiasm wears off and old habits creep back into everyone's individual lives, the band leader may have to resort to communicating with some members one way and other members another way.

We strongly recommend that worship bands invest in a communication tool such as Planning Center in order to make communication with band members simple and consistent.

The band leader must also take into consideration how much time each member needs in order to prepare for a practice at home and factor this into the band communications. A system should be set up so that every Sunday afternoon, or Monday morning (or whenever works for your band), the band leader gets all of the week's relevant information to members. An even better goal would be to plan a month or two ahead so that people who need extra time to practice can plan accordingly.

NEGATIVITY & CONFLICT

Do not let negativity fester. We are all human, and occasionally a conflict will arise within the band or between band members. The band leader needs to be aware of conflict and, when possible, reach out to those who are having trouble. Approach the person or persons out of concern and determine the issue. Ask open-ended questions to make sure the communicated issue is the actual issue. If possible, do your best to resolve the issue. Avoid triangulation: if the problem is with another band member, encourage band members to resolve the issue with one another, using Christian principles (Matthew 18:15-20). Be on the look out for signs of conflict: an unprepared band member, unexpected absences, or negative comments are all signs that something is going on with that person. Approach the person first with concern and see how you or the rest of the band might be supportive. Sometimes you may find it necessary to encourage a band member to take a break from the band if regular conflict is occurring. Be sure to continue to reach out to that person during the break, keeping him or her in the loop on all band-related activity. If a break is taken and the person feels cut-off, you may permanently lose that band member. If he or she feels connected and cared for during the break, that person will be more likely to come back when the issues are resolved. If conflict goes unresolved, you run the risk of losing multiple band members later when the conflict escalates.



BUDGET, EQUIPMENT, & APPRECIATION

How much does all this cost? Well, it depends on the type of band, the size of your church, and how you decide to present the music. Remember: you do not have to start big. You can add equipment and improve/upgrade equipment as your program grows.

SIZE OF SANCTUARY & BUDGET

If your band consists of two acoustic guitars and two vocalists, and your sanctuary holds 100 people, you probably need only a small sound system. With this size sanctuary, choose a sound system where the guitars can plug directly in, along with two or three microphones, and 2-3 monitors. (Do not forget to obtain microphone and music stands.) Such a sound system will cost from \$1,500 to \$2,000. You may also check with your conference to see if grant money is available for enhancing worship.

As the number of band members and vocalists increases, or if you have a relatively large sanctuary space, the sound system will need to increase as well. Do not let this be a deterrent; you do not have to buy a new system. Ask around to see if any local churches are looking to upgrade their sound system and may want to sell their old system. You may also be able to find used sound systems online. Do not forget that pursuing excellence also includes the sound system. The better the system, the better your worship band will sound, and the more people will come forward wanting to support the band's ministry. If you have a sound system that constantly has problems, this will both frustrate band members and take away from the meaningful worship experience you are trying to create.

WHERE TO BUY EQUIPMENT

Most equipment can now be purchased online. There you will find products and information guides that will help you determine what you need. Do not buy much more than you

need, but plan for growth. You may want to consider buying a sound board with 5-6 extra channels so that you will not need to buy another board in 6 months as your band grows.

You may also try your local music retailer for your equipment needs. Do not forget to ask for a non-profit discount! (Or, you may feel bold enough to ask the store for a donation. You may offer to share the store's goodwill publicly in worship and remind the store that a donation is tax deductible). The upside to buying online is that the prices are usually much cheaper; the downside is that you will not be able to see and try out the product like you can in a music store. (Returns can also be more difficult with online purchases.)

You will also need to consider other costs such as sheet music and annual CCLI license subscription. CCLI is a licensing company that provides ways for churches to reprint song lyrics, download chord sheets (depending on the subscription level), and work within the legal system of copyright. For more information and the terms of agreement, visit www.ccli.com. CCLI also allows you to change the key of the selected music. Check with your pastor or church administrator to see if your church already has a CCLI subscription.

