

How to format PowerPoint presentations for worship

Introduction

Every congregation is different. Styles of worship may vary (traditional, more contemporary or a bit of both), and church buildings and worship spaces are often very different from each other. The advice offered here is generalised for the broad range of contexts. You are encouraged to adapt this advice to suit your congregation's own style and needs.

We recognise that not all congregations use PowerPoint (PPT). Much of the advice here will be applicable no matter what digital presentation software is used.

This Fact Sheet has been created to compliment the PPT of the same title. The PPT includes examples to illustrate the points below.

Purpose of Worship PPTs

Before we get into specifics, it is worth considering the purpose of worship PPTs or digital presentations.

- Assisting the congregation to participate in and follow worship
- Ease of access for people of all ages and abilities
- It shouldn't be about "entertaining" during the boring bits...

Challenges

Worship presentations are different from most other forms of PPT, and so general advice from the internet is not always applicable.

- Lots of text – it can be very helpful for people to read the full Bible readings or text of prayers on the screen (especially if they are hard of hearing), but this means slides can be very text heavy.
- Long time for people to concentrate – in education and business, presentations on screen are usually kept quite brief. A church service is much longer, and some people will struggle to concentrate.
- Older members/people with vision impairment – most congregations will include people who struggle with seeing well, and there are likely some parts of your church building that are harder to see the screen from.
- Lower literacy members – there are also likely to be people with different reading abilities. This could include children, people without much formal education or people who speak English as a second language. Good PPT design can make it easier for these people to follow the service and to participate.

Principles of Good PPT Design

There are some basic principles which can make PPT design more effective. They are very much intertwined with each other.

- Consistency
- Readability
- Contrast
- Alignment
- Font Size and Style
- Simplicity and Placement

Consistency

Humans respond to patterns and routine. Keeping a consistent presentation style can help people follow the service because it:

- Uses visual cues
- Creates a mood conducive to worship
- Doesn't distract from worship

Readability

In everything you present, remember:

- If the congregation can't read it, it doesn't matter how pretty it is
- Each church will be different, but you need to cater to those who will struggle most.

Contrast

Contrast is about the difference between dark and light. For example, high contrast slides could have:

- Black/very dark background, white text
- White/very light background, black text

Remember that if there isn't enough contrast, the slide will be hard to read, and people will be distracted from the content.

Note: whether you choose white font on a dark background or black font on a light background will depend on:

- Your church size
- How much natural light comes into the building
- the size and location of your screen
- the type of projection equipment you use

You will need to experiment with what works best in your space. Try sitting in different parts of the church or asking a few different people to give you feedback.

Alignment

Alignment means how the text and other elements on the slides are lined up. It is helpful to know that:

- Left-aligned text is easier for lower literacy readers, and for large blocks of text
- Top alignment (distance from the top of the slide) is also important so readers can track from one slide to another (especially during readings and hymns).
- Consistency – most slides should have the same margins and alignment (see the PPT and Fact Sheet on 'How to create a PPT Master Slide' for help with this.)

Font Size and Style

Some fonts are easier to read on the screen than others.

- Usually simple, sans serif fonts work best.
- Elaborate or heavily stylized fonts are hard to decipher, and may distract from worship
- Serif fonts can be too busy for the screen
- Size matters. Guidelines for worship in ageing congregations state that text should be at least 36 font

Consistency is important. You should aim to keep your font style and size consistent throughout the service. This will be more pleasing to the eye and assist the congregation to recognise each section, where they are to respond etc. Inconsistent fonts can distract from the content of the service, particularly if they are difficult to read.

Headings, text and attributions should have set styles and sizes.

Simplicity and Placement

The 'keep it simple' approach is good to keep in mind when designing PPT slides.

- Overcrowded slides distract from worship
- Too much text or too many images decrease readability
- Avoid 'busy' backgrounds
- One image per slide maximum

Placement is about how you use the space on a slide.

- Text should be in the easiest place to read (left-aligned, consistent margins)
- Images should not overlap text
- Maintain contrast for text – if you have patterns or images underneath text, it can make it very difficult to read. Aim to have a plain, high-contrast background under all text.

- Avoid overcrowding
- If you want people to notice an image, put it on a separate slide and make it fill the screen (eg sermon illustrations)
- The bigger the object, the more attention it gets – avoid distracting from the text by using images which are too large
- On text-rich slides, images and colour bands should be restricted to the margins of the slide

PPT Resources on the Worship Planning Page

The Commission on Worship provides a number of resources already formatted in PPT for your use:

- Sermon and Reading Illustrations PPT – see the Visual Arts and Drama tab each week. You will find a selection of images to illustrate each reading and sometimes particular sermons. These have all been chosen because they are free for you to use. Please make sure you include any sources listed when you use these images (acknowledging them once on the PPT is sufficient).
- Seasonal Master Slides – each liturgical season, a range of master slides are available for you to use. You can copy and paste your existing service PPTs into these master slides and they will automatically reformat them. (Refer to the PPT and Fact Sheet on 'How to create a PPT Master Slide' for instructions on how to use master slides). You can find these in the weekly Visual Arts & Drama tab.
- Resources Ready 2 Go (weekly service orders already complete with images, Public Domain hymn lyrics, readings etc) – available each week in Word and PPT (standard and widescreen) in the Service Orders tab.
- Responsive Psalms – the psalms for the week are available with the antiphon included are available in PPT (standard and widescreen) on the Readings tab each week. Simply copy and paste these into your service to save time.
- Service Orders – each of the approved service orders (with and without Holy Communion) are available in PPT. You can find these on the Service Orders tab each week.

These PPT resources are all available in Standard and Widescreen

For further assistance

Please contact the WPP Coordinator at cowblog@lca.org.au

Conclusion

Summing up, PPTs should enable worship, not distract from it. As you adapt this advice to suit your context, we particularly encourage you to bear in mind accessibility, consistency and readability.

God bless you as you serve his Kingdom!