



Westminster Presbyterian Church

PHILOSOPHY OF WORSHIP

Purpose of This Document

To establish with clarity and conviction the vision for worship held by Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) and to foster congregational unity. While not meant to restrict the work of the Spirit, this Philosophy of Worship (POW) will offer guidelines for corporate worship.

Introduction and Convictions

As a confessional church, Westminster Presbyterian Church subscribes to the Westminster Standards in our practice and doctrine. We hold three primary biblical convictions which inform our beliefs concerning weekly corporate worship services. First, we believe we gather to worship God and God alone (Ex. 20:2; Matt 4:10). He alone is our highest aim and our greatest good, so to this end we worship. Our worship is trinitarian. We praise the Father, Son and Spirit and we look to them to work in our midst. Therefore, we focus our worship on God, not ourselves. We accomplish this by being Biblically Rooted and Gospel Saturated in our worship services.

Second, we believe the Bible is clear: worship is communal. We apply this to our worship by focusing on our status as servant members of Christ's Body, and by laying down our preferences for the sake of each other. We aim to create an environment that fosters being Multi-Generational and Relationally Honest. For this reason, we provide opportunities for people of all ages to serve in worship, encourage one another, and seek to grow in our faith together.

Third, we believe God has commanded our worship to have another end: the nations. From the call of Abraham to the Great Commission, God commands us to worship in a way that invites everyone into our midst (Gen. 15, Matt. 28, 1 Cor. 14). For this reason, we desire to be Outward Focused in our worship through an inviting presence. It is our intent to welcome newcomers just as we welcome one another.

Our conviction at Westminster Presbyterian Church is to trust God's work in our midst as we worship Him, exhort one another, and create a welcoming community. The following guidelines flow out of this core philosophy of worship:

Areas of Specific Highlight

1. Our Sunday Morning

a. Priority of the Worship Service

There are many good things that we can choose to do with our time together on Sunday mornings. Based on the vision and mission of WPC, we prioritize the following on Sunday morning:

i. Gathered Worship

Gathered worship is the highest priority of our Sunday mornings. All that we believe to be most important about gathered worship will help direct what our worship services look like and how long they will generally last. Other Sunday opportunities will be secondary to the worship service.

ii. Unhurried Fellowship

God has created us as a deeply communal people. We need unhurried time together to connect and have meaningful conversation. This means we will make the time and space for our members to be together in a variety of ways and to do so across the generations.

iii. Theological Training

We aim to provide relevant and rich teaching from God's word on topics that transform our lives as disciple makers who witness God's Kingdom to this world.

2. Liturgy

a. Worship Elements

The following is a list of worship elements that we value the most. This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list: Call to Worship, Prayer, Singing, Scripture Reading, Confession of Sin, Confession of Faith, Tithes and Offerings, Baptism, Testimony, Preaching, The Lord's Supper, Benediction.

b. Values

i. Reverent Pace

We value having the space and time to reflect deeply on our time together with the Lord. Much of our life is marked by busyness, hurry, and distraction. In worship we aim to slow down and be fully present with God and one another.

ii. Intentional Structure

We generally aim to present the 'Gospel Arc' in each worship service. We move from Exaltation, to Confession, to Adoration/Thanksgiving, and then to Mission (see Isaiah 6). This is the most natural flow of response when a Christian heeds God's call for worship. When we encounter his glory, we become aware of our sin. When we confess our sin, we receive the mercy and love of our Savior which generates adoration and thanksgiving. In hearing God's word, we are equipped to go back out into the world to model the beauty and love of Jesus to all.

iii. Meaningful Fellowship

See 6.a.i and 7.c. below.

3. Sacraments

The sacraments are means of grace ordained by Jesus Christ through which he administers His covenant promises to His people through physical signs and seals. They are vital elements of worship. We receive the sacraments in worship together as God's people, and our pastors and session oversee them.

a. Baptism

Baptism is administered once to believers who have professed faith in Christ and their children (Matt. 28:19-20). In worship, our ordained pastors baptize with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We do not believe baptism regenerates the heart but instead admits one into the visible church. Therefore, we believe it is vital for the children of believers to receive baptism in addition to their parents. Biblically, baptism has replaced the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). In administering to both believers and their children, we recognize baptism primarily communicates God's covenant promises to us rather than our faithfulness to Him. This is also why we only administer baptism one time and recognize baptisms properly administered by other churches. Our means of administering the water is sprinkling or pouring. While we recognize immersion as legitimate, we do not practice immersion.

b. Communion

Communion is administered regularly to believers who have professed their faith in Christ and obedience to Him (1 Cor. 11:17-29). In worship, we take the elements of bread and wine (grape juice) after the pastors have set them apart with prayer. When we take communion, we believe the Lord Jesus communes with us spiritually and nourishes us through the elements that represent his atoning body and blood. When someone takes communion, they publicly say, "I believe in Jesus!" Therefore, those present in worship who do not believe in

Jesus don't take communion, and covenant children who have not yet made a public profession of faith and taken vows of membership don't take communion. To receive communion, you must be able to examine your heart (1 Cor 11:28) and believe the wonderful work of Jesus on your behalf. Biblically, communion replaces the Old Testament sacrament of Passover.

4. Preaching

We believe that the preaching of God's Word is an effective means through which the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. This is why ordained pastors ordinarily preach in our church. We most often adhere to a type of preaching called expository preaching. Expository preaching is a type of preaching where our pastors explain the meaning of God's Word, relate it to our everyday lives, and urge us to apply Scripture to our hearts. Most importantly, our pastors point us to Jesus in every sermon. This emphasis centers us on the good news of the Gospel and equips us to be God's kingdom people.

