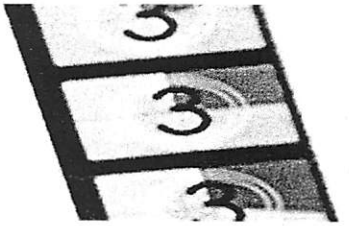
Getting Started With Multimedia In Church Worship

By Michael Bausch

Churches have been using screens and projectors in worship since the early 1900's. Recent research has uncovered how Congregational ministers as early as 1910 were using film during worship services to "drive home the message" and to put the Gospel into "pictorial form." Thomas Edison wrote for "The Congregationalist" how churches could use motion pictures for "instruction and moral advance." Using multimedia in worship is not a 21st century innovation!

Recent technical advances with computers, projectors, and screens have made it a lot easier for congregations to add visuals into their worship services. No longer is it necessary to thread film into an old 16mm projector or to sort through carousels of slides to use visuals in worship: a computer's hard drive can easily store and manage images and video from a number of sources. A small, bright, lightweight projector can be attached to the computer, and you can display what you want at the click of a mouse.

Multimedia technologies are tools for communicating the Gospel and for inviting church members to share their gifts and talents with the visual arts: photography, film, painting, sculpture and computer-generated graphics.



These technical developments combined with a number of resources advocating the use of multimedia in worship have led to an increasing number of congregations finding ways to effectively use the equipment in worship services. Churches understand that this technology is not used because it's "cool" or "glitzy," but because it serves the mission of the Church. Congregations are investigating using media in worship for reasons similar to those first identified in the early 1900's:

- They know the importance of communicating the Gospel in every age, using the particular communication tools of that age.
- They pay attention to research showing that engaging more of worshipers' senses in worship (eyes, ears, noses, mouths, and body movement) results in higher attention levels, better understanding, and thus more personal and social transformation.
- They understand that the widespread cultural acceptance of video screens in diverse settings offers a way to effectively deliver information.
- They are willing to incorporate technical advances in their teaching, learning, and worship.

These congregations know that by delighting both the ear and the eye, worship can become a transforming and memorable experience for all generations.

Getting Started

Thinking Visually

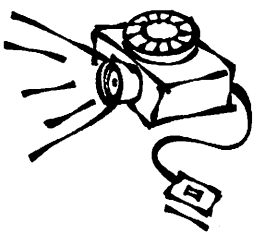
Most worship leaders are trained to express themselves with words, and to effectively communicate orally. With some practice, these leaders can start thinking visually. Ask yourself, "how could I show this thing that I am talking about?" For example, how could you show some of the announcements that you have printed in your worship bulletin? Could you display a photograph of members for whom you are praying? Could you show pictures of your youth group's recent social activity? Would it help your sermon to display a digital reproduction of Rembrandt's "Prodigal Son" when preaching on that text, or Henry Tanner's "Annunciation" during Advent? Is there a line from a poem you would want to project onto a screen, along with a visual symbol? What short sequence from a recent movie could serve as a call to worship, an invitation to the offering, or an illustration of a sermon point?

Teams

It is possible for one person to incorporate multimedia into worship, but it is silly to try. There are many talented people in every congregation who can skillfully produce and present media arts in worship. Congregations already know how teams of choir members, instrumentalists, and worship planners can work together to provide high quality music ministries.

The same can be true for the media arts. Enlist the art teachers in the congregation, the movie buffs, the photographers and painters to help brainstorm what materials could be used to add visual beauty to worship. Ask your computer whizzes and those who already work with presentation media to help find ways to project the visuals in the sanctuary. Gather these people together with other worship planners, and encourage them to use their gifts in worship. Ask them to think visually about worship. What would they show to illustrate a future worship theme? What scenes from films could introduce or support the theme, and where are they located in the DVD or videotape? What other visual arts could be used to support the theme?

Equipment



Most congregations already have the equipment necessary to add visuals to worship, because they have been using it in their educational settings. Most churches have used slides, filmstrips, videotapes, art books, and posters to illustrate church school lessons. Many already have in church closets and attics the screens and projectors they need to begin introducing visuals into worship. This is to say that adding visuals into worship does not need to cost lots of money. Most churches already have slide projectors, filmstrip projectors, televisions, VCR equipment and screens that can be brought into the sanctuary to introduce the use of visual arts in worship.

