Worship Resource
12 Components of a Good Worship Folder

If you are going to invest the time and money to use worship folders regularly, you might as well produce ones that are really excellent. Here are some things you can do that will make your worship folder exceptional.

#1 — A good worship folder eliminates the need for searching.

Your goal in having a worship folder is so that people don't need to go looking for various components of worship. The more you put into the worship folder, the easier it is to follow along. So if you use a worship folder, the *only* thing you would ever have people use is *Christian Worship*, and then only for the hymns. The psalm, even if it was the exact one found in the hymnal, would be printed in the worship folder. The responsive Prayer of the Church, even if pulled from the front of the hymnal, would be in the worship folder. And you might just want to consider putting everything, including the hymns, in the worship folder. That makes it impossible for someone to get lost.

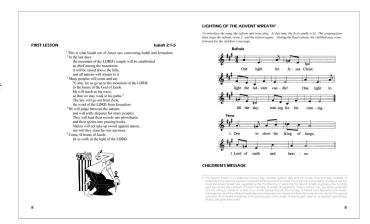## #2 — A good worship folder has plenty of white space.

In print layout, white space is the portion of a page left unmarked: margins, gutters, and space between columns, lines of type, graphics, figures, etc. White space should not be considered "blank" or "unused" space. It is an important element of design, key to aesthetic composition. Judicious use of white space can give a page a classic, elegant appearance. For example, upscale brands often use ad layouts with little text and a lot of white space.
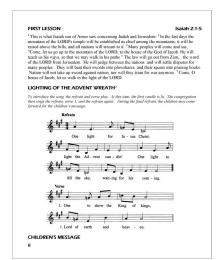
There is a temptation with worship folders to cram as much text onto a page as possible. But if you crunch the numbers, the amount you save annually in paper is very little, maybe $200. So instead of spending perhaps $2800 to produce a worship folder that looks nice, you are spending $2600 to produce a worship folder that looks cluttered and unprofessional. If you want your worship folder to convey that what you are doing (worshipping!) is important, you do not want it to look unprofessional. So leave room for white space.

The other benefit of white space is it makes it easy to use worship folder templates over again. Say, for example, you want to cram both the First Lesson and the Psalm of the Day onto the same page.

You can maybe do that on some Sundays when the First Lesson is short. But when the First Lesson is long, now you have to adjust. If you had just kept them both on their own page, leaving more white space, it would make formatting much easier.

Here is an example of two pages with white space. The First Lesson is arranged nicely, capturing the poetic form of Isaiah 2. That leaves room for some artwork based on that lesson. The next page is *just* the song for the lighting of the Advent wreath. That leaves room at the bottom for an explanation for the history of the Advent wreath. Everything looks clean and neat. However, you could fit it on one page.

Here we have eliminated the narrowed "poetic" formatting of the First Lesson. It is now one block paragraph. We eliminated the explanation of the Advent wreath. We reduced the size of the music graphic, making its text smaller than the rest of the text on the page. We eliminated the graphic. It is not a bad layout, but the page is definitely more cluttered.

If you eliminated white space, you could turn a 20 page worship folder into a 16 page folder. But the little you save in printing costs is offset by increased labor costs and results in a lower quality worship folder. So is it worth it?

Open up a magazine and look at the good ads. They will contain lots of white space.

#3 — A good worship folder uses fonts well.

You open up the font drop-down box in Microsoft Word. How many are there? 200 perhaps? It is tempting to use many of them. If you want your worship to look professional, avoid that temptation. Here are the four rules of fonts.

    A) **Limit yourself to two fonts max.** Within just one font you have many possible variations:

        Italics
        Bold
        Bold Italics
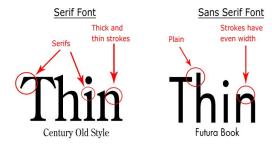   PHRASES OR TITLES WITH SMALL CAPS
        ALL CAPS
        ALL CAPS BOLD

If you want to choose two fonts to have more options, a good practice is to choose one that is a serif font and one that is sans serif.

In typography, a serif is a small line at the end of a stroke.   Serif fonts are more formal. They are generally easier to read in printed material. Sans Serif fonts are more modern and easier to read on computer monitors.

In the C13 worship folder templates for Advent, we use a common sans serif font — the Eras family — for headings, titles, and explanations. We use a common serif font — Times New Roman — for everything else.

