

Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries
Jail Worship Coordinators' Training

There are four key elements to a successful worship service: (1) **planning**, (2) **participation**, (3) **preaching**, and (4) **prayer**.

Planning

Worship services must be properly planned and purposely prepared. This means that the coordinator must coordinate the volunteers who will attend and participate in the worship service. Prior thought should be given to who will perform each specific function during the service, and each volunteer should be assigned a specific role to perform during the service. This all should be done at least a week prior to the date of the worship service and confirmed the day before the service. Coordinators should also assign a back-up person for each task in case of an emergency.

Prior planning prevents poor performance.

- Keys for effective worship planning
 - Communicate with volunteers ahead of time and assign roles
 - Ensure that you have musicians and/or recorded music
 - Arrive at least 15 minutes before the start of the worship service

Participation

The worship service should be participatory in nature. There should be some intentionality regarding providing opportunities for the inmates to be active participants in the worship service. "Passive worship assumes that worship is something that somebody else does to you or for you" (Webber, 1992, p. 17). The worship service should be designed to encourage participation from the inmates. Hymnals and/or song sheets should be employed to make sure everyone has access to the words of the songs that are sung during worship. The worship leader may also solicit testimonies or prayer requests so that the congregation is not merely an audience watching a production.

Additionally, volunteers should not be spectators. Each volunteer should have an assigned role and should perform some function during the worship service e.g. handing out materials, praying, singing, preaching, etc.

- Keys for increasing participation
 - Utilize hymnals or provide song sheets to encourage congregational singing
 - Provide opportunities for the inmates to share testimonies and/or prayer requests
 - Ensure that each volunteer has a role and is not merely a spectator

Preaching

The sermon is the central aspect of the worship service. It should be planned carefully and presented creatively. The jail is not the place for "practice preaching." Because the needs of the men and women are so deep and diverse, there is a strong need for a seasoned pastor or preacher to present the gospel message.

It is important to note that this is not a Bible study. It is a worship service, and the expectation is that there will be a preacher. Teaching is designed to INFORM; preaching is designed to IMPACT. The purpose of preaching is to elicit a response for salvation, spiritual growth, or a commitment to Christian service. Therefore, great attention must be placed on the preaching aspect of the worship service.

- Keys for powerful preaching
 - Punctuality – start on time, end on time; keep the message between 20-30 minutes
 - Relevance – ensure that the message connects with the inmates in their social context
 - Exegesis – the message must be biblically sound and rooted in scripture
 - Appearance – dress appropriately so that your attire does not distract
 - Clarity – keep the message simple and easy to understand
 - HEAT – deliver the message with fire, passion, and creativity

Prayer

Prayer is last on this list but should be first on your list of priorities. Prayer is a key aspect of any worship service, but is especially important for the men and women worshipping at the jail. Many of them come from broken environments and are in need of healing. Many will have come to a place of repentance and commitment during the worship service and will need prayer to seal that commitment.

Prayer should be an integral part of the preparation process and should also play a prominent role in the execution of the service. In addition to having specific time designated for prayer at the beginning of the service, volunteers should also be praying to themselves throughout the service. Finally, each worship service should include time at the end of the service for an altar call and special prayer. This can be done corporately or on a one-on-one basis. We recommend having the last 10 minutes of the service devoted to prayer.

- Keys for incorporating prayer
 - Volunteers should pray together before the service
 - Include some form of corporate prayer in the worship service
 - Solicit prayer requests and pray for the specific needs of the inmates
 - Allot enough time at the end of the service for special prayer

Utilizing these four elements: planning, participation, preaching, and prayer, will ensure that you have a powerful worship service that impacts the lives of the inmates.

Sample Worship Service

Opening Prayer & Introductions	2 minutes
Scripture Reading	3 minutes
Musical Selections	10 minutes
Testimony Time	10 minutes
Musical Selection(s)	5 minutes
Sermon	20 minutes
Altar Call/Prayer Time	10 minutes