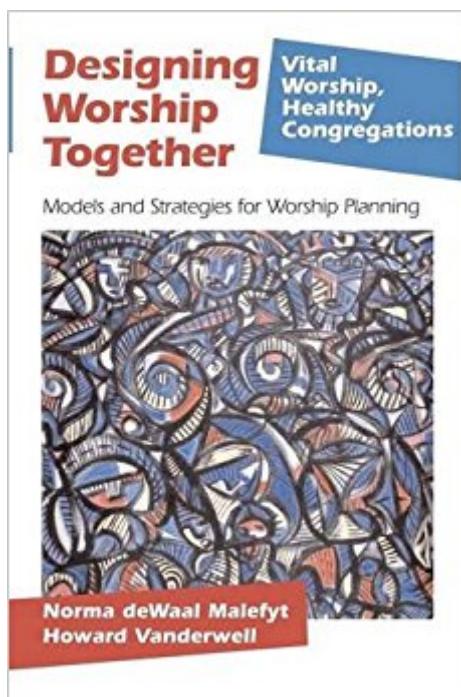


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# Designing Worship Together: Models And Strategies For Worship Planning (Vital Worship Healthy Congregations)



## **Synopsis**

Much more than a "how-to" for worship planners. Drawing on more than two decades of collaborative worship planning, as well as numerous conversations with other worship planners. Pastor Howard Vanderwell and musician Norma de Waal Malefyt lay out a thoughtful, field-tested process for planning, implementing, and evaluating life-enriching weekly worship. Well over a dozen field-tested tools and a selected bibliography round out this invaluable resource for worship planners.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Presents a convincing case for a collaborative approach to worship planning." -- John Ferguson Elliot and Klara Stockdal Johnson

Norma deWaal Malefyt is a resource development specialist for congregational song for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. She teaches organ and accompaniment skills for worship at Calvin College. She holds degrees in education and organ performance and has served several congregations as organist and director of music. Howard Vanderwell has served as pastor and senior pastor at four Christian Reformed congregations. He is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary and has completed graduate studies in homiletics and worship. He is currently a resource development specialist for pastoral leadership at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

This excellent resource is focused on the "why" and "how" of collaborative worship planning. The editor of the "Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations" series, John Witvliet, captures succinctly the driving themes behind the book in his Foreword (p. viii):Congregations, and the leaders that serve them, need a shared vision for worship that is grounded in more than personal aesthetic tastes. This vision must draw on the deep theological resources of Scripture, the Christian tradition, and the unique history of the congregation.Congregational worship should be integrated with the whole life of the congregation. It can serve as the "source and summit" from which all the practices of the Christian life flow. Worship both reflects and shapes the life of the church in education, pastoral care, community service, fellowship, justice, hospitality, and every other aspect of church life.The best worship practices feature not only good worship "content," such as discerning sermons, honest prayers, creative artistic contributions, celebrative meaningful rituals for baptism and the Lord's Supper. The also arise out of good process, involving meaningful contributions from participants, thoughtful leadership, honest evaluation, and healthy communication among leaders.Designing Worship Together makes a strong case for broadening the participation in collaborative worship planning as a mechanism for achieving these objectives, and explores process and organizational structures appropriate for enabling an aggressively collaborative planning, evaluation, preparation and reflection approach for Christian churches.The authors dedicate the first chapter of the book towards motivating (and understanding the challenges) of the "together" theme in the book. While many might guess at some of the obvious advantages of spreading the worship planning load--greater variety, sensitivity to the needs of a larger community, sharing the burden, etc...--the case is made very strongly, and the authors introduce some benefits the reader might not have considered. For instance, the intangible value of "ownership" or "investment" in the worship service stimulated by the involvement of others in the process may be unexpected. When worship is planned regularly by a small, paid staff, it can become simply a job--a burden--and it might not be immediately obvious that training and involving others can elevate the experience of all beyond that of a weekly task to an ongoing, joyful investment.Clearly, there are some challenges associated with collaboratively planning worship. The authors outline these challenges capably, and it may be the case for some local churches that, upon understanding and reflecting on these challenges, collaborative planning may be counterproductive. The authors include one very real, practical challenge which deserves attention: the availability of time.Time is a primary challenge in our society. In a manner never before seen, our time is considered a precious resource, almost every 21st-century Westerner considers their self "time-poor." As Christians, we should reject this illusion

as profoundly counter-scriptural. That we are terminally busy individuals is certainly a reality and a challenge when faced with tasks like worship planning. But the work of the church is a primary place where Christians ought to reject the gospel of busyness, reflect on a Christlike posture and response, and capture these counter-cultural truths in the context of the worship event and the planning surrounding it. Additionally, *Designing Worship Together* addresses the importance of having qualified participants in the planning process. These qualifications of heart, mind, and spirit are plainly crucial to a successful planning process. But, more than this, the work of training and preparation for worship planners is bound to spill out to the wider congregation, and the benefits of ongoing formation of worship planners is sure to increase the congregations' general ability to prepare for, participate in, and appreciate excellence in the worship event. The remainder of the book is dedicated to guidance on organizing people, time, and processes in a variety of ways to enable the collaborative planning process. The greatest flexibility is afforded by the authors to the organization of people in the process, given the breadth of church sizes, traditions, resources available, and maturity of the congregation. Several examples are given for how different congregations have organized the planning effort, but the common pattern of some oversight committee (such as the church board or worship committee) and a smaller, more focused weekly planning team is assumed. The authors describe productive allocations of responsibility between these groups and the types of communication which must occur. Once the organization of the people involved in planning and evaluation is understood, the authors strongly encourage the creation of what they call a "Congregational Worship Statement," a document expressing the local understanding of what worship is, what the congregation wants to accomplish in worship, and broad principles describing how the particularities of these goals combine with denominational and regional tradition, doctrine, and other emphases to inform specific decisions about designing corporate worship. One of the most challenging and useful disciplines required by collaborative worship planning, and captured in excellent detail in this book is the creation and maintenance of a service planning calendar. Maintaining such a calendar has the potential to produce a huge variety of healthy spin-offs within the weekly worship services and beyond. Working together to populate the calendar in advance can facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit over time by providing a framework for reflection and communication about the themes and content of each service well in advance. It enables accountability mechanisms across the planning team. It produces a written record of what has been done. Perhaps most significantly for the congregation, the development of the planning calendar makes it possible for worshipers to prepare for the coming services and reflect on services in the past. An emerging theme in the *Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations* series is the emphasis

on effective evaluation, and Designing Worship Together continues this theme by dedicating an entire chapter to structuring an evaluation regime for worship planners. Careful, thoughtful, and honest evaluation is a critical component in improving worship, and this book provides an unusual breadth of practical aids for worship evaluation. Finally, the appendices include a short annotated bibliography of other books and resources the reader may find useful. Notably, there is an example educational document titled *When You Worship With Us*, which congregational worship planners would do well to adapt in their home churches. Copious supplementary material is available from the book's web site at Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. The primary weakness a reader will identify is the absence of practical help in guiding the formation and education of worship planners, new and old. Successful application of the book's principles over time will require continual investment in formation, perhaps more than many other ministries in a local congregation. Perhaps the authors will to address this weakness in a future edition of this otherwise comprehensive book.

This book would be useful primarily for a large congregation of 500 plus or more where its concepts could be usefully implemented. In smaller congregations of 150 or less it has minimal usefulness as its rather complex organizational ideas are not valid for such congregations. I write this as a pastor of the latter and found it of limited use for my purposes.

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