Another important thought to discuss as you start the band: Do band members get reimbursed for equipment purchases? If the drummer breaks a pair of sticks during a service, does the church pay him/her back when he buys another set? What about guitar strings? Some musicians will see these elements as a part of their musical gift to the church, but do not take these things for granted. You would not want someone to decide not to participate in the band because he or she could not afford the upkeep on an instrument. If it means setting aside an extra \$150 a year in your band budget, it is well worth it so members can serve in this way without undue financial stress.

As you plan what you will need for your band, take some time with the pastor, administrator, or church finance chair

to plan out your budget for the year. Revisit this budget each year and determine whether or not you have adequate funds for your ministry. You may also want to ask if a line item for special music can be added to the budget. Sometimes it is nice to be able to add a unique instrument for a special Sunday (trumpets for Easter, violin or timpani for Good Friday, etc.). Having the ability to pay a musician once in a while will add to the quality of your program. If this happens, you will need to keep your regular musicians in the loop and let them know that since it is a special occasion, and a unique instrument, the church is paying a one-time honorarium for that person. Again, communication is very important here. Do not hide the fact that a guest musician may get paid. Explain the reasoning to the band members so they truly understand.

APPRECIATION

Since many musicians will be offering their time and talent as a part of their gift to the church, like any gift of time or talent, you will need to find a special time each year to celebrate the ministry and give thanks for its participants. From the worship leader up to the senior pastor, encourage the leadership of your church to regularly let your musicians know how valued they are and how much their gifts add to the worship service.



PERFORMANCE VS. WORSHIP

It is important as you are starting your worship band to discuss the difference between performance and worship.

performance: an activity (such as singing a song or acting in a play) that a person or group does *to entertain an audience*.

worship: the act of showing respect and love for God especially by praying, singing, and liturgy with other people in a community with shared beliefs.

(Merriam-Webster)

Regularly remind band members that what the band does at each worship service is to lead, facilitate, and be an extension of God's grace that draws people closer to God. It is never about the individual "performing," but rather about each individual member's willingness to offer the gift of music for the good of the whole community. This is why we pursue excellence in worship and do not settle for mediocrity. If our part in worship lacks excellence and causes those who have gathered to worship to be distracted or repelled by what we offer, we have not been the instruments that God needs for us to be.

With a focus on excellence, it becomes easier to choose who sings or plays lead on what songs. The answer is: whoever sounds best. Band members might be invited to contribute to that decision process, but ultimately all must respect the decision of the band leader.



BAND COVENANT & EXPECTATIONS

As you develop your worship band, you may want to consider writing a short, one-page covenant listing the essential expectations of band members. You may include (but are not limited to):

- Punctuality (practice & worship)
- Dress Code
- Preparedness
- Code of Conduct
- Music Suggestion Process
- Avoiding Negativity
- Understanding Worship vs. Performance
- Role of Worship Leaders
- Vision & Mission of the Church
- Safe Sanctuary Policy
- Proper Use of Sanctuary & Church Facility
- Storage of Instruments

It would be wise to create such a covenant during your first practice together. Remember to review the covenant once a year or whenever a new member joins the band.



WORKING WITH THE PASTOR

The pastor is ultimately responsible for worship. It is critical that the pastoral and lay leadership of the church are on board with the creation of a worship band. The pastor, lay leader, and church council of the church should have already established, together with the worship team, why a worship band is being added to the service, the goals of the addition, and how they will evaluate the effectiveness of the change. If a staff person is **hired** to lead the worship band, the job description and evaluation process should be created by the **staff/parish relations committee**. If the worship band leader will be a **volunteer** from the church, the job description and evaluation process should be created by the **committee on nominations and leadership development**. Clear goals and objectives should be set and understood by both the pastor and the worship band leader (you cannot judge what you have not first clarified!). Also make sure that a liaison is established, separate from the pastor, to be of support to the new worship leader and to be a link back to the SPRC or committee on leadership development.

The worship band leader will work with either the pastor or music director to make sure each week's worship services are planned out. Beyond the SPRC or committee on leadership development, the band leader will need to have initial conversations with the pastor to better understand what is required of the worship band. We recommend the band leader have regularly scheduled meetings with the pastor in order to stay on the same page when it comes to the selection of music and planning of worship. Understanding your pastor's theology of worship and how each song selection works together to create a worship service is an ongoing conversation.

