

# LAY WORSHIP

Building Confidence and  
Capacity as Lay Leaders

THE CENTRE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING  
AT KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO

**Instructor:**

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## Introduction and Overview

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### About Instructor Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis

Sarah is the Associate Professor in the Practice of Ministry and Faith Formation at Knox College. She is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and has served congregations in Guelph and Norval Ontario. Her primary areas of research are preaching, worship and the practice of ministry. From decolonizing worship practices to trauma-informed preaching, Sarah has published several books aimed at facilitating a conversation among Christians about topic that matter to the church today.



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### About Ministry Forum

Ministry Forum is where faith, community, and leadership converge. We are a vibrant and inclusive online platform hosted by Knox College, University of Toronto, dedicated to serving current and aspiring Christian ministry leaders. Our

community is as diverse as the ministries we represent, encompassing students, alumni, pastors, psychotherapists, chaplains, and those passionate about spreading the Good News in whatever ministry context they find themselves.



Our identity is rooted in the belief that ministry is not a solitary journey; it's a collective effort. We are a fellowship that values authenticity, fosters connections, and celebrates diversity. Here, you'll find a safe space to explore, share, and grow in your faith, leadership, and ministry.

### Overview

Understand the significance of lay leadership in worship and the responsibilities it entails. Introduction to the workshop structure, expectations, and how to engage with the content and fellow participants.

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## Module 2: Context

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### Overview

Explore how various contexts (cultural, theological, geographical) influence worship practices. Discuss the importance of inclusivity and language in worship settings.

### Reflection Questions

What does your context look like?

- Give consideration to language for God and people

- Think about diversity

- Geographic location

- Your church's architecture and how that shapes the worship experience

What works and doesn't work in your context?

What is expected in your context?

What is preferred?

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## Overview

Understand the core of what worship is, its purpose, and whom it serves. Learn about the 10 Core Worship Convictions and the Reformed tradition's approach to worship.

## Living Faith 7.3

The church lives to praise God. We have no higher calling than to offer the worship that belongs to God day by day, Sunday by Sunday. Through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, in praise, prayer, teaching and fellowship, God sustains the life of the church. We worship God as Lord offering ourselves in the service of Christ, rejoicing that we have been brought from darkness to light. Worship draws us into the work of Christ. Even now he intercedes for the world to which he came and for which he died. In union with him, the church prays for the healing and the salvation of the world. Blessing and honour and glory and power be to our God for ever and ever!

## 10 Core Worship Convictions

- Awareness of the glory, beauty, and holiness of God.
- Full, conscious, active participation.
- Deep engagement with scripture.
- Celebration of baptism and the Lord's supper.
- A discerning approach to culture.
- Disciplined creativity in the arts.
- Collaboration with other ministries.
- Hospitality
- Intentional integration with all of life.
- Collaboration in planning and evaluation.

## Reflection Questions

What stood out for you as the 10 Core Convictions about worship were shared?  
What surprised you?

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## Module 4: Order of Worship

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### **Overview**

Examine the traditional four-fold order of worship and its theological underpinnings. Learn how to structure a worship service that facilitates a meaningful encounter with God.

### **The Gathering**

Inviting God's people to worship and prepare their hearts.

### **The Word**

Hearing and reflecting on Scripture as God's message.

### **The Response to the Word**

Responding to God's Word through prayer, offerings, and commitment.

### **The Sending**

Commissioning worshipers to live out the gospel in the world.

### **Traditional Order of Worship Example**

- Prelude
- Opening Hymn/Praises
- Land Acknowledgment
- Call to Worship
- Prayer of Approach/Adoration
- Prayer of Confession
- Assurance of Pardon
- Prayer of Illumination
- Scripture Readings
- Sermon
- Sacraments of Baptism/Communion
- Prayers of Thanksgiving
- The Offering
- Closing Hymn
- Charge and Benediction

### **Reflection Questions**

What Order is most familiar to you?

Why do you do it the way you do? Do you know why?

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Does it help people encounter God? Why or why not?  
Does it help people move from despair to hope?

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## Module 5: Scripture

### **Overview**

Understand the central role of Scripture in worship planning and execution. Introduction to the Lectionary and how to select appropriate Scriptures for worship.

### **The Revised Lectionary**

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) is a three-year cycle of weekly scripture readings used in Christian worship, providing a systematic approach to reading significant portions of the Bible. It includes readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels. Developed in the late 20th century, it is used by many Protestant, Anglican, and Roman Catholic congregations around the world.

The purpose is to provide a diverse and rich experience of Scripture, uniting different congregations through a common set of readings and encouraging a deeper understanding of the texts.

The RCL was created through the collaboration of several Christian denominations, aiming to promote unity among Christians by encouraging the use of common scripture readings across different traditions.

The lectionary operates on a three-year cycle, with each year designated as Year A, Year B, or Year C. Each year focuses primarily on the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, or Luke, while John is read during Easter in all three years.

For each Sunday and festival, the RCL specifies four readings: one from the Old Testament, a Psalm, an Epistle (or letter from the New Testament), and a Gospel reading. This structure is designed to provide a balanced diet of biblical texts.

Other lectionaries exist, offering alternative approaches to scripture readings. Each lectionary aims to guide worship and scripture engagement, reflecting theological emphases and traditions specific to their communities.

### **Narrative Lectionary**

The Narrative Lectionary is a four-year cycle of readings. On the Sundays from September through May each year the texts follow the sweep of the biblical story, from Creation through the early Christian church.