Year C Advent-Christmas Media Suggestions

What follows are selected scriptures from the lectionary, with a suggested theme and focus. The art can serve to focus the theme further, and be displayed during a verbal message and/or during one of the musical pieces. A song can be illustrated with original art or photography, or by images found on, the Internet. The film clips are short sequences from various movies that help illustrate the theme. These suggestions are offered as starting places for your own creative thought. While the following suggestions come from popular culture, some worship leaders may prefer to use music and film clips from religious sources.

First Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 21:25-36

Theme: "The End Times"

Focus Question: What does Advent have to do with the end of the world and the coming of God's realm?

Art: display a selection of book covers of the Tim LaHaye "Left Behind" series

Song: "It's the End of the World As We Know It " by REM

Film Clip: "Independence Day" (scene of a fiery destruction)

Second Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6

Theme: "Prepare The Way"

Focus Question: who is John the Baptist and to whom does he refer as we prepare in this season?

Art: find a variety of artistic images of John the Baptist

Song: "It Ain't Me Babe" by Bob Dylan (use pictures of John pointing not to himself, but to the One who follows him)

Film Clips: from movies that offer short dialogue about the true meaning of Christmas, like "Santa Who," "Scrooged," "It's A Wonderful Life," or "Charlie Brown Christmas."

Third Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Philippians 4:4–7

Theme: "Restored To Hope"

Focus Question: what is the peace that Christ brings us in this season?

Art: find art that communicates peace, like "A Peaceable Kingdom"

Songs: The Christmas Song" by Dave Matthews Band or "I Need You" by Le Ann Rimes

Film Clips: use a religious film like "Jesus of Nazareth" to show a brief lesson from scripture about hope.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Micah 5:2–5a

Theme: "The Little People of the Christmas Story"

Focus Question: who are some of the unnamed characters of the biblical accounts of Christmas, and why are they important to us?

Art: display works of art that show shepherds and other visitors to the manger

Song: "What If Jesus Comes Back Like That" by Colin Raye

Film Clips: find films like "Angus" or "A Knight's Tale", where minor characters play an important role in the story.

Christmas

Scripture: John 1:1–14

Theme: "Testify To the Light"

Focus Question: how does Christmas encourage us to live in the world?"

Art: the Issenheim Altarpiece by Gruenewald shows light surging from the Godhead

Songs: "For the Love of it All" by Peter, Paul, and Mary or "Yellow" by Coldplay

Film Clip: "Romero" offers dramatic scenes about the struggle for justice in Central America

Transitioning Into Another Worship Style

By Michael Bausch

What follows is a practical list of considerations our church found useful as we added visuals to the worship experience, and then added a visually based worship service to our Sunday morning schedule. The order is not as important as starting somewhere while sharing the vision and building support for that vision within the congregation.

1. Get yourself educated and informed: read what's available in areas of worship, technology, church growth, and learning theory.

2. Identify a small number of lay leaders in your church who will share your interest and excitement.

3. Buy multiple copies of the books you are reading and give them to the lay leadership. Take them with you to workshops on the issues you're excited about.

4. Claim a vision for the future. Share it with your leadership body. Brainstorm the names of people who would be most interested and supportive towards that vision, your core of leaders within the congregation.

5. Start meeting: proclaim the vision and the challenge in writing and verbally; assemble articles and books and begin talking about the ideas you are discovering.

6. Talk together, dream together, set some goals and visions: get clear on what it is that you want to do.

7. Begin introducing visuals into worship. Show some slides and filmstrips: start light, for example, showing Christmas art, or a painting or sculpture that illustrates a point in your sermon. Add visuals to the worship bulletin including pictures, sermon outlines, quotations, anything for the eye.

8. Assemble the visual artists and photographers in your church, and talk about ways to incorporate visuals into learning settings of the church.

9. Utilize video resources. Bring in TV and a VCR. Show a mission moment. Show a minute of footage from a recent youth retreat. Show the women's luncheon. Show the church school kids working on an art project. Use the offering time wisely: instead of an offertory, show a video mission moment.

10. Begin to investigate available technology, such as projectors, larger screens, and how computers help deliver visuals. Check into prices. Study what's out there. Bring it before the congregation as a dream, as part of your shopping list of things the church needs.