5. Singing

a. Values

i. Congregational

The defining point of Sunday worship is the worshipping together of the congregation. This is accomplished when the worship team, as lead worshippers, engages the congregation through liturgical elements and music. We prioritize congregational singing. We aim to select well-known music delivered in a singable key and style. When possible, new music will be taught in a way that gives the congregation time to learn the song. Song selection will seek to retain a timeless, enduring quality in both text and melody. At the same time the sound of our songs will remain relevant to our culture and times in both our old and new music.

ii. Biblically Rich

See 7.a. below.

iii. Thematically Diverse

We will work to ensure that our song library addresses a wide range of relevant themes within the Christian life. All of life, for the Christian, is worship. Therefore, we ought to sing about God's presence in the whole of our lives and world.

b. Style of Worship

i. We Honor All Styles

Revelation 7:9-10 teaches us that in the end, every nation, tribe, people, and language will be represented around God's throne, giving him their worship. We believe this means that God delights in the

diversity of his world and his people. When a community embraces its God-given cultural distinctives to offer authentic worship, God receives that worship with joy. Therefore, we do not hold any particular style of sincere, biblical worship as better than another in the eyes of God.

We also seek to pay attention to the particular culture of our local body of believers. This is primarily expressed through styles of music which inherently generate a certain atmosphere within our worship. Therefore, we aim to offer worship music that reflects the overall culture of our church.

ii. Our Particular Culture

A. Traditional means...

Much of our congregation loves and engages with a musical style that focuses on historic hymns and a more classical sound. For this reason, our traditional worship service utilizes weekly choir and orchestra-led music. The orchestra consists of instrumentalists, piano, and organ. We primarily sing established hymns, but we also embrace new hymns from contemporary songwriters.

B. Modern means...

Much of our congregation loves and engages with a musical style that focuses on newer songs and newer sounds. Therefore, our modern worship service utilizes band-led music including guitars, drums, keys, and lead vocalists. We maintain some of the most loved hymns of the past, and we emphasize the best new songs that the Church is singing today.

C. Joint Worship Services

See 7.e. below.

6. Excellence

We believe that all spiritual gifts come from the Spirit of God as tools that are to be used for the edification of the Church and the spread of the Gospel across the earth. Through the experience of the Church, we know that these gifts have both limitations and potential for growth. Those who are gifted to lead worship in any capacity will be expected to offer their gifts to the Lord and the congregation with excellence. Our God is the most excellent One and he deserves the best that we can offer him. He does not expect perfection, nor does he hold to the world's standards of excellence. Rather, he looks to the heart of the worshipper. We will aim to equip and encourage our worship leaders to fan their gifts into flame, to be of a mind and heart to pursue excellence, and then to work within a team of people who are also pursuing

excellence. The worship team's focus will be on Sunday morning worship above all else. Being ready to lead that service well is the worship team's highest priority. This also means that we will maintain reasonable standards for those who serve on the worship team—both in Christ-like character and in their particular skill sets.

7. Our Five Core Values Expressed in Corporate Worship

a. Biblically Rooted

We weave God's word throughout all aspects of the worship service, and it regulates our worship. This means that the congregation leaves each Sunday having been given a variety of opportunities to meet with our God and to be made more into his likeness. The primary way we will consistently review this point is through our liturgy meetings each week. Further, we also aim to maintain alignment with the denominational nuances of the Presbyterian Church in America.

b. Gospel Saturated

We specifically proclaim the good news that God's kingdom is here, and it is available to all who would walk in God's ways. This rhythmic reminder can be given through any number of means including confessions, songs, sermons, and prayers. Further, this gospel message is not something merely directed at the individual to enhance an individual life. It is inherently communal, and accordingly we should remind ourselves that God's purposes are bigger than our own. Further, our gospel preaching focuses on enabling obedience through the means of the strength and motivation of Christ.

c. Outward Focused

We emphasize, highlight, and pray weekly for specific local or global ministries with which we have member connections. This keeps us focused on the reason for the Church's existence – to make disciples of all nations and to continue to advance the kingdom of God. Additionally, we will strive to make our worship services accessible and understandable to non-Christians. This will include providing clear explanations of the liturgical elements as they occur and avoiding the use of Christian terminology (unless explained) That may be unfamiliar to those outside the faith. While we hold that our worship together on Sundays is primarily to edify the Church, we also aim to demonstrate the beauty of Jesus and his ways in such a manner so as to attract others to him for the first time.

d. Relationally Honest

We celebrate the ministries and efforts of different groups within the church that are making a kingdom impact through real life gospel transformation. Since gathered worship offers limited time for building transformative

relationships, we will regularly encourage individuals to join small groups and to serve in ministries both inside and outside of the church. We also aim to continue recording and showing “God’s Story, Your Story” videos as they are an excellent and timely way to share testimonials from our members. Further, we will remain relational in the way we proclaim the gospel in word and song.

e. Multi-Generational

We work hard to ensure that our worship services, in structure and style, remain accessible and encouraging to every generation. This means we will offer both the old and the new, the historic and the modern. We will celebrate the breadth of diversity that God has given us in the context of the people God has gathered here. Neither worship service should exclusively cater to a particular generational preference. We will aim to host occasional joint-worship services each year as a means of giving the entire congregation a chance to engage with different worship styles, and to maintain a sense of unity throughout the church. Further, people of all ages should be welcome in all aspects of worship as they are able.