Questions to regularly discuss with the pastor:

- How does each selection of music fit into the whole vision or theme of the service?
- What mood or tone is each selection trying to create?
- What theological purpose does each selection serve (praise, lament, quiet reflection, etc.)?
- Is the song selection preparing the congregation for the message that will follow, or is it the exclamation point at the end of the message?

Answering these questions together for every worship service will ensure that your worship planning is in line with the pastor's vision for the service. Do not forget to communicate this information each week back to the band members. Doing so will help them better understand the importance of selections and how their offering of song fits into the larger picture and intent of worship.



WORKING WITH A MUSIC DIRECTOR

Some churches have a music director to whom the band director will report. Do not assume that the music director is on board with adding a worship band. It is not always the case that new worship styles are wholeheartedly embraced by all. Make sure your music director knows and understands all of the conversations that led up to adding the worship band. The music director should also be included in the regularly scheduled meetings with the pastor and worship band leader so you are all on the same page.

If your music director will also be your band leader, do not assume that your music director has the skills needed to coordinate a band. There is a difference between playing by yourself and playing with a band, and there is a difference between accompanying a choir and playing a keyboard or piano with a band. Some music directors can adjust and do

this well, while others might struggle to make the necessary shift. If this is how your discussion around a band has come about, important questions to ask are:

- Will the music director be the leader of the band?
- Does s/he have the skills?
- Is s/he willing to learn?

It is here that the music director must be honest with him/herself and with the church so that the new worship band can have a healthy foundation. If these questions are not asked up front, many problems may develop. Some may say yes up front only to find no joy in the new process and new band. The director may seem to support the band from the outside, but might inwardly resent the change. If the music director is given added responsibility, will there be added compensation? Look carefully and list how the addition of a band will affect your music director if he or she is to take on both roles:

- How often will the band lead worship?
- How many practices will that entail?
- Will there be extra practices to prepare for Easter & Christmas?
- What compensation will be paid for the extra responsibilities?

Are there additional questions you need to ask in order to be honest and up front with *your* music director? Every case is different, because every music director and church context is unique.



PLANNING & PURPOSE

Nothing frustrates a team as much as being unprepared. What also frustrates worship band members is when music selections or worship service themes are perceived to be thrown together at the last minute. When this happens, people cannot offer their best, and excellence is impossible. The earlier a pastor and worship team plan the worship calendar and themes, the more time your band will have for creativity and preparation. Planning ahead as much as possible reduces stress for all involved and allows band members to work toward excellence.

Just as a lack of planning frustrates a team, a lack of a clear purpose will drain the team's motivation. Help your worship band understand the important part it plays in the whole of ministry. Help band members understand how particular songs support the theme or message of the worship service. Always make sure that your worship band knows the "why" of what worship bands do – like the gathering of worship itself, it is not about us, it is not about the band, it is about being a part of an experience that helps those gathered draw closer to God, give thanks and praise to God, and grow in their faith. The band, as a part of the worship service, ultimately helps those gathered to be who God calls them to be. Continually remind your worship team of their purpose!



WORSHIP BAND AS SMALL GROUP

With any ministry group, any team, and any committee in the church, if we are not first and foremost caring for one another, then we need to stop everything and refocus. Your worship band will only be as strong as its individual members, and those individuals are always growing, learning, and seeking deeper meaning for their lives. If your worship band devolves into quick practices that only cover the songs for the worship service and brief encounters before and after worship, or if your time together becomes something you

have to do - a chore - you might as well stop. However, if your worship band becomes a place for regular fellowship and extended conversations beyond the worship practice, then your band will become a healthy small group and a healthy ministry of the church.

Make time for (and budget for) opportunities for fellowship outside of rehearsals. Every other month, consider taking the band out after practice to a late meal at a diner or restaurant, gather in one another's homes for celebrations and holidays, or have a talent show for the band and all their family members once a year. The more attention and care you give to one another in your spiritual journeys, the stronger your worship band will become.



