

Why Be a Worship Leader?

Serving as a worship leader can be nerve-racking. When I was first asked if I would be interested in serving as a worship leader—a few months after I started attending a Lutheran church near my graduate school—my first thought was, “The whole congregation will be looking at me! What if I mess something up?” I know I’m not the first, or the last, person to feel anxious about making a mistake while all eyes are on me. However, I hope to convince you that serving as a worship leader, while it may initially be a bit intimidating, is very much worth it.

As a graduate student, I was getting plenty of practice giving presentations in front of other people and was slowly becoming more comfortable having a roomful of people staring at me, but still, I was nervous. Most of my anxiety stemmed from the fact that because I grew up attending a Methodist church, much of the Lutheran liturgy at my new church was different. Laypeople serving as assisting ministers, communion assistants, and crucifers was new to me. With the encouragement of an experienced worship leader, however, I decided to give it a try and agreed to serve as crucifer, the person who carries the cross in the opening procession.

I am very glad I did. First, it wasn’t nearly as scary as I had imagined it might be. Training for my specific role, walking through the service a couple of times beforehand, and getting a well-timed nod from our pastor to let me know when to start moving, made me confident I could do this job. Before I knew it, I was volunteering to serve in all of the worship leader roles, when needed.

Second, serving as a worship leader gave me a perspective on worship that was different from what I had gotten sitting in the assembly. I realized that I hadn’t noticed a lot of the details about how much planning and setup is required for a worship service to run smoothly. Someone has to bring bread for communion and make sure there is enough wine. There are candles to be lit, readings to mark, and hymnals to be put out. I now appreciated all of these “little things” that I’d missed before. I also realized how carefully the worship service was planned. Everything about it was designed to engage all of the worshiper’s senses in the whole experience. For the eyes, there is the procession and the different-colored paraments for different seasons; for the ears, the music, scripture reading, and sermon; for the nose, the burning of incense; for the hands, the water in the baptismal font; and for the tongue, the bread and wine.

Third, and most importantly for me, I felt more involved in the life of the congregation. Simply being asked if I would be interested in serving as a worship leader made me feel like I belonged. *I must belong here if the congregational leaders think I can do this, right?* While learning new roles, I got to know other members I might otherwise not have approached, thinking we probably would not have much to talk about. Soon, I knew almost everyone’s name, and they knew mine.

Serving as a worship leader also gave me a way to share my time and talents, which was very important to helping me feel directly involved with my new congregation. I knew that my contributions to the life of the congregation were needed and appreciated. I was far away from home and really on my own for the first time, but connecting with

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a new church family gave me a sense of belonging in a new place that I hadn't even realized I'd been missing until I found it.

I hope my story has convinced you to consider serving as a worship leader in your congregation, and I pray that it will be as rewarding for you as it was for me.

Tips for beginning worship leaders

1. **Start with the role you are most comfortable with.** For many, that might be serving as a reader, or perhaps a role that doesn't involve public speaking, such as usher or crucifer.
2. **Practice makes perfect.** When you are learning a new role, ask the person training you to walk through the service with you ahead of time. That person often will be the presiding minister, assisting minister, sacristan, or another experienced worship leader—someone who invariably will have lots of suggestions that will help you feel more comfortable. Don't be discouraged if it takes a few repetitions before you are completely comfortable serving in a specific role.
3. **Use hymns as an opportunity to look ahead in the worship folder.** Double-checking what is coming next can calm moments of anxiety about forgetting what you are supposed to do next.
4. **Be sure everyone can hear you if you have a speaking role.** If your church has a sound system, this might require some help from your tech minister. If not, just pretend you are talking to someone at the back of the room.
5. **Don't move too fast.** That doesn't mean you need to be slow; it just means you don't need to rush when you are processing or moving from place to place up front.
6. **Look for clues from your fellow worship leaders.** For example, if you forget which stanza of the closing hymn is your cue to start the recession as the crucifer, just look for a nod from your pastor or assisting minister.
7. **And most importantly, if you forget something or make a mistake, stay calm.** It happens to everyone. Look for help from your fellow worship leaders and your pastor. As long as you don't act worried, people in the congregation will hardly notice.



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—Emma Reuschel