

You Have 60 Minutes: Put Together a Worship Service!

by Sheryl Wise and Crystal Newton

So you're in charge of planning your church's American Baptist Women's Sunday. Don't panic! Look at this as a blessing and an opportunity to showcase all the great projects your group has worked on during the year. You have a great responsibility, and you shoulder a huge burden. Go for it!

The third Sunday in September is traditionally proclaimed as "American Baptist Women's Sunday." We honor women who contribute their gifts to the church, community, and the world.

International Women's Day is March 8, and many congregations will choose the Sunday closest to that date for their annual celebration. However, this resource may be used whenever your church chooses to celebrate women.

Sermons need to be written, songs need to be learned, graphics need to be created, facilities need to be prepared, and so on. This is when panic sometimes sets in, especially if you are called to plan a worship service and you have never done it before. Actually, this will probably mean that you can bring new ideas to worship, even if it is a little scary. The key is to start early, meet often, communicate to everyone, and pray *a lot*. So sing that new song, try that new style of presenting, invite a guest speaker who will challenge everyone, or just allow for thinking outside the box.

However, the reality is that you will still want to work within the context of your church. If you have a worship committee or team, they will be able to guide your planning and help with resources. And, most certainly, the pastor should be involved. Take her or his guidance and collaborate to bring the service to your congregation. She or he can really help you with the nuts and bolts.

If the service is left entirely up to you, the first thing you do is pray. The second thing you do is look to the women and girls inside (and outside) your church who have gifts of

speaking, music, inspiration, or organization, and assemble a team.

As you meet, consider how you can use AB Women's Ministries new program theme, "A Time to Serve." (AB Women's Ministries has available packets of "A Time to Serve" bulletin covers; order at www.abwministries.org or call Judson at 1-800-458-3766.) Next, look at the elements of your worship service. Many churches follow a specific litany or order of service. You will want to discuss your options of using the existing order or designing something of your own. Considering the theme "A Time to Serve," it is a perfect opportunity to try something different. Most churches use all or most of the following elements: call to worship, Scripture readings, music, prayer, sermon, children's story, offering, benediction, and, of course, announcements!

As you plan each section, involve the women and girls in your congregation. Involve those who aren't normally in the pulpit. Involve those who may not be active in your women's or girls' group. You will need greeters, ushers, music, people to give introductions, prayers, speakers, Scripture readers, and so forth. Worship services can look different from church to church. You don't need to create a totally new thing, but be open to the Lord's leading in planning and don't be afraid to try something different. Ultimately, find ways to help people connect with Jesus.

Once you have all the elements together, you will need to follow up with all participants to ensure they are ready to serve and that they understand how their part fits in the worship service. As you plan, it is sometimes helpful to create a time script or give specific directions, such as "On the third verse of the hymn, the ushers come forward." If necessary, practice! Of course, this is very dependent on your setting. Some churches are very formal; others are more relaxed.

Some women may have experience in leading worship, while for others it may be their first time to be involved. Simply communicate clearly the expectations for each person. It is also a nice touch to send a thank-you note after the service to let them know that you appreciate their efforts.

Some “odds and ends” suggestions:

- ◆ Serve coffee, doughnuts and/or bagels, and fruit before the service. The better the spread, the more people will show up to partake and to fellowship! As an added benefit, they’ll be on time for worship too.
- ◆ Offertory thought: Consider giving a part of your congregation’s offering to the Women and Girls Mission Fund of American Baptist Women’s Ministries or another organization that supports the empowerment of women internationally.
- ◆ Hymn suggestions: “I Serve a Risen Savior,” “I Will Serve Thee,” “Joy in Serving Jesus,” “I Am Your Servant,” “Brother, Let Me Be Your Servant,” “Servant Song,” “Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?”
- ◆ Calls to worship and benedictions: Hymnals have indexes by categories; you may find additional songs or readings. The Internet will provide many resources for poems, stories, and graphics. Do searches on

words such as *servant*, *servicing*, and *serve*. If you use an online source, make sure you give proper credit, especially if it is a copyrighted resource. This is especially true with music. Use the resources within Bibles and concordances for additional guidance.

◆ Pictures/Displays: The old saying “A picture can replace a thousand words” is true. It doesn’t have to be a fancy projector and laptop setup. Posters or trifold in your fellowship area, on easels around the sanctuary, or printed as part of your bulletin will work just as well as technology. Set up displays showing what American Baptist Women’s Ministries is doing in the community and the world. Showcase White Cross, your local or state special project, or scholarship students. You might even have a dedication for one of these projects.

Finally, as you prepare to plan, remember to give all the praise and honor to God. He should be in the forefront of every element—even the announcements.

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