MUSIC SELECTION

MUSIC SELECTION

Always work closely with the music director and pastor to pick appropriate songs for each worship service. Below are a few suggestions to get you started:

1. CCLI is always a good place to start. Here you can make sure your church's music license is up-to-date. If you live stream your services, you can find a church video license, learn how to legally stream music, and legally copy and share audio recordings. Song Select offers transposable chord sheets, lead sheets, and vocal sheets to share with your musicians. Learn about church copyright licensing and laws. CCLI also offers a top 100 worship song list based on use in churches across the U.S.²
2. Spend time researching popular Christian songs.

² *Discipleship Ministries has recently begun reviewing the CCLI Top 100 list. In this process, a panel of worship leaders reviews the list and makes recommendations stating which songs fit well into the United Methodist theology of worship. You can access this list here (look for "CCLI Top 100"):* <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/modern-worship-music>

3. *Wow Worship* is a great series of albums (going all the way back to 1996) that feature hit contemporary Christian songs.
4. Find and regularly listen to your local Christian radio station for ideas.
5. Do not forget the hymnal and other collections of music (*Worship & Song, The Faith We Sing, Global Praise*, etc.). As stated earlier, adding a band to traditional hymns offers worshipers the opportunity to experience the richness of hymnody and will introduce them to well-tested and appreciated theological concepts.

Remember that the songs you choose need to be vetted with your pastor and music director. Make sure song selections are in line with the theology of your church. Also be aware that not all mainstream Christian songs translate well to worship services. Listen to songs with the congregation in mind: Is the song in too high a key for most voices? Are the lyrics hard to understand or hard to sing? Is the song teachable? Will the congregation be able to learn the song quickly? Is the tempo appropriate for congregational singing? Is the selection appropriate for all age groups present in worship? Can your worship band play the selection with excellence?

INTRODUCING NEW MUSIC & ENCOURAGING CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

When introducing a new song, make sure you give adequate instruction to the congregation. Help them to follow along and encourage them to sing along. You may want to try singing a verse and the chorus and then invite the congregation to try the verse and chorus with you. Have a visible band member use invitational gestures to invite the congregation. Make eye contact with the congregation (closing one's eyes might be tempting, but it separates the leader from the congregation and can easily become a defense mechanism for insecurity). Maintain a good singing posture as you lead the congregation. The point is to try to make the congregation feel comfortable, encouraging them to raise their voices to try a new song. Song leaders

with microphones will also assist to lead the congregation in learning a new song. Make sure you tell your song leaders that their purpose is to lead the congregation – it is not a solo vocal piece. If the song selection is going to take a lot of time and effort to teach, perhaps it is not the best song for worship. If song selections seem like they may be too difficult for a congregation to sing but are perfect for the theme or service, consider making it a special offering of song where only the band sings. Good times to do such offerings include: at the very beginning of worship (to set the tone of the service), as a preface to the sermon, as a time of reflection after the sermon, offertory, or as a song for sending the people forth from the sanctuary. Whenever an offering of song is done in this way, consider including the lyrics of the song in the bulletin or on the screen so people can follow along and contemplate the words and how they fit into the whole of the service.

UNCHURCHED BAND MEMBERS, SECULAR INFLUENCE AND OPPORTUNITY

As you build your worship band, you may realize that many members have never played in a Christian band. With larger and larger numbers of people today not growing up in the church, this reality will increase. Along the way, you may need to add educational moments during practice to help band members with church language and traditions. This might be a place where you invite the pastor or another leader in the church to explain and explore the basic theological principles and traditions of the church. Take time as needed to talk about the theology conveyed by particular selections and why the selection was chosen. As you learn about your band members' previous band experiences, listen for new ideas that could contribute to the worship experience. If some band members know the songs of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, or Johnny Cash, talk with the pastor and consider how the spiritual nature of some secular selections might highlight the human condition being explored in a sermon or sermon series. Parish Drive, a New Jersey-based United Methodist worship band, has performed everything from U2 to Night Ranger to the Monkees during worship services. Their church, The United Methodist Church in Wayne, has gone so far as

to plan sermon series based on popular artists. (Examples of particularly fun and well-attended sermon series included “The Beatles” and “The Rolling Stones.”) Think about your ministry context and ask: “What singers or bands are popular among the people that we serve? Why are they popular? What human struggles or celebrations are expressed in the music?” Just because a song was not written in a church context does not mean it does not deal with issues of faith, alongside common issues of humanity. Such song selections might ground us in a particular struggle or issue and give the pastor the opportunity to show how the gospel message speaks in direct ways to that struggle. The secular can become sacred; as the two meet, secular songs in a sacred setting can take on new and deeper meaning for parishioners.

