# TECHNOLOGY IN WORSHIP:
## Insights from Congregational Worship Leaders
(gathered January 2005)

Calvin Symposium on Worship
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**USES IN WORSHIP**

We use PowerPoint in our worship services.  In the last year or two, we have started using pictures as the background instead of just a plain color.  Typically, the background is related somehow to the theme of the service and helps set the mood. . . . Because our baptism font is not elevated, we zoom in on the baptism with our video camera and project it on our screens so that everyone has a good view. . . We also use video clips and have begun to make our own videos.
>       —Sarah Cupery, Kentwood, Michigan


While we have used PowerPoint for as long as we have been in our new building, in the past year we have broken away from a rigid format requirement and begun experimenting with the use of photos as backgrounds, and with the use of video clips to promote offerings and missionary support.  We have also made our first attempt at using our projection capability for evangelism.  We showed the Jesus Film the Saturday evening before Easter and promoted it earlier that day by canvassing with handout cards and free drinks (the cards asked "Are you thirsty?")  So far we have found ways to try almost everything discussed, except for providing live video close-ups of baptisms so all in the congregation can see.
>       —Greg Steggerda, Orange City, Iowa


We have been using Power Point for about 6 years and love it.  We use it for the songs (SongShow Plus), the message and special music.  I am very blessed to have a multi-media person who is willing to spend many hours on the net finding and putting together wonderful presentations.  She has 4 other people she is training.
>       —Elizabeth Hoekenga, Hayward, California

Our church has been utilizing video presentation for about 10 years now.  We have been using mostly PowerPoint for lyrics and sermon notes.  We also produce video clips to show via VHS or DVD.  Some are merely clips from a movie (we have obtained an MPLC umbrella license) and some are shot and assembled onsite using video capture and compilation software.
- We have found video helpful in testimonies.  People come in and give their story on camera.  I edit the story so that it stays focused, and removes "mistakes" (coughs, embarrassment) and allows people freedom to say "let's start again, I didn't say that right".  Also it allows people to insert a piece of the story added later and put it in the right context.  Finally we can make the testimony a certain time length.
Some other things I've learned . . .
- As for the projector, brightness is a key factor but as important as brightness (i.e. lumens) "Contrast ratio" is right near the top.  There are some projectors coming out with 2000:1 contrast ratios and higher.  That gives clarity and definition and even makes projectors of the same lumens of brightness seem brighter that those of less contrast ratio.
- PowerPoint is not very good at incorporating Video into a presentation.  It's possible but not very smooth.  I'm currently looking into other software to accomplish this.
- A video mixer really helps with transitions.  We have a 4 Input Video Mixer: one for the computer image (PowerPoint), one input for DVD, one for VHS, and one for live camera.  The output from the mixer goes to the projector as well as to two TV monitors for the worship team to view during singing.  The Video Mixer allows us to smoothly transition from PowerPoint into a DVD using dissolve or other transitions.
- If you're going into video editing, you can't have a large enough hard-drive.  Video eats up a ton of storage space on your computer, especially if you want to archive anything for future use.  A DVD burner is a must if you want to

backup any video files and also to create DVD's of your work.  Many times a single video file is larger than 1Gig and therefore will not fit even on a CD for data backup.

- Finally, video captures people's attention very effectively.  We are a very video oriented culture.  It can be an amazing tool as long as it doesn't become the main focus.  Like any other tool, it's a way to impact people for Jesus, not an end in itself.

  —Jeff Baas, Kalamazoo Michigan

The upgrade of technology and software is important from time to time.  Also, requesting guest presenters to come with their presentation formatted to what the host presenter has.  DVD, MP3, formats are much easier to upload and run right into PowerPoint.  We use PowerPoint for all of our worship presentations.  S-Video presents a much clearer picture than coax cable, or other means of input/output.  We started strictly with songs and no backgrounds.  We have moved to adding litanies, portions of liturgy, etc.  This has saved on paper and bulletin printing.  Also we can keep the litanies/liturgies on file in the computer and bring them up without a lot of retyping/editing. We have added background color (liturgical colors) and backgrounds that compliment the liturgical year.  We are also presenting video/PPT clips for offering/mission causes, or video clips that are focusing on our worship ("Voice of the Martyrs" video for Persecuted Church worship services).  This has only taken away the offertory some of the time (video with sound).