11. Pause. After a period of using visuals, take a few months off, pausing the project. Don't talk about it or think about it. Do things as you usually did. Wait to hear from others. Keep the vision alive in monthly committee meetings. Keep other groups informed of the vision, the dream.

12. Keep assembling the people who are interested in various aspects of what you have done together, and keep them talking and thinking. These action people will keep pushing for change through the church.

13. Speak before the various groups in your church to communicate the dreams, the visions, and the hopes that have been developed over time.

14. Identify your congregation: ages, interests, abilities, future projections for age ranges in church; how neighborhood or area is changing. Describe what other churches are doing and why. Build a base of information for the people and decision makers.

15. Consider developing a style of group-based ministry. Become more efficient in your use of time. Wonder about what the pastor does that other lay leadership could be doing as expressions of their Christian calling.

16. Develop group ministries and train people to do the work of the church, freeing the pastor to do the worship work and keep a creative edge. Consider how laity can provide premarital sessions, nursing home and home visitation, home communions, new member meetings, confirmation, etc.

17. Train youth and adults to put imagery to music. Discuss the music they listen to and uncover important themes.

18. Start a film group to view movies and discuss the themes found in contemporary film.

19. Illustrate sermons with verbal references to film, television, and music. Next time show or play the reference rather than describing it. Discover how cultural material reflects or contrasts with gospel messages.

20. Get "literate" in electronic media. Discover what's out there and how it might be used in worship. How are churches using computers in worship?

21. Visit churches already using video. Notice how television utilizes its video technology with movement, color, and labels.

22. Think about the architecture of your worship space: what does it teach about God and how does it organize a style of worship? What is it saying about how we approach God in worship?

23. What changes might you make to the architecture to incorporate projecting words and pictures before the congregation?

24. Honor the need to hold worship at the same time as Sunday School so that young adult parents can worship while their children are in class.

25. Take a teaching approach to worship. Build a community or teachers and learners.

This process can takes months and years to develop. It requires leadership being committed to a particular community for a significant time period. It involves a desire to communicate the gospel to an increasingly visually oriented people. It seeks to build a fresh attentiveness to our faith traditions, helping us learn in new ways while encouraging us to apply what we learn to the world in which we live.

Print Resources

Bausch, Michael G. Silver Screen, Sacred Story: Using Multimedia in Worship. Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2002. This book describes how one UCC congregation introduced multimedia into worship over a period of time and includes practical information about developing congregational support, enlisting teams, finding equipment, using popular culture in worship, and following copyright laws.

Hammar, Richard R. The Church Guide to Copyright Law. Matthews: Christian Ministry Resources, 2001.
This book offers clarifications about copyright law and typical church situations.

Lindvall, Terry. The Silents of God: Selected Issues and Documents in Silent American Film and Religion 1908-1925. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2001. Read these documents for a description of how early Congregational ministers advocated using films in worship in the early 1900's.

Malone, Peter and Rose Pacatte. Lights, Camera... Faith! Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2001.
These authors provide a lectionary-based movie scene guide based on Cycles A, B, and C, including a film recommendation for one of the lectionary texts of the week.

Phillips, Roy D. Letting Go: Transforming Congregations For Ministry. Washington: The Alban Institute, 1999. Read this book to learn about team leadership and how clergy can encourage gifted leaders to emerge within the congregation.

Sample, Tex. The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. Sample advocates designing worship that uses the music and imagery of electronic culture to communicate the Gospel through "the construction of an experience."

White, Susan J. Christian Worship and Technological Change. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
This book is for those unsure about using technology in worship. White reminds us that the church has always been incorporating technology into its worship life, and offers a model for embracing technology in religious communities.