All this said, it is important to understand how secular music may be accepted (or not) as part of a church service. There will be some in the congregation who will embrace the concept, and others who will not feel a worship service is the right time or place for secular selections. To help align the music with the message, be sure to have the band leader or pastor explain to the congregation why those musical choices are being made, or what to be listening for in the day’s music selection. Add a description in your bulletin about the songs, their lyrics, and how they fit with that particular Sunday. If you try secular selections, you may be surprised at how receptive congregations can be if they understand your reasons for the unconventional or secular selection. You may also find that people who typically are not interested in church will be open to trying a church that occasionally plays and explores a wide variety of song selections familiar to them. In the example given earlier, the worship band of The United Methodist Church in Wayne played a Rolling Stones set at a local community festival. In between songs and at the end of the set, the band invited people to join them for worship that weekend for *Rolling Stone Sunday*. New people who might never have tried the church, came that following Sunday after enjoying the “secular” music offered by the worship band. On *Rolling Stone Sunday*, the pastor led the congregation to reflect on *Satisfaction* and *You Can’t Always Get What you Want* as those two concepts related back to a

better, more fulfilling way of life in Jesus Christ. If we are open to new ideas, the band and the talented people in it, will be able to enhance our worship experiences while inviting more people into the life of the church and into new life following Jesus.



THE DRUMS ARE TOO LOUD! (THE BAND IS ONLY AS GOOD AS ITS SOUND TECHNICIAN)

Everything seems to be going well, but then you receive the feedback – “The drums are too loud!” (or perhaps a guitar or vocalist). This brings us to the importance of the sound technician. This person (or persons) should be considered a part of the worship band. In this important role, you are looking for another volunteer who supports the band and its mission, is willing to arrive early for each service and band practices, in order to properly balance the sound. The individuals in the band must submit themselves and their instrument volume levels to the expertise of the sound technician. Keep in mind that a drummer sitting behind a drum kit, and the rest of the band standing near their amps, possibly with monitors facing them, cannot hear how the whole band sounds from the perspective of someone sitting 45 feet away in a pew. Your sound technician, who is sitting, standing, or walking around the worship space, is the one person who can objectively adjust the overall sound appropriately. A good sound technician should always be discipling two or three people in order to give the sound technician the flexibility to miss a worship service as needed.

*If the drums really are too loud for your worship space, consider purchasing a drum shield or cage that deflects partially or entirely the sound of the drums. You may decide to cage and mic your drums in order to better control them at the sound board.

Here are a few tips for you and your sound technician:

- **USE APC UNITS:** Do not let the threat of a power outage take out your sound system.
- **HAVE BACKUP PLANS FOR EVERYTHING:** If most of what you do is wireless, have a couple wired microphone options if something dies. With each piece of equipment, ask yourself how it could fail, and be prepared for the quick fix or backup option. You may also want to have backup DI boxes.
- **FINDING THE BEST QUALITY SOUND:** Consider using compression to even out volume spikes.
- **TEST AND SET LEVELS DURING PRACTICE:** Test, set, and mark sound board levels during your worship practice for each song selection. Know ahead of time who is plugged in where and what microphones are being used for each selection. As the band practices, set and mark the appropriate levels so that you are not making major adjustments during worship. Some sound boards have the ability to record multiple EQ settings and can be reset to that setting at the touch of one button. For best consistency in the quality of sound from practice to worship, try to maintain the same assigned sound equipment for each band member.
- **KNOW WHO IS SPEAKING AND SINGING:** Talk with the pastor, worship leader, or band leader to make sure you know who is speaking or singing when and with what microphone. Mark up your bulletin with detailed notes. Any distraction or delay with the sound equipment potentially takes away from the worship experience.
- **NO MAJOR CHANGES DURING WORSHIP:** Refrain from making major sound board changes during worship. Nothing kills the tone of worship more than a live microphone or a feedback spike.
- **MARK CABLES & MICROPHONES:** Mark all cables and microphones with colored electrical tape or a number/letter system. Find an easy system so that you can quickly and visually identify equipment for problem solving and adjustments.
- **BATTERIES, BATTERIES, BATTERIES:** Make sure you

