



Towards Best Practice:-

When Visitors Lead Worship in Local Churches

***A leaflet for church secretaries,
pulpit supply secretaries,
synod lay preaching commissioners,
and those leading worship in local churches***

Introduction

Public worship in our churches may, for several reasons, be led by visitors:

- Absence of a resident minister
- Churches working in teams/clusters
- A special/anniversary service
- Ecumenical pulpit exchange.

This is one of the strengths of the URC. For the welcoming congregation there is the opportunity to receive new ideas, experience a wider variety of styles of public worship, and to encourage the development of the gifts of those called by God to serve the church in this way. For the visitor it is a privilege and an opportunity to introduce new ideas, or offer a different perspective, and also to support the local ministry as a representative of the wider church.

Responsibilities

Public Worship is offered in the presence of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God. Those who lead worship therefore must take the responsibility seriously. Just as each person leading worship does so in his/her own unique way, so each congregation is different.

- There is a diversity of styles of worship within the URC.
- Churches follow a variety of materials (or none) in planning their Church Year.
- Churches vary enormously in the resources available from within their own congregations.
- Almost every church has an aspect of worship particular to that congregation.

The visitor brings his or her own strengths and weaknesses:

- The style of worship they feel comfortable in leading;
- Whether they feel constrained by particular worship material;
- The amount of time they can devote to the preparation of worship in collaboration with the church.

Collaboration

God-centred worship is one of the fruits of close co-operation between visitor and congregation. Some of this will involve a sensitive briefing of the visitor by the church as to their traditions and expectations while still bearing in mind a need to be open to the gifts, experience and ideas the visitor can bring.

The Visitor needs to respond as an ambassador of the wider church. They need to be realistic in the assessment of how much time they can give to the preparation of worship, especially when members of the congregation are actively involved, and they must be honest in assessing their own gifts, particularly in the context of the style of worship required.

Practicalities (1)



CHECKLIST FOR THE WELCOMING CHURCH

Upon making the booking

- Give date & time of service, location of church and name of contact person.
- Enquire if the visitor requires transport.
- Give details of size and type of congregation, numbers and age range of children, where they sit and when they go out/come in.
- Advise on the 'normal' order of service and if people are prepared to take part (eg. Bible readings, leading intercessions), by whom.
- Provide information on what material is followed (Roots, Lectionary) and send relevant section *immediately* indicating to what extent this can be varied.
- Indicate if there is a Children's Address/Introduction to Theme at the beginning or sharing what has been done in Children's or Young People's Group and if anyone else will be involved in presenting that.
- Give information on hymnbook(s) used, copyright licence, whether learning a new hymn is a possibility, availability of a music group.
- Specify what equipment is available (data projector including laptop, sound system etc)
- If the service includes Communion/Baptism explain the Synod policy.

Within a month of the service

- Confirm by letter the date, time and postcode of the church, giving details of how to get there & parking arrangements, plus an emergency contact number for the day.
- Enclose an Order of Service (if required) details of hymnbooks used and deadline dates for hymns/service sheet, including arrangements for sending hymn numbers/titles.

On the day

- Make sure that someone is waiting so that the visitor is received and shown to the vestry.
- Invite the visitor to check any requirements in the church.
- Indicate whether the visitor is expected to give the notices and, if names of church members/friends are to be mentioned in prayers, provide them in writing.
- Inform the visitor about procedure at the start and close of worship and whether coffee is served after the service.
- Explain the sound system set up including who is responsible for switching microphones on and off (eg. during hymns), and whether roving microphones are available.
- Make preparation for the appropriate expenses in advance and produce a thank you slip in readiness.

Practicalities (2)



VISITING WORSHIP LEADER

When invited to lead worship

- Decide well ahead when you are available to lead worship bearing in mind time needed for preparation.
- Discover if any particular theme is being followed.
- Ask whether it is a 'normal' or 'special' service and approximate numbers of adults/children.
- Find out what equipment/resources are available. (Amplification system/OHP/data projector/use of readers/singing groups etc)
- Ask what hymnbook(s) is used (and if there is a copyright licence) and the deadline date for hymns/service sheet.
- Note the name, address & phone number of a church contact, the date & time of the service, how to get to the church and an emergency contact number for the day.

Upon arrival

- Arrive in good time to liaise with the duty elder, organist, musicians, readers etc - provide Orders of Service if required.
- Learn the names of those welcoming you, readers/others taking part, and of any people to be mentioned in prayers.
- Familiarise yourself with the worship area, adjust the height of lectern/microphones and if necessary 'test' the equipment.
- Check where children/special groups/ choir will be sitting.
- Listen carefully to any instructions (who will offer vestry prayer, procedures for notices, offering, close of worship).
- Check that all those taking part have arrived (and have a contingency plan).

After the service

- Take note of any comments to reflect on later.
- Collect all your belongings.
- Give details of your expenses (if not already done) and thank the church for their welcome and hospitality.

Prepared by the Leadership in Worship Committee
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