Headings in the C13 worship folder templates are from the Eras family. We achieve variety by using them differently: all capitals, italics, etc.

FIRST LESSON

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

HOLY COMMUNION

Times New Roman is used for service directions. Example: "During the final refrain, the children may come forward for the children's message." It is also used for all the parts spoken or sung by the congregation.

B) **Don't use crazy fonts.**   Both the Times New Roman family and the Eras family are common.   They have classic lines.   They are used in professional publications. Informal fonts such as Bradley Hand or an art font such as *Harlow Italic* are generally not used in professional publications.

C) **Keep your fonts appropriately sized.**   A good rule of thumb is that for normal text, you keep to 11 or 12 point.   You can go slightly smaller — as small as 8 — for explanatory notes.   You can go slightly larger — as big as 16 — for headers. The theme of the day on the worship folder cover could be a large font — 22 to 28 point.

You also want the sizes of your font to be consistent throughout the worship folder. So if you decide that your liturgy will be set in 11 point Times New Roman, then you need to size your music graphic so that the text of the music matches that.   It looks odd when the worship folder uses a 12 point font for the pastor's line — "In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord — and then displays the lyrics of the musical response in a 9 point font.

D) **Use fonts consistently.**   Virtually every music graphic you will use contains a serif font, generally Times New Roman.   Since that is the case, it would make sense to use Times New Roman whenever the pastor or people speak.   That is *consistent* use of fonts. So the liturgy, the lessons, the verses of psalms, the hymns — these would all be in Times New Roman.   The headings, footnotes, etc. — these would all be in a sans serif

font.   Doing this gives your worship folder a unified look. When you have the people speaking in one font and singing in another, the worship folder looks "cobbled together."

If you want to use a more informal sans serif font for liturgy and lessons, then consider resetting the lyrics to sung portions of the liturgy (things like "amen" and "alleluia" to the same font.   It is perfectly legal to do that, and can be accomplished easily through a number of different graphic editing programs.
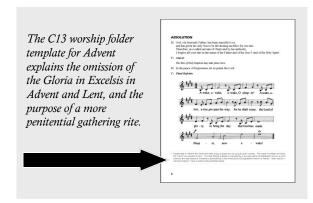
#4 — A good worship folder doesn't just present the service. It explains it.

How many members know that making the sign of the cross during the invocation is intended to remind people of their baptism? How many know what the Paschal candle represents, and why it is lit only during Easter, baptisms, and funerals? How many know the history of the *Gloria in Excelsis*?   How many even know what "Alleluia" means?   Or "Amen"?   If your *members* do not know those things, then think of how confused your guests will feel!

Signs and symbols in the liturgy can be valuable, as they convey Gospel truth. They would not have become traditions if they didn't. But that Gospel truth does not benefit someone if he does not understand it. If you make the sign of the cross to begin worship, and people *don't* understand the connection to baptism, what is the point of making it at all? What is the point of people singing "Alleluia" if they don't know what it means?

Ideally, the place to do this education is in a Bible class. But if BIC is the only place where worship principles are taught and customs explained, how long will it be before people forget those principles and customs? Having them briefly summarized in the worship folder can help.

The C13 worship folder template for Advent explains the omission of the Gloria in Excelsis in Advent and Lent, and the purpose of a more penitential gathering rite.

This need not be an every-Sunday thing. But it can be very beneficial to occasionally offer explanations of the worship service. This is especially true for unique customs, like the use of an Advent wreath.

#5 — A good worship folder answers questions guests might have.

In the evangelism planning module for C13, we asked you to consider questions your first time guests might have when they come onto your campus, things like: locations of restrooms, whether or not there is child care, whom do they contact if they want more information about your church, etc.

The inside front cover of your worship folder is a great place to put a "welcome" message and answer those questions.   Watch visitors in worship.   Often the first thing they do when they sit down is page through every piece of literature you have given to them.   So use your worship folder to answer any questions they might have. It is a simple way of making their first-time visit a bit more comfortable.

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#6 — A good worship folder knows where to put breaks.

One of the challenges of laying out a good worship folder comes when you cannot fit everything on a page. Even if you leave lots of white space in your templates, sometimes a lesson or a hymn will spill onto a second page. How do you break it up? Here are some rules:

- **Never make it necessary to turn a page while singing a hymn.** If you have a two page hymn, it needs to start on the left page and continue on the right. It *cannot* start on the right page, requiring people to flip the page mid-verse. Unless they are very familiar with that hymn, they will get lost when they flip the page. To avoid this, it means at times you will have to adjust what comes in the worship folder *before* that hymn so that you can make the hymn begin on the left page.

