



# Ways to Incorporate the ARTISTIC GIFTS of the Congregation into Worship

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Children's Art Club, Calvin Presbyterian Church, Toronto, ON.

Music is a common art form used in worship, but what about other forms of art? Chances are there are many artistic talents in your congregation that could be used to glorify God and beautify your church's sanctuary. There are many easy ways to facilitate participation from congregation members of all ages in sharing their gifts through creative expression.

As your congregation incorporates more art into worship, it is important to remember that your aim is to glorify God, which does not require perfection. In *Finding Words for Worship*, Ruth Duck writes, "Creativity is an important dimension of worship; and the creativity that best serves worship is a process, not a product" (p. 10). Here are a few ideas for incorporating the creative gifts of people in your congregation into worship:

**ASK AND INVITE:** You probably are not even aware of artistic talents hidden in your congregation, so it is important that you ask. You are likely to have a sketch artist, painter or sculptor sitting in the pews. Don't rely solely on Sunday announcements, also put it in your newsletter, on social media and make personal invitations. If you are just starting to incorporate non-musical art into worship, it is best if you make the ask specific. For example:

- "We are doing a sermon series on forgiveness. Is there someone in the congregation with gifts in painting who would like to create a painting for the front of the church to accompany the sermon?"
- "We would like to make our own autumn flower displays. Are there any gardeners out there with flowers we could use? Does anyone love floral design, have skills in it or want to learn about it?"
- "We will be reading Jeremiah 18 in a few weeks about God as the potter and us as the clay. I've heard that you make clay pots. Would you be willing to bring clay in on the day of the sermon and create a simple pot while the sermon is being preached?"

**SEEK OUT VARIETY:** People who don't identify as artists might be hesitant to come forward, but they still have talents to share. The crafters, for example, might see their artistic gifts as useful for church rummage sales but not for worship; however, given the opportunity and the right projects, knitters, quilters, seamstresses and woodworkers can also add beauty to the worship space.

- Quilts can be used as pew coverings to make the sanctuary more colourful and comfortable for specific liturgical dates, such as Pentecost, or for specific readings, such as Joseph and the colourful coat or Noah's Ark and the rainbow.



Members of the prayer shawl groups from Knox PC in Holstein, Amos PC in Dromore and Knox PC in Normanby, ON.

- Are there bakers in your congregation? For a Communion Sunday, invite the bakers in the church to make different types of loaves and put them on the altar.
- Carpenters are a central part of the Biblical story. On a day when you are discussing Joseph, have a woodworker from your congregation come in and create something out of wood to show the children. Or, for a Good Friday service, have a woodworker make a simple wooden cross with nails in it to display at the front of the sanctuary.

**DRAW INSPIRATION FROM LITURGICAL SEASONS:** Many congregations eagerly await decorating the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas yet overlook opportunities to decorate at other times of the year. Each liturgical season, with its colours and symbols, offers an opportunity to embrace the beauty of God’s story. As you plan the decorations for the next liturgical season, think of the specific elements you might want to experiment with and find people with untapped gifts to help you.

- The creative use of lights is an easy way to incorporate beauty into a worship service. Is there anyone in your church who has experience working with lighting? An interior decorator, perhaps? Or someone who uses lighting in unique ways in their home? One way that you could invite them to use their gifts is to plan how lighting could be used during Holy Week to portray the movement from darkness to light that happens from Good Friday to Easter Monday.
- Is there anyone in your church who does origami? Invite them to get the congregation involved in making paper stars during Advent, paper doves on the Baptism of our Lord Sunday or paper animals when you tell the Creation story.
- Are there old banners in your church that need updating? There are many great ideas online for contemporary banners that can be created easily by seamstresses in your congregation.