Internet Resources

Search engines such as Google (www.google.com) and Alta Vista (www.altavista.com) allow users to conduct a search of images found on the Internet. Click on the "Image" link above the textbox contained on these websites to access this specialized search engine. Enter keywords and phrases that describe the type of imagery desired. Results are provided in the form of thumbnail images which are linked to the website containing the full-sized images

Find art resources at www.artchive.com — a collection of art masterpieces with high quality images available for free download for educational purposes (suggestion: support this site by becoming a donor)

A fine lectionary-based resource for film clips, art, and scripture study is found at www.textweek.com

Using Multimedia Technology in Worship

By Michael Bausch

When Thomas Edison showed the first moving picture on a white sheet in 1895, a new communication era began. Life could be captured on film, projected on a large screen, and seen and heard in dramatic new ways. The viewing public loved it, and almost immediately, churches tried to harness the new technology to serve the Gospel. Clergy and laity from a wide number of denominations began to use film in revival meetings and evening worship services to "drive home the message" and to show the Gospel story on big theater screens. Edison became an advocate for churches to use motion pictures for "instruction and moral advance."

By delighting both the ear and the eye, congregations are discovering how worship becomes a transforming and memorable experience for all generations.

Since those early days, technical advances with computers, projectors, and screens have made it a lot easier and less expensive for congregations to add message-enhancing visuals to their worship services. No longer is it necessary to try to thread film into an old 16mm projector or to shuffle through carousels of slides: a computer hard drive easily stores images and video. A small yet bright, lightweight projector can be attached to the computer, and you can display what you want at the click of a mouse.

These technical developments have led to an increasing number of congregations finding ways to effectively use the new equipment in worship services. By delighting both the ear (with music and solid preaching) and the eye (with colorful images and moving pictures), these congregations are discovering how worship becomes a transforming and memorable experience for all generations of visually-oriented people.

Some may say, "this equipment is too expensive for most of us." Not so! It is possible to introduce visuals into worship without much expense, because most congregations already have the equipment necessary to add visuals to worship now and build support to buy newer equipment later. Many churches have used slides, filmstrips, computer software and videotapes to illustrate church school lessons. These churches are already equipped to bring multimedia into worship with their existing slide projectors, filmstrip projectors, televisions, VCR equipment and screens. Adding visuals into worship does not need to cost a lot of money.

Using Equipment You May Already Have

Using a VCR and television: before a worship service begins, show a brief clip of home video of the recent youth retreat, or a minute or two of last week's Sunday School classes engaged in a lesson. During the offering, show a 2-minute video clip of a mission project your church supports. Get a video splitter and cable to connect multiple television sets so you have them in the center aisle and in the side aisles. Put them on wheeled carts so they can be set up and removed easily.

Slide Projector: show pictures of the Sea of Galilee to set the context for a sermon about Jesus' parables. Use religious art collections to display various artists' portrayal of the Last Supper for a Lenten sermon starter. Give the youth group a slide collection and ask them to select and organize slides that illustrate the theme of a favorite musical piece that could be played in a midweek Lenten service or worship service.

Film Strip Art: locate one of the filmstrips in your Christian Education library that shows the life of Jesus, or offers artistic interpretations of the Holy Week/Easter story. Show the filmstrip during the offertory to a musical accompaniment, or use a short sequence of pictures from a filmstrip to introduce a Lenten sermon.

Screens: adequate screens are found in most church storerooms, while newer and lightweight portable screens designed for video/data projectors may be purchased for several hundred dollars. Permanent screens (a bit more expensive) and motorized retractable screens (more expensive because of the motors) are also available, and can easily be concealed in most church architecture. Some churches simply use a white sheet attached to a wooden frame, or project their images on a light-colored wall until they raise the funds needed for a good screen. Rather than investing thousands of dollars in equipment you might not be prepared to use, start more slowly and use what is available to you, adding better and newer equipment as your support for using visuals in worship grows.

Using Newer Multimedia Technology

Today's computer and projection technologies make it easier to do the same thing as the older visual technologies: they can be used to collect, store, and organize images and project them onto a screen. What's different now is that with a computer it is easier to organize and store images. Computers are capable of storing audio, video, digital photographs, scanned images, and data files. They allow vast amounts of storage and easy organization of material.

Where once a church needed separate projectors for films, slides, filmstrips, overhead, and opaque projection, now a single projector plugged into a computer can do all of that. These projectors are capable of showing images from a computer screen, and from either a VCR or DVD machine. The bulbs are very bright (measured in "lumens" as in the more lumens the brighter the projector), allowing them to be used in well-lit rooms. As with computers, projectors have increased in power and decreased in price. They can be plugged into the back of a laptop or desktop computer, and in seconds the images you select can be projected onto a screen.

