



# EQUIPPING FOR... **WORSHIP**

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## **Visual Arts in Worship: Designing the Content of Screens for Effective Communication**

Based on a workshop presentation at the Presbytery of Oak Ridges Day Apart Conference, October 24th, 2015 by Neal Mathers, a minister at St. Andrew's, Newmarket

**W**e cannot escape the visual elements of our church and biblical heritage. Through the centuries magnificent church buildings have been filled with beautiful stained glass and elaborate carvings that depict stories of our faith. Icons, frescos and paintings have visualized our faith for most of the history of Christianity. Clergy have dressed in gowns hiding their street clothes, worn stoles with various colours and symbols. We have the water and font at baptism, bread and wine at communion, ashes on Ash Wednesday, foot washing on Maundy Thursday, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil, candles on an Advent wreath and crosses on church walls.

Open your Bible and read the instructions God gave for the construction of the tabernacle and the temple (e.g., Exodus 26, 1 Chronicles 28:11-18). Consider Jesus' parables as story pictures (e.g. Mark 4:2-32) about what the kingdom of God is like (Matthew 13:10-11).

The invention of the printing press by Johannes Guttenberg in the 15th century enabled the church in the following centuries to use print media in worship and to communicate broadly about faith. In many ways digital projection returns to the visual roots of our faith.

The kingdom of God "is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." Luke 13:19

### **We are visual learners**

According to recent research, 65% of people are now classified as "visual learners", although in a sense we are all visual learners. In a July 2012 posting titled "Learning through Visuals" on the *Psychology Today* blog, Dr. Haig Kouyoumdjian wrote:

"A large body of research indicates that visual cues help us to better retrieve and remember information. The research outcomes on visual learning make complete sense when you consider that our brain is mainly an image processor (much of our sensory cortex is devoted to vision), not a word processor. In fact, the part of the brain used to process words is quite small in comparison to the part that processes visual images." Available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/get-psyched/201207/learning-through-visuals>

I suggest that if your church is not using the visual arts – and remember digital projection can enable that – then you are not communicating in the modern world.

### Digital projection requires planning and preparation

If you are planning on introducing digital projection or multi-media, then you need to know and understand that digital projection is more work, not less. It adds an extra level of complexity to worship planning. Worship is no longer just words. It is now words accompanied by images.

### Digital projection can enhance worship

The goal of digital technology in worship is to enhance the worship experience by creating a visual space on the screen that will point eyes to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Digital projection is a medium through which people can worship visually – just like the organ or piano is a medium to enhance worship through music.

### Digital projection has many uses in worship

The most common uses are to project:

- the words of hymns and songs
- loop announcements as people gather and/or as they leave
- the words to responses e.g., the Call to Worship, Prayer of Confession
- the words of the scripture passage, realizing that people have a higher retention level when they hear and see, rather than just hearing
- images or scripture verses that support the minister's sermon
- congregational unison readings e.g., the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer or the Doxology
- music or movie video clip to enhance worship or to illustrate a point in a sermon

### Digital projection needs carefully chosen images

Congregations often use digital technology to place an image as a background for the words projected. The phrase *There was once an old man* will have different meanings when paired with a picture of an alcoholic, an old man playing with his grandchildren or the character Gandalf from the movie *Lord of the Rings*. The first line of Book of Praise Hymn #27 *As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you* will have

a different effect when paired with *an ocean and secluded beach scene* rather than with *deer grazing in a river bed*. It is important to find *suitable* images, ones that reinforce and support the text rather than distract, create confusion or cause misunderstanding. In each case, ask how might the image affect the viewer's understanding of the words? Ideally words and picture(s) will complement each other.

### Computer software is helpful

The right software reduces the time you spend composing slides for worship and result in a much better presentation. There are three software or program choices that are most often used in congregations:

1. Microsoft PowerPoint: In the hands of someone who is really good with this program many things are possible.
2. Specially designed worship software: The two leading worship softwares are Easy Worship and ProPresenter. Both can be used with a Mac or a PC, but ProPresenter works best with a Mac.

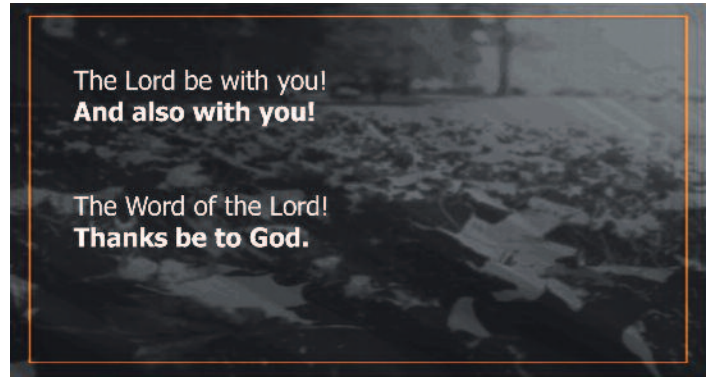
At first glance, specially designed worship software may seem expensive to a congregation. They retail between \$400- \$500US. It is a lifetime purchase and upgrades are available from time to time either for free or for a reasonable cost. The key advantages of worship software over PowerPoint is that it is specifically designed for worship and it is user friendly. This software also comes with preloaded background images, a song library so many favourite hymns and songs are already loaded, and you can download into the program directly from Song Select, which has every song, covered by your CCLI copyright, within it.