  —Kevin Soodsma, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Probably what we have learned the most the last year when it comes to presentation technology in the last year is that less is more.  I often will hear comments when we use all of the options mentioned in the question that church doesn't feel like church but rather like watching TV.  We try not to do too much.  We use SongShow for our worship songs and PowerPoint as an augment for the messages.  Both regularly feature pictures that that connect to the theme.  Not much is overtly spoken about them.  We have gotten a strong negative reaction to using film clips in our services.  We have sometimes shown clips from movies that parents have not allowed their children at home to see.  Our feeling toward video clips is that unless it really fits we will not use one.  In this past year however we have incorporated a lot of in-house video.  We often will go onto the streets and ask people questions linked to the topic we are discussing on the given Sunday.  We make a montage of their answers and back it with some music.  This has been very good.  These movies are insightful and they give us a picture of the average person in our city.

  —Jonathan Van Dyke, Abbotsford, British Columbia

Our church has not really pursued the implementation of presentation technology.  We have purchased a small projector to be used for guest speakers, etc. but as far as worship technology we have focused on printed music and words, etc.  Fuller (CRC) is a strong singing church and always wants to have the notes (not just words).  Our sanctuary does not lend itself to great projection, and as with many other congregations, the resources to manage such a system is something that we stumble over.  We recently did a worship survey and had 28% response.  Of the respondents, we had 26 people interested in projected music.  So we're probably going to stay with what we have.

  —Cathy Winterhalter, Grand Rapids, Michigan

I received the book from Quentin Schultz at the last symposium.  Since I am not "techno" minded, I passed it on to our pastor.  We just use the PowerPoint presentations in our church for songs, litanies and the like.  We talked of making the backgrounds fancy for the songs, but realized a lot of the people would have trouble reading the words.

  —Heidi Saathof, Abbotsford, British Columbia

I've been very challenged to integrate our projection to incorporate both the musical notes and the words — our congregation is unsatisfied with just words projected — and so it has taken some ingenuity to get the music to a legible size and so forth.  The singing has also improved — I would encourage everyone to try to put music up on the screen.

  —David Banga, South Bend, Indiana

We use PowerPoint for the entire worship service and we project all the songs as well as the different parts of the service (offering, prayer, etc). We used to project scanned copies of hymns from the hymnal but abandoned that because of the number of screens needed for each hymn (especially with multiple verses) and because the text ended up being quite small. We have used PowerPoint presentations during the offering to highlight various ministries of the church (GEMS, SERVE trip, CRWRC etc). In general this goes over well as long as we don't show them weeks in a row (then people get tired of it). We have found it is very easy for mistakes to creep into PowerPoint services (i.e. a word missing here or there) and have to be so careful of that!
   —Stephanie VanRooyen, Barrie, Ontario

Our church never uses any technological aids (such as PowerPoint, film clips, projection) in our present worship services. Because we have committed to continuing our "formal, traditional" format for worship in our church's vision statement, we choose not to use such aids.
   —Larry Visser, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Other technology that we have made great use of is recording straight to c.d. — this enables us to very quickly and easily convert the sermons etc. to mp3 format and put them up on the web.
   —David Banga, South Bend, Indiana

I have learned a great deal about presentation technology in worship through my work here at Sanctuary, a CRHM (Christian Reformed Home Missions) plant in Seattle. We use a program called SongShow Plus (published by Fowler Productions in Oklahoma) on a weekly basis in our main worship service. It is a program that integrates PowerPoint-type slideshows, a database that hooks up with CCLI, scripture database and the ability to play DVDs. Prior to this position, I hadn't used DVD capability in worship. We've found Digital Glass, a Sally Morgenthaler/Sacramentis Product, helpful in worship, and have used it three times since October. It is a DVD with music background that explores the themes of Praise, Stations of the Cross and other themes. Having only been a worshiping church since October 3, there hasn't been any major element of technology that we've abandoned yet. We worship in Taproot Theatre on Sunday mornings. Taproot is a Christian theatre troupe well known in the Seattle area. On Sunday mornings, the worship leaders and a Fastfold Projection Screen set up in front of the props. The projector, a 1200 lumin Magnavox, shoots the images about 30 feet from its perch near the side of the stage. The other technologies (computer, sound equipment) remain in the sound booth upstairs. Our location and expertise allows us to pursue a wide variety of presentation technology as we seek to minister to our very tech-savvy city.
   —Peter Armstrong, Seattle, Washington

**RESOURCES**

We've been very happy with SongShow for worship song projection because it is very flexible and easy to use. We use Microsoft PowerPoint for messages. We get images off of a Google image search. We use Adobe Premier Pro for video editing, this is a fantastic program.
   —Jonathan Van Dyke, Abbotsford, British Columbia