The texts show the breadth and variety of voices within Scripture. They invite people

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to hear the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the prophets, Jesus, and Paul. Listening to the many different voices within Scripture enriches preaching and the life of faith.

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## Module 6:Prayer

### **Overview**

Learn about different types of prayers used in worship and their purposes. Develop skills in writing prayers that resonate with your congregation.

### **Types of Prayer**

#### **Call to Worship**

Is often scriptural – see the psalms.

Is about God calling us to worship – we gather in the name of the Triune God.

May be responsive, unison, or read in one voice.

#### **Prayers of Approach/Adoration**

Dear God

We love you.

You are amazing and powerful.

You have done great things.

#### **Prayer of Confession**

We have made mistakes.

We are sorry.

Please forgive us.

Amen.

#### **Assurance of Pardon**

Friends,

In Jesus Christ we are made new.

We are forgiven.

Amen.

#### **Prayer for Illumination**

Help us to open our minds and hearts

To understand what you are saying to us

In the scriptures and the sermon.

Amen.

#### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

May also be called the Pastoral Prayer or Prayers of the People

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These prayers should draw on the theme of the sermon  
Begins with thanksgiving to God for God's grace and salvation in JC  
Prayers for our world, our church, ourselves  
Do not mention every situation that needs prayer  
Be careful about privacy  
Pay attention to what is happening in the world

### **Prayer Exercise:**

#### **Prayer of Adoration Example**

Holy God

We come before You today with hearts full of admiration. You are amazing, God! You made everything, and Your greatness is beyond words.

We adore You for being so wise. You know everything and understand everything.

We love You for Your never-ending love. You gave us Jesus, who shows us how much You care. Through Him, we find hope and forgiveness.

We praise You for always keeping Your promises. You are like a strong, unchanging rock that we can always count on.

We pray all of this in Jesus' name

Amen.

#### **Prayer of Confession Example**

Generous God,

We come before You with humble hearts, knowing that we are not perfect. We have made mistakes, and we have done things that hurt others and ourselves.

We confess our sins to You now. Please forgive us for the times we have lied, hurt others with our words, or acted in selfish ways. We are sorry for not always following Your loving guidance.

Help us, God, to turn away from our wrongdoing and turn toward You. We want to be better, to be more like Your Son, Jesus.

Thank You for Your promise to forgive us when we ask. We trust in Your mercy and grace.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen

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## **Prayer for Illumination Example**

Dear God,

As we turn to Your Word now, we ask for Your help. Open our hearts and minds to understand what You want to teach us through the Scriptures.

May Your Holy Spirit be our guide, illuminating the words on these pages and bringing them to life in our lives. Help us to see Your truth and apply it to our daily walk.

Give wisdom to those who will share Your Word with us today, that their words may be clear and filled with Your wisdom.

We thank You for the gift of Your Word, and we pray that it may be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen

## **Reflection Questions**

How do you feel about praying in worship?

What are your areas of strength and weakness?

What are your growing edges?

How do you feel about praying extemporaneously?

How do you feel about using other people's prayers?

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## Module 7: Music

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### **Overview**

Discuss the challenges and opportunities in selecting music for worship. Understand the theological implications of song choices and the practical aspects of working with music leaders.

### **Reflection Question**

As a worship leader, what are the challenges and opportunities of choosing music?

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## Additional Questions

### **What About Preaching?**

**Answer:** Preaching is not covered under the scope of this course. For those interested, we have a seminar specifically dedicated to preaching - you can find it here. Our Lay Preaching Course is designed for beginner preachers (those with little or no experience) and will cover both the theology and practical aspects of preaching. It's an excellent opportunity for those looking to improve their listening skills or who might find themselves called to preach unexpectedly.

### **How will I know what works in my context?**

**Answer:** The diversity in today's church communities makes a one-size-fits-all approach to worship challenging. What might resonate in one congregation could be completely foreign in another. It's essential to be mindful of the specific needs and traditions of each community you're serving. While some foundational elements remain constant, flexibility and sensitivity to the congregation's unique character are key.

### **What about the benediction at the end of the service?**

#### **Who is permitted to perform it?**

**Answer:** A benediction, essentially a "good word," is a blessing that sends the congregation out with the Holy Spirit's giftedness they received at baptism. While there's debate about whether non-ordained individuals can raise their hands during a benediction, I [Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis] believe in the freedom to bless others as part of our call. The form of a benediction can vary, from traditional blessings in the name of the Trinity to simple phrases like "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." It reaffirms the worship service's teachings and reminds the congregation of their mission and purpose. This could be a scriptural promise or a simple directive, like loving others as Christ has loved us. It's about imparting God's presence as people leave the worship space.

### **What about Communion? Who is allowed to serve the elements?**

**Answer:** The breaking of the bread and the prayer of the Holy Spirit are typically reserved for ordained ministers. However, laypeople can participate in prayers for communion or other roles as determined by your presbytery. Additional resources and training are being made available for circumstances where lay people may need to lead communion.

St. Andrew's Hall at the University of British Columbia has developed a Sacramental Elder Course for Ruling Elders in congregations without a called minister. This is a free

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online course that enables Ruling Elders to apply to their Presbytery for permission to provide the Sacraments in their local congregation. Elders can register by emailing: [deansoffice@standrews.edu](mailto:deansoffice@standrews.edu)

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