### Worship software

I have used both Easy Worship and ProPresenter. The needs of your congregation will govern your choice. Both programs offer a 30-day free trial period. As you will discover then, the software makes it easier to experiment with different font sizes, colours and styles.

### Tips for creating PowerPoint slides

1. Less is more. Do not over saturate people with visual images. For example, my congregation has the technology to project the words of each scripture reading on the screen. We've chosen NOT to do that because it might tip the scales towards over saturating the congregation with images. Instead we simply put up one slide with the scripture readings and their page numbers in the pew Bibles.
2. Give yourself adequate time to design, prepare and review PowerPoint slides. At my church we have one person prepare the slides, one polishes them (edits and enters them) and then I give them a final review before worship begins.
3. Spelling errors can ruin any presentation. Spell check does *not* automatically correct everything. In fact, it doesn't recognize some of the words in our Christian language at all and sometimes will automatically change them to something else. And if a spelling error looks bad when it is on paper, it looks 100 times worse when it is projected on a large screen.
4. Rehearse the presentation. What you see on your computer screen when you prepare the slides and what you see on the BIG screen in your worship area may be different. Find this out before worship so you can correct it.
5. If your congregation follows the lectionary and the church year, choose backgrounds for slides that are consistent with current season's colour. In this way the projected images can support other aspects of worship.
6. To determine the best font style and size, gather a small group of people to stand at the back of your worship area. Project some hymn lyrics on the screen with different font styles and font sizes. Together decide which ones work best. Remember that for the elderly with declining sight and or people with visual impairment the fonts and size need to be accessible – or hand out printed copies of what is on the screen.



7. Boldface is a useful tool. For example, if you project a responsive psalm or prayer, the leader's part can be un-bolded and simply bold the responsive part. You don't even have to say "Leader" and "People." People catch on quickly, knowing to read the boldface in unison.
8. Consistency on the screen – from one slide to another, from hymn to hymn, from week to week – is critical for effective communication. Be consistent with the size and type of font, line spacing, punctuation and transition speed. The greater the consistency, the greater the effectiveness of your presentation will be.

### FAQs

#### How do I decide how many fonts?

Less is more. Just because you can use multiple fonts doesn't mean you should. The rule of thumb is never use more than two fonts during the same worship service. This will help your presentation look clean, professional and cohesive.

#### Which fonts are recommended?

The safest choice for fonts are those that are called "Sans serif" fonts. Both PCs and Macs have the fonts Helvetica or Arial as their default fonts and those are both "without serif." "Serif" refers to any protruding feature at the end of a letter's main stroke. Sans serif fonts are the safe choice for almost any worship presentation. The most popular with churches today are: Gill sans, Gotham, Helvetica neue, Myriad pro, Tahoma and Verdana. The reasons include "modern looking", "clean" and "easy to read."

### What font size do you recommend?

Choose a font that is large enough for easy reading, but not so large that it breaks your hymn lyrics or other text in too many unwanted places. The size and shape of your screen, the size of your worship area, the number of screens you have and how close people are to those screens will influence the font size you choose.

### What are the best font colours?

Just because you can have text with all kind of different colours doesn't mean you should. Even when you use background images, the default should always be white text on a black background or black text on a white background. Change this rule only when there is a good reason to do so.

### What line spacing should be used?

Most worship software use a default value of 1.0 between lines. Most experts now suggest that 1.2 or 1.5 spacing is a better option and makes the text on the screen easier to read.

### What is the best way to align text?

The most popular alignment for worship slides is in the center, the primary focal point. There it is easiest to read and most appealing to the eye. The second most popular alignment is on the left because the straight edge of the text makes it easy for readers to find the next line. This is best for long blocks of text like scripture readings or responsive reading. Align the text on the right only when you want to add a unique design twist to your slides. It's a creative way to add a little variation to your presentation.

### When do you recommend using all caps (i.e. capitals)?

Avoid using all upper case in your presentation. If you capitalize everything you are defeating yourself. Socially, using all caps is symbolic of yelling. Also all caps makes your presentation more difficult to read. We are trained to read with an uppercase letter followed by lower case letters.

### Copyright issues

Copyright may be an issue with many images and videos. See <http://presbyterian.ca/copyright/> <http://www.wingclips.com/>. Some congregations subscribe to websites e.g., WingClips which has both a free account feature and subscription service. However there are some visuals available through the PCC website. Check out the following pages:

**Photos** <http://presbyterian.ca/sharing/photos/>  
<http://presbyterian.ca/pwsd/gallery/>

**Videos** <http://presbyterian.ca/sharing/videos/>

#### PowerPoint

<http://presbyterian.ca/mission-moments/>  
<http://presbyterian.ca/pwsd/category/display-present/>

### How many lines should be on each slide?

In graphic design there is a phrase called “white space” which refers to the space around or between the elements. It may not always be white, but as blank space it provides “breathing room” for eyes as they travel to the next text or graphic. If there is too little white space, there is visual congestion. The more there is, the less cluttered and more legible the text and the more pleasing the design. The rule of thumb is this: four lines of text on one slide create enough white space, eight lines create clutter.

### Recommended Resource

*The Worship House Media Handbook* by Jeff McIntosh and Church Motion Graphics, downloadable for \$24.99 US from [www.worshiphousemedia.com](http://www.worshiphousemedia.com). This is the best resource I know for both new and experienced people who want to create great presentations for Sunday morning.

### Canadian Ministries wants to hear from YOU!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your story of using digital projection in worship. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 Ext. 271 or Facebook at [facebook.com/pccconnect](https://facebook.com/pccconnect)