- **Balance music as best you can.** Say you have a 20 page worship folder. Pages 18 and 19 are available for the final hymn. It requires two pages. Split it into two equal halves. This is easier to read and makes for a more aesthetically pleasing worship folder. For example:

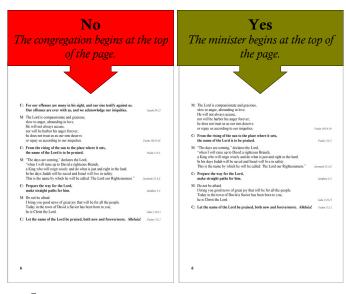You would do this only if you needed to put something after the hymn.

Otherwise, balance the hymn.

- **Try to keep Scripture lessons on one page.** If you have to use two pages, arrange it like you do hymns, so that people do not need to turn the page.

- **Never have the top of a page begin with something the congregation has to sing or say.** Say, for example, you want to print out a responsive Prayer of the Church. If you have to turn the page, or even if you start on the left page and continue to the right page, you want the top line of a page to be one the pastor speaks. He can prepare beforehand. He can know what is coming on the next page. The congregation will not.
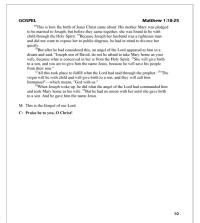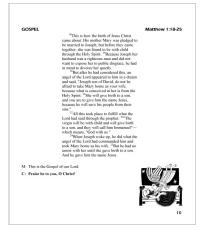
#7 — A good worship folder "fills and balances" each page.

We talked earlier about the importance of white space. That is aesthetically pleasing *if* you then arrange the text to make the page look fully used. You need to "fill" the page. Let's look at an example.

This is the page for the Gospel reading in the fourth Sunday in Advent. On the left, the lesson is almost as wide as the page itself, and it is all crammed at the top. That means only about 60% of the page is used. The remaining 40% is unusable. You cannot fit the Hymn of the Day there.

On the right, you have the Gospel reading narrowed down to a width more similar to what you would find in the Bible. Some line art that is based on that lesson has been added. And you will notice the entire page has been lowered some. The words "GOSPEL" and the "Matthew 1:10-25" have been brought down a quarter inch, centering everything. The page is eminently readable, is well proportioned, and yet also looks full.

Those pages also illustrate that not everything can be centered in your efforts to fill the page. It is fine to center non-responsive readings, like a lesson. But if it is responsive, it should be left justified. And so in both examples above, the lesson is centered. But in both examples, at the end of the lesson, the minister says, "This is the Gospel of our Lord," and the congregation responds, "Praise be to you, O Christ!" Those are left justified.

Therefore, what you are striving for is what graphic designers sometimes call *collective centering.* Look again at that example on the left. Imagine drawing a rectangle around every place there is print.

Notice how headings touch the sides of the rectangle. So do responsive readings. Other text is centered inside the rectangle. But then the entire rectangle — all text and print *collected* together — is centered on the page. It is 1/2 inch from each side and 3/4 inch from teach top. (Page numbers do not count. They are in the footer of the page.) Thus, the page looks filled and balanced.

#8 — A good worship folder is not redundant.

Is the pastor going to motion for people to stand before the confession of sins? Might he even *say* something like, "Please stand"? Then there is no need to have instructions to stand in the worship folder. If you have "Men" printed before verse 2 of a hymn and "Women" printed before verse 4, there is probably no need to announce, "Please note that the men will sing verse 2 and the women will sing verse 4." Your worship folder has said that for you.

There are times when repeating information might be helpful — when you are doing something new or unusual. For example, in our C13 worship folders for Advent, on the page with the Advent wreath song, there are instructions inviting the children to come forward during the final refrain for the children's message. (Having the children do that prevents the 30 seconds of "dead time" if you wait until the song is over to have them come forward. It is a refrain. They can sing along while they walk forward, like the Israelites did with the ascension psalms.) On the first Sunday in Advent, it might be worth mentioning that note, in case people have not read the instructions. After that first Sunday, they will know.

#9 — A good worship folder makes use of the arts.