have the appropriate spare batteries on hand at every service. Consider rechargeable batteries, which are better for the environment. Have a battery tester handy so you know the charge level of batteries. Know how much charge each microphone has and make sure it has enough for the length of your service.

- **TAKE CARE OF YOUR CABLES AND THEY WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU:** Carefully roll and mark spare cables and keep in a safe place where they will not be stepped on regularly. Check and replace fraying cables or cables that are showing wear. Audio gremlins are usually found at connections and in cables that are showing wear (or microphones whose batteries are not charged).
- **TAKE CARE OF YOUR MICROPHONES:** Store microphones in cases. Do not store with batteries in them (in case batteries go bad and start corroding). It is better to start a practice and worship service with fully charged microphone batteries.
- **WIRE ORGANIZATION AND SAFETY:** Do your best to make sure wires are neat and organized to keep the band safe and free from unnecessary tripping accidents. If you must have wires crossing a well-used path, cover the wires with a floor mat, or tape in place with gaffers tape.
- **SOUND CHECK:** At the beginning of each practice and worship service, take time to do a sound check. Have musicians and vocalists check their instrument volume and microphone volume. Also be sure to check the microphones for those who will be speaking. Instruct those with volume controls on their instruments to set them appropriately and not touch them (explain that you will be controlling their volume from the sound board). If you have monitors, also check to make sure that musicians can hear themselves clearly. Make sure that the monitor sound is not so loud that it feeds into your original microphone mix.
- **EVERYTHING IN THE SOUND BOARD:** Avoid individual amps when possible. It is much better to be able to control all the instruments from the sound board.

(These are just some of the basics. Go online to find more tips and online tutorials. Tutorials may also be offered with the purchase of your sound board.)

IT MAY NOT ACTUALLY BE ABOUT THE DRUMS . . .

As stated earlier, introducing a band in worship will not be accepted by all people. Although it is important to be able to hear and respond to constructive criticism in order to help the band learn and grow, you must also be aware that for some people the drums will always be too loud. Some will be against the band concept entirely, or the drums being present in the sanctuary (Search: history of introducing the pipe organ in churches). Sometimes you will need to listen for what is behind the criticism – down to a possible competing value about whether or not the band should be present at all. Chances are high that you will have individuals who will never support the band, and that is okay. Do try to continue to educate people about why the band is being added and the importance of cultivating a selfless worshiping community.



THE FIRST PRACTICE

Your worship band's first practice is very important. Take time to go over the band covenant and expectations. Share with them the concept of the band being a care group within the church and that caring for one another is ultimately more important than the band itself. Introduce the importance of cultivating a selfless worshiping community and explain to them why the band is being added to worship. Help them to understand how offering their gifts in this way fits into the whole ministry of the church. Cover the difference between worship and performance. Consider having the pastor or lay leader of the church come to the first practice to express appreciation for the band and their willingness to serve the church. Beginning your first practice in this way will build a firm foundation for your worship band.

Your first practice will set the standard for all practices that follow. If you start on a good note by setting healthy expectations, chances are good that future practices will follow suit. To make your first practice work, everyone needs to come to practice prepared. This means that there are a number of practice preparation elements that you will need to send to band members at least two weeks before the first practice. Consider having at least 1 to 2 months of weekly practices prior to the first time the band is added to worship. Remember that first impressions for the congregation are crucial to the success of this newly added ministry. A lack of excellence in the first worship service will plant seeds of doubts in those who were not sure about the band in the first place. An excellent first worship service will remove such doubts.