**GET CHILDREN INVOLVED:** Adults are more likely to become involved in creating art for worship if children lead the way. A great way to get children involved is to have them create art that matches a specific theme. The theme could be based on the liturgical season, such as “He is

Risen” for Easter, or a sermon series theme, such as “Going Out” for a series on missional theology. Work with the children’s ministry coordinators to have the children make the art as part of a lesson in Sunday School. Find beautiful ways of displaying the artwork in the sanctuary: mounting it on cardstock, framing it like in a gallery or using display cases. Here are a few fun and easy suggestions:

- Illustrated Children’s Ministry has beautiful thematic colouring posters that can be coloured in the sanctuary by old and young alike and then framed or put on cardstock to be put on the walls: [illustratedministry.com/churches](http://illustratedministry.com/churches)
- It is a classic, but having the children decorate the windows or plain walls in the sanctuary with “stained-glass” made out of tissue paper in shapes and colours related to your theme will brighten up the worship space in a fun way: [youtube.com/watch?v=E4215d-IA70](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4215d-IA70)



Children of the Sunday School at St. James Presbyterian Church in Hanwell, NB, helped transform the sanctuary Easter morning, creating stained glass pictures using tissue paper.

- Dramatic readings or enactments of the scripture passage are fun ways to get kids involved in worship. Have your children’s ministry volunteers practice with the kids during Sunday School, and then invite them to read and act out a scripture passage during worship.

**MAKING ART DURING SERVICE:** The Reformed Tradition has emphasized the Word as a primary means of knowing God. Art can complement the Word by helping people to grasp the Christian story in new ways. At a moment that is appropriate during your church’s liturgy, you can engage congregants in an art activity that speaks to their hearts. A few suggestions to get you started:

- A powerful way of conveying that we are shaped by God is by the engaging in making a collective art project of pinched pots. Pinched pots are simple clay forms that are easily molded by one’s hands. For an example of how one artist engaged her congregation in this project visit: [petrazantingh.ca/#/pinchpot](http://petrazantingh.ca/#/pinchpot)
- The next time you tell the parable of the mustard seed, get creative by handing out old bulletin covers and asking people to follow instructions on making origami birds. At the end of the service the birds can be collected and strung throughout the sanctuary as a reminder of God’s kingdom.
- At your next Christmas Eve service, you might encourage the congregation to create a simple manger ornament out of popsicle sticks and fabric that have been precut and provided to each person.

**CONGREGATIONAL PHOTO EXHIBIT:** There are likely many people in your congregation that love photography. Now, with camera software in mobile phones, everyone can participate in this artform. A fun and easy way to start using art in the context of worship is by inviting people to take pictures that represent different themes like hope, faith and love.

- Select a handful of pictures that really capture the theme to be framed and used as decoration in your sanctuary. Create a photo album of all the other submitted photos and put it in a place where people can look through it.
- Use photos as images to accompany the Order of Service in bulletins or projected on an overhead screen.
- Print photos and then string them on the back of pews or anywhere they will be appreciated by people in the congregation.

**DON'T FORGET THE WRITERS:** In every congregation there are hidden writers just waiting to be asked to contribute words for worship. Liturgical writing is an art that takes practice, so, if you'd like members of your congregation to start writing for worship, you may want to start up a writer's group for people to practice together.\* Start by having the writing group read the lectionary readings for the week and write reflections based on the readings.

- There are several ways to write for worship that will to prepare writers to contribute to liturgy: a reflection for a bulletin cover, a newsletter article, a prayer for a special meal or a reflection for the website.
- Once writers gain confidence, work with them to begin writing Prayers of Adoration and Confession, or Prayers of Intercession.
- If you have a creative or experienced group of writers, you can experiment with poetry, drama and other creative styles of writing. Find a place during the worship service for your writers to share their spiritual writings.

**INTEGRATE MOVEMENT INTO LITURGY:** Although we don't frequently use dance as a means of prayer, movement can be a meaningful and beautiful way of worshipping God. The mere mention of liturgical dance can evoke fear or discomfort for many congregants. It is important to note that there are many ways to incorporate movement that don't involve elaborate dances. Consider the following ways that you might begin using this form of expression in worship:

- Some congregations use ribbons or prayer flags to offer interested congregants the opportunity to praise through physical movements. While this can be very prayerful for those holding the ribbons or the flags, it can also have a great visual impact on the congregation as a whole. For reticent congregations, a good place to start is on Palm Sunday when the congregation is already involved in waving palm branches.
- If there are children or teens taking dance classes, you might invite them to perform a simple dance for one of the songs during worship.
- Think creatively about physical gestures that can be used to communicate prayers or accompany songs in the worship service.

\*A helpful book about using liturgical language is Debra and Ron Rienstra's *Worship Words* (2009, Baker).