

WORKING SMARTER AT WORSHIP

A Survey of Tools and Techniques

Introduction: Doing Things Once

Planning worship involves dozens of Sundays and festivals, hundreds of hymns, and thousands of other resources. It involves pastors, organists, directors, singers, instrumentalists, ushers, and others. How can a congregation keep worship planning from being needlessly frustrating?

This workshop will guide participants through a survey of tools and techniques to help make worship planning more efficient and effective. These digital tools are not ends unto themselves. Rather, they are means by which worship planners can save time, energy, and frustration by continuously striving to do things only once.

What are your biggest frustrations when it comes to planning worship?

- Web: bit.ly/workingsmarter
- Twitter: #workingsmarter

1: Planning Worship with the Perfect View

When you plan worship, you need all kinds of information from all kinds of sources. Linking that information allows you to view exactly what you need exactly when you need it. It allows you to make the best decisions in the least amount of time. Rather than storing mental links (chasing information back and forth between books and resources and past records), build a permanent, digital link between as much information as possible. This can be done through formulas in a standard spreadsheet and, to a much greater extent, through relational databases.

RESOURCES:

- [Worship planning spreadsheet](http://bit.ly/worshipspreadsheet) (bit.ly/worshipspreadsheet) – *Limited capabilities, cloud-based*
NOTE: The linked spreadsheet can only be viewed. In order to edit, you must first make a copy.
- [Worship planning database](http://bit.ly/worshipdatabase) (bit.ly/worshipdatabase) – *More capabilities, less accessibility*
- [Planning Center Online](http://planningcenteronline.com) (planningcenteronline.com) – *Subscription-based planning tool*

2: Cataloguing Resources for Easy, Effective Searching

Another challenge in planning worship is being able to search for resources easily and effectively. This includes resources in your music library as well as resources outside of it. In a filing cabinet, binder, or standard spreadsheet table, each resource can be catalogued only in a limited way. Linked data allows you to catalogue any given resource in as many ways as you'd like, which, in turn makes your searches easier and more accurate.

RESOURCES:

- [Worship planning database](https://bit.ly/worshipdatabase) (bit.ly/worshipdatabase) – *For music in your library*
- [Evernote with Evernote Web Clipper](https://evernote.com) (evernote.com) – *For music not in your library*

3: Getting Everyone on the Same Page

Rather than communicating by making many duplicate copies of communication (like email), centralized communication tools post messages to a central location so that an entire team can view the single, “canonical” piece of information. In such a system, email becomes a notification system instead of the communication system itself. Centralization leads to several benefits:

- Communication is stored in a single location and cannot be lost, misplaced, or deleted
- Individuals can read the context of a conversation more easily and therefore contribute more intelligently
- All communication can have a permanent link, which makes referencing past conversations easier
- Individuals may search through the communications to find what they are looking for
- Users can access their communication through specific mobile applications

Since planning and conducting worship is a team activity, a centralized communication system brings the team onto the same page, not only figuratively but quite literally.

RESOURCES:

- [Basecamp](https://basecamp.com) (basecamp.com) – *My favorite*
- [Trello](https://trello.com) (trello.com) – *Interesting paradigm*
- [Flow](https://getflow.com) (getflow.com) – *Expensive but powerful*
- [Asana](https://asana.com) (asana.com) – *Tasks and discussions together*

4: Storing Files Instead of Sending Files

The same principle of centralization also applies to storing and delivering your work. Rather than intentionally duplicate a file, it’s better to store that same file in one place where everyone has access. Centralization of files brings similar benefits as centralized communication.

- Files are stored in a single location and are often protected from deletion or tampering
- Individuals can access each file directly and will always receive the latest version of the file
- Links to the centralized file can be sent instead of copies of the file itself
- Individuals can search through the files in a certain project or folder
- Centralized storage is usually cloud-based storage which means the files are accessible from many devices and locations

Worship planning involves the production and sharing of numerous files: worship folders, lead sheets, accompaniment PDFs, etc. Storing files in a central location makes life easier for everyone involved.

RESOURCES:

- [Dropbox](https://dropbox.com) (dropbox.com) – *My favorite*
- [Google Drive](https://google.com/drive) (google.com/drive) – *Integrates with Docs*
- [iCloud Drive](https://icloud.com) (icloud.com) – *Coming late 2014, tight integration with iOS*

5: Scheduling Appointments Sensibly

Scheduling an appointment that involves three or more people is incredibly difficult. There are ways to work smarter when it comes to scheduling appointments, meetings, and rehearsals. The best method is to use a scheduling tool. Scheduling tools allow you to create a poll that all invitees fill out. Each person indicates the times that work for them and the service shows you where everyone's calendar fits. Each person fills out the poll once and the organizer selects the best option.

More complicated solutions, like the one in Planning Center Online, offer even greater power. For instance, Planning Center Online allows people to set scheduling preferences like, "I'm willing to usher twice a month," as well as block out dates that don't work. The system then translates "available twice a month but I'm on vacation these two specific weekends" into a schedule that gets the volunteer into service twice in the month, but not on the two weekends he is out of town.

RESOURCES:

- [Doodle](https://doodle.com) (doodle.com) – *Create polls to help the best time emerge*
- [Planning Center Online](https://planningcenteronline.com) (planningcenteronline.com) – *User input paired with scheduling*
- [Google Forms](https://google.com/forms) (google.com/forms) – *flexible form creation, responses stored in a single spreadsheet*
- [Google Calendar](https://google.com/calendar) (google.com/calendar) – *More manual but is good for schedules*

6: Creating Service Folders Efficiently and Accurately

Producing service folders already takes time. The work can be tedious and repetitive. It can be easy to make mistakes. But don't make it more difficult than it has to be. And don't make mistakes that are easy to avoid.

Having data linked allows easy, efficient, and accurate copying and pasting between your worship resources and your service folder.

RESOURCES:

- [Worship planning spreadsheet](https://bit.ly/worshipspreadsheet) (bit.ly/worshipspreadsheet)
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- [Worship planning database](https://bit.ly/worshipdatabase) (bit.ly/worshipdatabase)

Closing: Getting Things Started the Right Way

No digital tool can replace hard work and diligent attention. Planning and conducting worship is still work, but it is possible to *work smarter*.

Deploying some of these digital tools in your congregation will also take work. You will need to carefully plan your implementation and training.

We suggest the following method:

- Thoroughly evaluate your current methods to determine what sort of solutions would help you work smarter. Consider interviewing everyone on your team to aid in your evaluation.
- Once you have identified where you can work smarter, choose the right tool for the job. Plan on how you'll use it.
- Train key people on how to use it before you start to use your new system.
- Stick with it through the inevitable kinks and frustrations that happen with learning a new system. New habits will form and you will reap the benefits.

With proper planning, attention to detail, and patience you can begin to work smarter at worship.

Presenter Information

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Pastor Bassett is a 2010 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and serves as pastor of St. Stephen, Fallbrook, California. He is a member of the WELS hymnal project executive committee, serving as chair of the technology subcommittee. He has designed the project's public website as well as its private side for managing work by the project's seven subcommittees.

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Pastor Bauer is a 2008 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He was assigned to be an associate at Emmanuel in Tempe, Arizona, where his areas of focus were worship and outreach. He also served as an organist, choir director, and music coordinator. He recently accepted a call to serve at Good News in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. He is a member of the Institute for Worship and Outreach, a consultant for Schools of Worship Enrichment, and a member of the WELS hymnal project executive committee.

Handout and Resources

This handout, including live links to all resources, can be found at: <http://bit.ly/workingsmarterhandout>