Old bibles were often works of art. They might contain graphic headers and illustrations every couple of pages. Doing this served three purposes. First, it broke up the "plainness" of a page that contained just text. Secondly, it served to reinforce what Scripture said. Thirdly, it gave glory to God by showcasing the great gifts the Lord of the Church had granted to those artists.

You can do the same with your worship folders, showcasing not only the gift God has given to musicians, but also the gifts he has given to artists.

You can buy worship folder covers that have nice photography on the front. Generally, they sell for about $8 for a pack of 100. Also, using preprinted worship folder covers means you have to print that page separately from the rest of the worship folder, which can be a bit of a hassle.

A simpler and more cost effective approach is to purchase digital liturgical art. There are many good options available.

The C13 worship folder templates use a lot of art from Steve Erspamer. Mr. Erspamer has produced three volumes of art. Each volumes has multiple lessons for each Sunday in the church year. A volume costs $30 and contains hundreds of images. You can order the volume for Year A, which is what we are entering into, HERE. (You will note that at the bottom of that page, you can order the other volumes from Erspamer. You can also order other collections.)

If you want liturgical art that is clean and stylish while retaining a very classic look, we recommend the work of Ian Welch.   Mr. Welch is a graphic designer who also has a Masters of Divinity from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.   His website is parementics.com. It also offers art for every Sunday in the Church Year. The artwork for one Sunday costs $2.   Parementics also offers collections of Christian symbols which can serve well throughout the pages of your worship folder.   The C13 logo is a Paramentics design.

In the page-by-page template explanation, we will tell you where artwork came from, so you can purchase it if you wish to use it.

#10 — A good worship folder focuses on the Means of Grace first and foremost.

What that means is that the only announcements that go at the beginning of a worship folder are the ones that people need at that moment: where the nursery and bathroom are located, whether or not there are large print bulletins, etc.

Other announcements would go at the end of the worship folder or, maybe even better, as an insert. In the C13 worship folder templates, we do not leave room for the weekly announcements. You could easily insert pages using Microsoft Publisher or Word. However, we recommend putting those in *a bulletin* — a brief, half-page document — and inserting that into the worship folder. Print it on a different colored paper so it is obvious that it is not part of the worship folder.   (Note: If you use worship folders regularly, the terminology clarification might be helpful for your people. The *worship folder* or *service folder* is what you use for worship. The *bulletin* is a brief list of announcements that is inserted into the worship folder.)

#11 — A good worship folder has been proofread by more than one person.

Even that does not guarantee there will be no typos. The C13 worship folder templates have been proofread by two people. It would be wise for you to check them again before you print! It is as simple as this. The more people that proofread your worship folders, the less likely it is for you to have awkward typos.   So we recommend having at least two people proofread your worship folders.

That might be 1) the person who lays out the worship folder and 2) the pastor. It might be 1) the pastor and 2) someone who does proofreading (like a legal assistant) for a living.   You want it to be people who can pay attention to detail and who have a good grasp of the rules of grammar and punctuation.

When a typo happens, do not beat yourself up.   First editions of books frequently have typos that are then corrected in later editions.   The C13 program has some too. It is fine! Just avoid them as much as possible by having at least two sets of fresh eyes go over each worship folder.

#12 — A good worship folder can be used again and again.

Once you lay out a worship folder well, it becomes a template for other services. For example, take the C13 worship folder templates for Advent.   The basic order of service was laid out *once*.   Then the lessons and hymns were swapped out for the subsequent weeks.   It did not take much time to produce those final three worship folders.

You will find the same if you use worship folders each week. For example, take *The Common Service,* beginning on page 15 of *Christian Worship*. The first time you lay it out in a worship folder will probably take two hours. But from then on, all you have to do is swap out the portions of service which change from week to week: the Prayer of the Day, the lessons, the hymns.   That is perhaps 20 minutes of work.

The bottom line is that while using worship folders sounds like a lot of work, it isn't. Once a worship folder is laid out well, it becomes a template for similar services.

In Conclusion

Well laid out worship folders take effort, but we believe it is effort well spent. If you talk to churches that use worship folders regularly, they will share stories about pastors visiting sick members and finding those members hung on to their favorite worship folders.   They will *also* tell you about members of the church visiting guests, and the guests commenting on how helpful the worship folder was for them.

We pray this module of C13 helps you in your efforts.