PowerWorship is the program I use to create PowerPoint slide shows for congregational lyrics. I select the titles I want from a list and PowerWorship spits them into a PP presentation. No more copying and pasting slides! Visit www.powerworship.com for a free download. www.worshiptogether.com has some wonderful Bible studies for worship teams. I use them with my band before rehearsal. There's no "homework" and they are very insightful. Emergent YS publishes a CD ROM called Worship Image Gallery that I use almost weekly for my PowerPoint backgrounds. It has over 700 images to help set the mood for worship.
   —Sarah Cupery, Kentwood, Michigan

Web sites – http://www.churchmedia.net (very strongly recommended, I simply cannot recommend this site enough), www.tfwm.com (technologies for worship, conferences and magazine), www.sermonspice.com (short videos), http://www.midnightoilproductions (videos, graphics, training events), http://www.sxc.hu (free stock photography)

Software – any of the worship specific programs (SongShowPlus, MediaShout, EasyWorship, etc) over PowerPoint. For graphics editing (budget – Photoshop Elements 3), (price not an issue – Photoshop), for video editing (budget – Sony Vegas Movie Studio + DVD), (price not an issue – Adobe Premiere Pro)

Books – Media Ministry Made Easy (Tim Eason), An Hour On Sunday (Nancy Beach), Digital Storytellers (Len Wilson, Jason Moore), Wired For Ministry (John Jewell), Out On The Edge (Michael Slaughter)
      —Keith McKenzie, Holland, Michigan

Song Show Plus, Power Point, Integrities iworship DVD's (these are up to date songs that have a video background with a number of options for the music such as click track, just accompaniment or the full band and singers.  They are great for offertories or back ground for Communion, baptism, or professions of Faith.)  I just recently went to the Technologies for Worship Seminar and learned a lot.
      —Elizabeth Hoekenga, Hayward, California

http://www.inspirationalworship.com — Our congregation is "music literate" so it was important to us to have the notes and the words on the screen.  We now have a line item in our worship committee budget for this.
      —Kevin Soodsma, Grand Rapids, Michigan

- I am looking into new presentation software.  The ones rising to the top are:
Sunday Plus - http://www.sundayplus.com/
Media Shout - http://www.mediashout.com/ and
Songscreen Liquid - http://www.ibs.org/songscreen/
- As for video capture and creation I use two Sony Digital 8 cameras for raw footage.  I use a Sony software called Video Factory – now it's called "Vegas Movie Studio"
http://mediasoftware.sonypictures.com/products/showproduct.asp?pid=932 for video editing.  I have downloaded an Mpeg-2 codec to create those movies as MPEG-2 (DVD format).
- I use the "My DVD" software that came bundled with the computer's DVD burner to create DVD's
      —Jeff Baas, Kalamazoo Michigan

I would recommend the Songshow Plus program to others who want to integrate many programs into their worship presentations.  It is fairly user-friendly.  When I have needed assistance, Fowler is easily reached via phone and email. They have a great FAQ on their website as well as friendly and competent staff over the phone.  It is one of the only programs that integrates DVD, slideshow and has a large bible and song database.  Additional song slides are downloaded automatically from the CCLI website, as long as the church is a subscriber.  I also enjoy Sally Morgenthaler's Digital Glass DVD, as it creates nice space in worship and is a complete package.  We've also used the Integrity "I Worship" DVDs as a prelude to the service.  They help to create a joyful feel to the service, and feature high quality musicianship and striking video images. This would work well for a smaller church with a smaller worship team that still wants to integrate DVD technology well.
      —Peter Armstrong

We use primarily PowerPoint with *The Worship Sourcebook*, *The Psalter Hymnal* (Christian Reformed Church hymnal) on disk, and *Song Select* which has the lyrics of a lot of praise and worship music. With those three sources it is mostly cut and paste.  We have a CCLI license.
      —Greg Steggerda

**ORGANIZING TECHNOLOGY MINISTRIES**

We ask for volunteers to operate the PPT presentation during worship time. But the preparation time is done by church staff. Because not everyone knows music and whether or not a song needs to be repeated, etc. The Director of Music reviews the entire PPT presentation for each service, and informs the volunteer before worship of any details that may need to be noted.
      —Kevin Soodsma, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Create a media team with many people involved. The pastor must be involved at some level (even if it is only to communicate sermon themes, titles, etc.). SEEK OUTSIDE TRAINING EVENTS!!! Even if you think that you know how to do it all.
      -Keith McKenzie, Holland, Michigan