Make sure each band member receives the following BEFORE practice:

- Order of worship
- Shared audio file of the songs
- Chord sheets, lead sheets, or vocal sheets in the appropriate key
- Instructions on who is singing what part, who is playing what part, and who is playing what instrument
- Request that band members make themselves familiar with all this information and practice their parts.

Each band member should also understand that the practice is not the place to learn the song; this is why all of the information is sent to each band member in advance. The expectation is that the band members will need to learn the song on their own. Band practice exists so that band members can take what they have already learned and put the individual parts together. There is no surer way to build resentment and frustration among band members than to sit around doing nothing while someone else in the band is still learning the song.

For fun, here is an example of a bad practice:

- Set to start at 7:00 pm on a Thursday night, three people show up at 6:45 to set up. The bass player shows up at 7:15.
- One person never shows and never lets anyone know s/he was not going to show.
- As the bassist sets up, he makes noise with his amp turned up to 11, which makes it hard for the other three to argue about what key two of them learned the song in. The third person is actively learning the song in a third “mystery” key.
- Your 7:00 practice finally gets going at 7:36, and you still have three songs to learn. Only one person learned all three songs. She has to show the others how it goes (and in the correct key).
- Because the drummer never showed, the tempo is all over the place.
- The singers are having trouble singing and playing at the same time.
- As you stop to figure out an important chord in the song’s bridge, the bass player starts playing something by Rush. “Oh yeah!” yells a guitarist. Two of them begin to jam, while the other two, who do not know how to play the song, patiently and politely hope those two get this out of their system quickly.
- At 8:00, a guitarist says he has to leave in 5 minutes.
- By 8:15, “practice” is over and virtually nothing was accomplished.
- You agree to arrive at church at 6:00 AM on Sunday morning to try again before the congregation arrives at 8:45.

This is a funny example, but if you do not set clear expectations during the first practice and within your band covenant, examples like this could become your reality.

Important elements for a smooth first rehearsal:

- Cover the expectations & covenant.
- Make sure you have provided everything needed for each band member ahead of time.
- Make sure everyone shows up on time, tuned, and ready for sound check.
- Make sure the sound technician is present and a sound check occurs.
- Give quick direction for each selection, explaining the purpose of the song and when it will take place in the service.
- Plan for more time for more difficult song selections.
- If needed, work with vocalists separately and ahead of time, or begin separately (instruments & vocalists) and then bring them together.
- Divide your total practice time by the total number of selections and give only that amount to each song. You may want to do a rough run-through on each selection, then circle back and repeat, practicing each selection with refinements.
- Make sure the beginning and ending of songs are well defined and played or sung with confidence.
- Make sure each song selection is fully learned by the end of practice. Do not fall back on meeting early before worship to refine. Practice time before worship is always limited and is not the time to “finish” practicing. The practice time before worship is a quick sound check and may be a quick run-through to refresh memories.
- Agree upon and communicate an end time for every practice. Be considerate that your band members have a life outside of worship practice and may have friends or family waiting on them at home. Be respectful of their time, but also expect them to come prepared so that practice time is efficient and productive.
- At the end of practice, clearly communicate when the band will meet for sound check before worship.

PRACTICING WITH A METRONOME

If you find that your band is having a hard time maintaining a consistent tempo during a song, you may want to invest in metronomes for the band members, or at the very least a metronome for the drummer. Some drummers use a metronome device that pulses in their seat to help them keep time. If you are experiencing problems with tempo, encourage your band members to practice using a metronome.



MULTIMEDIA & PROJECTION OF SONGS

(In the following we are only reflecting on multimedia as they relate to the worship band. Here we use 'powerpoint' as a generic term, not pointing to a particular product.)

Just as having a good sound technician is crucial, having a good multimedia team is also important for the success of your worship band and worship service. This can consist of one to five people who are willing to create the powerpoint to accompany the worship service. You may find it easier to recruit one or two people to create the powerpoint, and another two to three people to rotate running the powerpoint week to week.

There are many multimedia worship packages available that can assist you in creating excellent powerpoint presentations (Media Shout, ProPresenter, EasyWorship, etc.), and plenty of online commentary to help you discern between them. Consider contacting other churches in your area or your conference office to see what they recommend. United Methodist Communications also has an excellent array of reviews and products in their techshop.