At the flip of a couple of switches, worshipers can see displays of scripture texts, song lyrics, photographs, reproductions of world-class art, scenes excerpted from motion pictures, and church-produced video as part of a worship service.

Once again, this does not need to cost a lot of money. Church members have access to used computers and refurbished projectors in their workplaces and homes. Public libraries and audio-visual companies are sources of rental equipment and sometimes loan it out on a trial basis. A worship committee could easily borrow or rent a laptop and projector for a couple of weeks. Used equipment is accumulating in members' homes and workplaces, and experimenting with this equipment can help you learn what you need to bring more visuals into worship.

Adding Visuals to Worship

There are many points in a worshipservice where visuals can be added, like showing the announcements before worship begins (and saving everyone the 5-7 minutes sometimes used up in talking about them), displaying a short videotape of a mission project during the offertory, or illustrating a sermon theme with a clip from a major motion picture. Here are some suggestions for inserting visual media in worship:

- ***Announcements***

Announcements normally printed in the bulletin can be typed into computer slides. Pictures can be added to these announcements (for example, photographs of the nursery where parents would take their children, the coffee serving crew, the flower chart, the summer camp brochure, the women's circle, the local hospital). Many church members have photographic equipment they could use to take pictures and shoot video. With digital cameras it is easy to take original photographs and video, and store these materials in a computer and show them on a screen with a video/data projector. Intersperse the announcements with slides illustrating the worship theme: sermon points, quotations, or religious art. For those uncomfortable with adding visuals to worship, the pre-worship announcement time can be an excellent starting point for gaining support for one day using the equipment during the service itself.

- ***Liturgical Support***

Display the worship prayers and litanies on screen in a type font large and bright enough to be seen

at the back of the worship space. Add hymn and song lyrics so people look up instead of down into their hymnals. Display the scripture so people can read along.

• ***Offertory***
Show pictures of ministries that your members' giving supports. Show short 1-2 minute video clips of denominational mission videos or of self-produced video of your educational, service, administrative, and group ministries.

• ***Special services***
Confirmations and graduations are excellent opportunities to introduce an occasional multimedia program. Ask parents to bring two photographs of their child, one from infancy or early childhood, and another that is more recent. Scan the photographs into the computer and type in the names of each confirmand or graduate with their pictures. As the photographs are displayed during worship, add music by asking someone to sing a song appropriate for confirmation or graduation, or find a CD version of such a song.

• ***Sermon illustrations***
Add visual power to sermons by displaying sermon points, quotations and scripture references on a screen near the preacher. Add pictures or symbols that visually anchor the theme. Find a work of art that communicates the scripture and sermon focus. Locate a video clip to capture attention and help focus the sermon (30-60 seconds is short and to the point, but if you must go longer, get a license to show anything that is beyond 3 minutes in length).

Copyright Concerns

Make sure that you are using copyrighted material legally. Licenses are available for displaying copyrighted hymn and song lyrics, and for showing motion pictures in churches. It is important to note that U.S. Copyright law provides a narrowly defined "exemption of certain performances and displays...in the course of services at a place of worship." Also, under the U.S. Government "Fair Use Guidelines for Educational Multimedia", explained in detail in the book Silver Screen, Sacred Story: Using Multimedia in Worship (see below), it is possible to legally use no more than three minutes of a movie clip without a license. Be very careful about the use of copyrighted material, whether it is from the Internet or other sources.

Give Yourself Permission To Be Creative

There is no set formula for using multimedia in worship. Be inspired by the Holy Spirit. As you add visuals to worship, keep asking the congregation for feedback. You may find widespread support for adding more visuals to worship, especially as they capture interest and help communicate important material. Invite church members to share their gifts and talents with photography, film, painting, sculpture and computer-generated graphics. Work with these members to develop guidelines and standards for using visuals in worship. Today's technological tools can effectively serve the Gospel in worship, and, as Edison wrote so long ago, for "instruction and moral advance."

Michael Bausch has conducted a media rich worship service for eight years. Michael's doctoral work was in the area of multi media enriched worship. Alban Institute published his book, Silver Screen, Sacred Story: Using Multimedia in Worship, in 2002. He is also a founding partner of www.worshipmedia.com The WorshipMedia team speaks and leads workshops across the country.

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