I have found that the best way to get people involved is to really work at incorporating a large number of people in a lot of capacities — the more variety you have in your volunteer pool the more likely people are to feel comfortable coming forward to help.
      —David Banga, South Bend, Indiana

We have learned that warm bodies are not enough. :) People must first have some natural ability and then some good training. Currently, some of our staff is under trained, and we are in the process of beefing that up.
      —Sarah Cupery, Kentwood, Michigan

The organization of this ministry is the toughest for me. It actually takes a large amount of my time particularly if we want to produce a video. It is very time consuming. Every minute of finished product is usually the result of three hours of work. It is difficult to find people to be available for that and to commit to that amount of time. I often end up doing all the work myself. There is much training required to produce videos and that can also be very time consuming for me. We have a team of 6 committed women who rotate on a schedule to produce and operate the PowerPoint and Songshow each week. This works very well.
      —Jonathan Van Dyke, Abbotsford, British Columbia

You must have good sound people and lots of training, what can go wrong will go wrong, everything must be rehearsed. Worship leaders and sound people speak a different language; it takes a lot of patience on both parts. I have also found that the more I know the more my sound people want to learn.
      —Elizabeth Hoekenga, Hayward, California

 We currently have 3 audio techs and 3 video techs. We use one each per Sunday. One runs the sound board and the other the computer and video mixer. Training is done by existing techs. Usually someone will show interest. I'll have them sit at the tech booth for a few weeks watching, and then they'll have a training season. When they're ready, they will run the board with a trained tech watching and helping. Finally they can fly solo.
      —Jeff Baas, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Obviously, many people must be on board in order to ensure that the technology aspect draws people into worship and is not a distraction, but an arrow pointing to the Triune God. Foremost in our context is the relationship between me, a Worship Pastor, and Carlo, our Technical Director. He is actually an employee of Taproot Theatre who we pay to run our technology each week. He controls sound, lights and the presentation of Songshow Plus. We meet 2.5 hours before the first service to set up. This is a unique situation, but it was in Taproot's contract with us that one of their representatives would be responsible for the equipment because of its value. He also takes care of the theatre, locks up, etc. As our church has grown, lay persons have stepped in to run the presentation so that Carlo is free to run sound and lights. We hope to continue to rotate others in to serve the body of Christ with their gifts. In my experience, the way to ensure a fruitful ministry is to rotate workers so that no one gets burnt out or always has to

worship from the back or the sound booth, etc.  Complete competence is always necessary so that technology runs smoothly.

> —Peter Armstrong, Seattle, Washington

We have a very gifted member who oversees the projection ministry; his paid job is in advertising and he is very creative with pictures to match the theme of songs etc.  We added 3 other PowerPoint "creators" so that the same person was not doing that job every week.  Lately there has been a request that the staff take over some aspects of PowerPoint which we are trying to avoid, I think!  It definitely is time-consuming to make a PowerPoint presentation for each church service.  We use a template as a starting point which really helps (made by the lead PowerPoint guy).  We have about 8 other people who actually run the computer during worship services to advance the slides.  We would like to start using EasyWorship software to do the worship services, but that will require more advanced training and also require us to create all new song files since PowerPoint files do not automatically drop into EasyWorship.

> —Stephanie VanRooyen, Barrie, Ontario

Our technology is not currently viewed as an individual ministry, simply a tool for worship.  We have projectionists who fall under the worship committee, but no formal technology committee and no committee that is formally tasked with exploring ministry uses of technology.  Our projectionists are given rudimentary training in PowerPoint, primarily just what is needed to allow them to navigate and click through the slides.  We found that adults tend to be overwhelmed as projectionists and often need assistance, as do others wanting to project something during the service.  Currently our best source of qualified projectionists and PowerPoint developers is high school technology students.