Take time to train both the people creating the powerpoint presentations and the people running them. Set consistent guidelines on how the powerpoint presentations should look. (Your pastor will also be able to offer a great deal of input in this.) Bottom line - keep it simple. Here are some tips:

- Make sure the font is big enough to read from anywhere in the sanctuary.
- Make sure the slides relating to the worship songs break in the right places (according to a breath in the singing, verse, or chorus of the song).
- Make sure those running the powerpoint know the importance of advancing the slides on time.

Worshippers become very frustrated when technical glitches keep them from singing as directed, and such mistakes will reflect poorly on the band and worship experience as a whole. It may seem to go without saying, but always double check that the words or phrasing the band is singing are the same words that are on the powerpoint. Just as sound board glitches detract from the overall worship experience, poor powerpoint slides (or distracted operators making errors) can take away from the overall worship experience.

Encourage the powerpoint operators to come to band rehearsals - at least initially - to practice. Encourage them to sing along (if they cannot follow the slides and sing, no one else can). If a new song is being introduced in worship, it is important for the powerpoint operator to learn the song ahead of time in order to move the slides appropriately. Lastly, whenever the band is singing a song as an offertory or offering, consider putting the words of the song on the screens or in the bulletin even when people are not being invited to sing along (if the song is covered under your copyright licensing subscriptions). This will allow worshippers to easily follow along and perhaps help them to better understand how the song fits into the whole of the service. Lyrics have a way of speaking to worshippers, much like a Bible verse or a sermon point, and making the lyrics accessible can facilitate this worship connection.



CREATING MULTIPLE BAND TEAMS

As your worship band grows, consider creating multiple teams so that your musicians do not have to play or sing every Sunday. Although it is wonderful to be a part of worship band, band members also want and need to sit with their families and simply experience worship on occasion. If band members have opportunities to observe and reflect on worship, they will ultimately improve their offering of worship each week. Work with band members to determine a schedule that works best for them. If you realize that some personalities work better with one another, or certain voices complement one another, split into teams accordingly.



TAKING THE BAND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH WALLS

So you have a band formed, and it is successfully leading worship regularly...you do not need to stop there! Your newly formed band is an excellent ministry that can be used outside the church walls.

Encourage your band to look for opportunities to play in the community. Wherever the band plays, make sure the members mention that they are the worship band of your church, with an invitation to worship at the church at the appropriate times. Many towns around the country have festivals where bands are invited to play. Consider learning a set of fun secular songs that everyone knows and loves, and perform them at the community festival (this group of songs will also be perfect for the band to play at church picnics or social events). Invite people to church through your worship band ministry! Some people may think they would never set foot in a church, but after hearing your band, might have second thoughts. As you play secular music in the community, invite your pastor to do a sermon series that links a popular type of music or a particular band to a biblical

theme. Play the same songs in the community festival (linked to the sermon series) and invite those gathered to the sermon series starting the next Sunday!



CONCLUSION

A worship band is made up of people who are themselves growing and learning at the same time that your band is learning and growing. Remember that each member has worth and value regardless of his or her contribution to the band. Each member is first and foremost a child of God. Your worship band will change, grow, and shift over time. Embrace the change, learn from mistakes, and learn from the successes too! A healthy, excellent worship band will draw more people to worship and, thus, into the presence of God. It will create a ministry where more people in your church can bring their God-given gifts together for the good of the worshipping community. A healthy worship band will help its participants grow in their faith as followers of Jesus. We pray for your journey as you create a new worship band in your church!



FOR FURTHER STUDY

Worshiping with United Methodists: A Guide for Pastors and Church Leaders (Revised Edition). Abingdon Press, 2007.

The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship. Greg Scheer. Baker Books, 2006.

Worship Come to Its Senses. Don E. Saliers. Abingdon Press, 1996.

The United Methodist Music & Worship Planner. David L. Bone & Mary J. Scifres. Abingdon Press.

The Worship Workshop: Creative Ways to Design Worship Together. Marcia McFee. Abingdon Press, 2002.

For more information and resources related to worship, visit:
www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/modern-worship-music

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