14 Ingredients For Developing A Worship Ministry (From Scratch)

Years ago, I developed the following basic ideas on building a worship ministry, for church planting pastors and worship leaders. Since then, many experienced friends (some are noted below, though more could be) have seasoned my thinking about how we can establish a worship life in a community that lasts for the long haul. I hope these 14 ideas encourage you if you are in this stage of church life.



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The Metaphor Of Baking Bread

Building a worship ministry in your church is more like baking a loaf of bread than a building a building. Ingredients shape the whole, and when the right ones are there, a particular fragrance and taste fills the church and a community. People are looking for bread. Jesus is the Bread. Worship can create a place of access to him.

In a worship ministry, the *flour* makes up the bulk of the bread. It's the *substance* that people are eating. The *yeast* makes it rise, makes it chewy, makes it melt in your mouth. The *flour* is not the *yeast*. In worship, the flour is the "why" of worship. It is the reason we worship. It is the collective values and meaning of worship. The music (and other languages of worship) are the yeast. They help it all rise, to be tasty, to draw us back. They become part of the substance when they are doing their job.

These 14 ingredients are both flour and yeast, both what will make the bread substantial and the bread rise.

14 Ingredients For Developing Worship In A Church Plant

Where do we start? At the very foundation of the dough. What is worship? Then, we move to the yeast – the how-to ideas – of building a worship ministry.

1. Determine Your Definition Of Worship + Create Your Worship Philosophy

This a big one, so a little time is worth it here. This is where it all starts. If this definition is off (even by just a few degrees) from a sound biblical vision of worship, we will have worship bread that is heavy on yeast (light and fluffy) and low on substance. Or vice-versa (heavy on substance and low on texture). I start at Rom. 12:1-2, and reach back into the Old Testament and forward toward Revelation (the New Creation) for this definition I came up with.

You can find my definition of worship here. (Note: I explore all of this here, and address the problems in the worship industry, radio industry and more because of our limited definitions.)

From this can emerge your "Worship Philosophy." This is an important iteration of your vision of what worship is all about, to which you can call people (in the church and in the worship team). This should be revisited each year, and edited as appropriate.

2. Spread Your Worship Philosophy Through Every Aspect Of Church Life

Having created a Worship Philosophy, built on a solid definition of worship, now you have something to speak from, teach from, and lead from. In every aspect of your church's worship life, from how you set up the stage, to how you handle your musician rotation, to how worship is led in small groups, to what you purchase for visual and sound gear, you are seeking to spread that philosophy through everything you do.

3. Build Worship On A Holistic Value Set

Here is where values come in. They spring from your worship philosophy. When we in the Vineyard family (my church movement) talk about worship, words like "intimacy with God," "accessibility," "integrity," "cultural connection," and "kingdom expectation," come to the fore. Not all worship movements approach worship with all of these same values before them.

What are your churches values? Phrases like "equipping the saints," and words like "simplicity," "healing," and "mission" are used when we in the Vineyard family talk about worship. God is the subject of the worship sentence, is one of our mantras. We are the objects of his love (Jn. 4:19). Songs are a *place we go* to meet with God. But life is a *place we go* to partner with God. Think holistically and make a big deal out of your values; it changes the music.

4. Choose A Worship Leader With Both Heart And Skill

You are praying for someone who has a passion to grow in Christ, and the basic musical skills it takes to lead worship, attract musicians, and build arrangements and bands. Logistic skills are vital for scheduling, and pastoral skills for keeping the team on track.

5. Get Your Worship Leader Visiting Churches

By osmosis, values seep in. Name your worship values, then expose your worship leader to those values in other communities as often as possible. Immersion is best for a season, if possible. In the Vineyard, it's the way we do it. Bring in role models as well. It's worth it.

6. Get Your Worship Leader Studying

They need skill, values, ministry, and even theological input. We can't leave a worship leader just to the making of music and the creating of experiences. It's not enough. They are as visible as you in pastoring the community in worship. Care for them; lead them. (I developed this for that very purpose.)

7. Remember That What You Have Is Enough

Worship music that sounds good can open people to God in beautiful ways. Don't be in a rush to gather a crowd of musicians. The music will just sound bad. Keep the bar high, work with the instruments you have, and help those sound great.

8. Embrace That An Acoustic Band Is Cool Today

Like the "what you have is en0ugh" line above, this tip reminds us that "acoustic" is always an "in" sound – leverage it to create an alternative vibe to the rockfest many churches try to recreate. Use pads and loops to fill out acoustic sounds. And buy a cajon. My goodness. A cajon.

9. Spend Years Recruiting Musicians

It's the rush to have a crowd up front that creates a monster we must dismantle later. If that's a value buzzing in your plant, then borrow musicians from other places, and get the sound strong. Piling everyone on because they like music will just damage things in the end.

10. Ask For Short Term Commitments

Do the opposite of making promises. Call it an experiment, and welcome people into 4-6 month opportunities. Running auditions is a must, right from the gate. Playing with a band is different skillset than many grew up with. It is always easier to appoint than it is to disappoint.

11. Get A Great Small Sound System

Great sound brings in great (called) musicians. I'm a huge fan of the Bose L1 series. In my view every church, whether it be church plant or otherwise should have at least one. The sound is perfect for smaller venues. Other systems work as well. Producer and Trainer Mike O'Brien has much wisdom in this area.

12. Borrow Under-utilized Musicians

You're setting the tone for the dynamics of corporate worship that you want to become the environment of the church. Draw in solid musicians and make it fun. Some of them stay, but for the right reasons. If not, help them figure it out. (Thanks to pal Mark Young for reminding me of this one.)

13. Coach And Mentor Your Worship Leader

As good friend Ted Kim says, don't set worship on autopilot. Sow into that leader; you're already coaching them by example, so do it intentionally. Coach values, not skills, unless you're a worship leader. Have them meet all your friends and heroes.

14. Create A Culture Of Worship Mentoring

If you don't invest in this, the process will struggle from the start. Every worship leader, every musician, every tech leader – must have a sense that there is a development expectation and provision in the culture of the church. If it's just about playing Sunday mornings, there will be a loss of enthusiasm. Everyone wants to grow, to be mentored and developed, in some way.

Any church that wants to plant churches must prioritize this, so when the time comes to plant there is already a vibrant community of musicians, techs, and growing worship leaders from which to draw.

Other Ingredients There are a few other things you can do to get things strengthened more quickly as well in your worship ministry.

- Host extended worship nights (it helps team and church culture)
- Do Worship Circles (again, instructions and a vid are in here)
- Get good tech without extravagance (visuals and sound matter today)
- Train visual techs (they need input, a great 50 min. free video with guru Nate Ragan is here)
- Optimize worship environments (small, resonant rooms for smaller groups)
- Be prepared to start over (sometimes a clean slate helps)
- Don't get discouraged; get help (invite it in)

Bless you as you develop your worship ministry with these ingredients and more.

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