> —Greg Steggerda

# Worship Committee Values for Screen Use in Worship.
# Third Christian Reformed Church, Zeeland, Michigan

**Crafted in April, 1999 and reaffirmed May, 2000**

| Values | Implementation of Values |
|---|---|
| 1. We value a blended style of worship. We value songs, liturgy, and worship that mixes old and new and is the kind of worship within which all may find a "place". | The screen will enhance the Praise and Worship component of our services. It will also reach a younger generation with a user-receptive medium. |
| 2. We value teaching sermons and messages that hearers can follow. | The screen could function as a place for sermon outlines, bulletin points, and visuals and could aid pastors and listeners in the covenant of learning. |
| 3. We value the nurturing and building of community, where all members can see, hear, and participate in the worship encounter. | The screen should be readable and visually accessible for all members regardless of where they are seated in the sanctuary. |
| 4. We value silent, prayerful, meditative, and reflective time prior to worship for preparation to meet God. | The screen should function as an accompaniment to worship. It should not be used prior to worship beginning for bulletin "advertisements" or announcements. |
| 5. We value the existing symbols in our worship space, including the furnishings and their placement for the sacraments and the proclamation of the Word. We also value the cross and the Trefoil rings. These things aid our worship of God & communicate stability and permanence. | The screen should not be a focal point of the sanctuary. The screen and its images should be regarded as "less than" those things which are permanent and centrally located in worship space. |
| 6. We value an aesthetically pleasing and liturgical color consistent worship space. | The screen and projector should be discreet and should not be distracting in their placement or function. Its colors and tones should not diminish liturgical colors in our worship space. |

| Values | Implementation of Values |
|---|---|
| 7. We value a music-reading congregation that sings its hymns and songs in 4 part harmony. | The screen should have a capacity to reproduce printed musical notation. |
| 8. We value the function of books and we value the use of books in worship. We especially value teaching children to find Bible passages with the context of a book. | The screen should not replace the use of books in worship nor take away the function of "turning together" to books for the public hearing of Scripture. |
| 9. We value simplicity and stewardly use of resources. | The screen should be uncomplicated & cost-efficient enough that its use is not *expected* for every service. We recommend using the existing screen & space if it is wise to do so. |
| 10. We value the time and creative energies of our current staff. | We recommend a "PowerPoint" or "screen" team to create & maintain what is on the screen. Like the sound system, staff should not be responsible for the screen's use, its success, or its failure. |
| 11. We value the "hearing" of the Word through the use of relevant examples and images, recognizing the profound impact of images on our imagination. | The screen's use of images should be managed with great care. Pictures and icons can have a profound affect on the viewer's spiritual imagination both for good and bad. We would urge pastors and screen caretakers to choose images with great sensitivity and care. |
| 12. We value following all copyright laws. | The Long Range Planning Committee should explore what licenses or permission process needs to be complete prior to *visually* reproducing a song or text. Visitors and members should be assured that we are licensed to display what appears on the screen. |

# Specific Criteria for Screen Use in Worship:
## May, 2000

**Artwork** – Images should be soft and sensitive to the "space" as holy ground. Art should be coordinated with the Worship Décor Committee and sensitive to the other areas in the worship space and liturgical season. Where possible, we would like to see the AV committee use commissioned rather than "stock" iconographic images. [Values 5, 6, 11]

**Motion** – Slide transitions should be "soft", even "unnoticeable". Transitions should be complete prior to a worship leader's speaking. If the screen will be used, it should remain in the "down" position so its movement does not distract. There should be no graphic motion on the screen when the congregation's attention should be devoted to other areas in the sanctuary. When in doubt about these matters, the AV Committee should consult the pastor prior to the service. [Values 4, 6]

**Contrast** – Text and images should be in sharp contrast with the background. To blend with surrounding décor, consideration should be made for darker backgrounds. Color palate selected should be sensitive to the art (see #1) and be aesthetically pleasing. Where possible, art and color should be coordinated by the commissioned artist and be captured as a "theme". [Values 4, 6]

**Video & Re-projection** – Video clips should be thematically consistent with the worship service and should avoid excessive rapid image transitions. In skits and productions, the video effect should not detract from the production participants. Use at these times is encouraged, especially if it adds value when other props are impossible or impractical. At this time, re-projection of the camera image is not advised for any service. [Values 5, 11]

**Text** – The use of Bibles and songbooks should be maintained. The primary text of Scripture for the sermon should come from a book rather than projected on the screen. The use of the screen for accompanying passages as well as other translations is encouraged. [Values 5, 8]

**Music** – Praise songs where a joyous "wall of sound" from the congregation is desired to give glory to God should be promoted to the congregation. Songs that convey supplication, submission, and other contemplations should not be accompanied by projection. Alternate colors or embolden texts should indicate when the congregation should sing particularly when song leaders or choirs lead alternate verses. Where the desire from the music coordinator is to promote the singing of parts, the use of the *Psalter Hymnal* should be indicated. The worship coordinator or pastor will indicate when a song should not be projected because of a desire to use musical notation. The congregation's familiarity with a song or response should be taken into account when determining the *necessity* of using the screen. [Values 7, 8]

**Pre & Post Service** – Consideration of image or art "slide show" or video sequences that set focus on the theme of the service or liturgical season and help the congregation focus on the worship are encouraged for consideration. Music, but not "speech", tracks are appropriate with the slides and video. [Values 4, 6]