

Don't Panic!!

The step-by-step guide to Local Arrangements

Maybe you've just received your latest copy of the Plan and discovered your chapel is due to have a Local Arrangement (LA) later in the quarter. Or maybe you've just been called by the Superintendent to be told the planned Preacher this coming Sunday is unwell and there's no-one to replace her. Or maybe you're trying to work out what having an LA might involve before offering to have one on a regular basis. Maybe you've got another reason to be thinking about LAs. Whatever the reason, this guide aims to offer a simple, step-by-step approach to putting on a Local Arrangement. It's not the definitive authority, as there are lots of ways of taking care of an LA, but it is designed to help guide you through a process and thereby enable you to create good, effective, Godly worship without panicking.

So, here we go...

Step 1 – Stop! Have a cup of tea (or coffee, or juice, or whatever your fancy really)! Pray!

Seriously, the first thing to do is to take a breath. A God breath. Breath out, then breath in, then do it all again. God is with us in the preparation as well as in the action. Yes, if you've been phoned at 8am on Sunday morning to be told the Preacher ill and all you've got are the hymns and readings then you've got less time than discovering an LA at the end of the new Plan, but there's still time to take a moment and seek God. So even if all you've got is one minute, use it to be still, pray, and listen for God.

Step 2 – Involve others

Worship isn't something we do alone. As mentioned above, we do it with God, and we do it with other people. Think about who the other people are that can be involved. Some of them may be obvious: the organist, worship band, or digital hymnbook operator; folk on the reading and intercessions rotas; a Local Preacher who's a Member and not planned that Sunday (though remember they are not obliged to lead or preach if not planned); those involved in putting together and running the projection; people who've shown an interest in the quality of your church's worship. Some may not be obvious: what about the person who offers quiet, well-considered wisdom at your Bible Study or House Group? If there's time in advance you might want to put a small group together to plan the service. If you're short of time you might at least wish to speak to a couple of key people and get their input.

Step 3 – Check out resources

People in other places have already thought about these things, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel. If you have access to the *Methodist Worship Book* you can check out page 51 for guidance on the general shape a service might take, with the pages before and after containing orders of service and resources that might be used.

The Methodist Church also offers online resources that you could make use of, based around this page: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship> . This page leads onto a number of other pages that offer a wide range of resources, including:

- resources related to choosing Bible Readings and hymns that relate to them, as well as other worship resources: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/lectionary-and-other-resources>
- resources to enable the offering of creative prayer opportunities: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/creative-prayer>
- the online version of the recent hymnbook, *Singing the Faith*, which also includes additional hymns made available since publication: <http://www.singingthefaithplus.org.uk>

Step 4 – Do not be afraid...

...of being quiet – offering space for silent prayer is a good thing, and something often over-looked. It can be a simple yet effective way of allowing people space to pray together without needing to be creative. If you use silence be aware of two things: you'll need to keep an eye on the time because we find it difficult to accurately judge how long periods of silence (15 seconds can feel like 5 minutes, 10 minutes can feel like just a couple), and some people prefer silence if they have something to concentrate on (an image, a flickering candle, the cross). Trust that God is in the silence.

...of being creative – Local Arrangements can be great opportunities to try something different. If there's something you've always fancied giving a go in worship but never had the chance, go for it! It could be having a conversation instead of a sermon, it could be having several songs in a row, it could be reading some poetry or listening to a piece of music, it could be a prayer activity, it could be worshipping around the coffee tables. Trust that God is in the new.

...of being traditional – if you think that the best way of handling an LA may be to simply have people pick their favourite hymns, then do it. If you think following the order in the book (minus the sermon) is what people will appreciate, then go for it. If you think that a hymn sandwich with reading of one of John Wesley's sermons is just what the doctor ordered, then get on with it (though you may wish to update Mr Wesley's language!). Trust that God is in the old.

...of being wrong – no-one is perfect except God, as met in Christ through the power of the Spirit! Every preacher and worship leader knows the frustration of communal worship not working out quite as they had planned. That's life. Yet we believe in a God who seeks good out of all things – many are the preachers who have been approached, at the end of services that felt all wrong, by someone who has gently said, "Thank you. That thing you said really spoke to me. I feel blessed." Trust that God is in the mess.

Step 5 – Make a plan

Whether it's done on your own, or with a group. Whether it's done in full detail over a month or two, or in headings on a scrap of paper an hour before the service starts. Whether it goes through several revisions or seems to simply make sense from the first attempt. Whether it's based on something somebody did before, or is entirely original. Get an order of service down on paper that you, and any others helping to lead, can follow. The congregation might not know exactly what will follow next, but it's good if those who are leading worship know what will be happening.

Also, try and make sure the plan makes sense. Ask yourself, "Why does this come after that?" For example, are you having the confession after the song of praise because God's glory reminds us of shadows in our lives, or are you having confession first because we need to unload our burdens in order to fully praise God? In other words, don't just put things in the plan because you think they should be somewhere, be clear why you're going to do things.

Step 6 – Pray, again

It is God that we worship. It is God who enables us to worship. Pray at the beginning of this process, pray during this process, pray as you complete this process and are about to lead God's people in worship. Whether the process has been an hour or a month, if God has been sought in the preparation then it is more likely that God will be found during the worship itself.

Step 7 – Relax and enjoy yourself

Yes, leading worship can make you nervous, but remember Wesley's words: "The best of all is, God is with us." So, don't panic – God is with us in everything, and God will be with you and all those who help the people of God give glory to the One who is the source of our worship.