**Technology in Worship: Beyond PowerPoint**

If "worship" means "music," and church youth need contemporary worship, then you had better use PowerPoint, right? Not so fast, advises Quentin Schultze.

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[Quentin Schultze](http://worship.calvin.edu/about/authors/?slug=quentin-schultze) likes to tell about the video conference he arranged between his Calvin College freshmen students and middle-aged students at a seminary in a southeastern state.

"A seminarian asked my communication arts students, 'How do you feel about having more technology in worship?' Every student in my class said they'd prefer less.

"One student said she was from a church that decided to go into technology in a big way. They wanted to invigorate their worship, especially for younger members. The church spent so much on PowerPoint and other high-end technologies that they had to lay off one of two full-time pastors," he says.

According to a regional study Schultze and his colleagues conducted in 2003, churches' reasons for adding media in worship included being more relevant to members (84 percent), relevant to youth (77 percent), seeker sensitive (66 percent), and in pace with other churches (33 percent).

**Start with worship planning**

"We know from other studies that the new technology generally does not deliver on the promises. We can't find any long-term evidence that high technology keeps young people connected with the church," Schultze says.

As he explains in his book [*High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely*](http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/publications/high-tech-worship/)*,* many churches don't train people to effectively use new video, overhead projectors, and PowerPoint media.

The main problem, though, is that congregations "simplistically equate *transmission* with *communication."*

But churches can do incredible things if they start with the goals of worship, rather than a limited vision of technology. "Go beyond debates over musical worship style to talking about the purpose of Christian worship-God speaks, humans respond in faith," he says.

Good liturgy helps worshipers gratefully commune with God and each other. Technology, whether low or high, can enrich corporate worship. For example, the purpose of presenting our offerings is to remind us that all good things come from God. Videos shown before the offertory can help us see how God puts our gifts into action.

At Rogers Heights Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan, Don Steenhoek has developed the use of musical notes with text on slides. "So the church is keeping alive their tradition of praising God through multipart singing. And reading music off a screen solves a problem for older members, who find hymnbooks too heavy to hold or must grab a pew to stand," Schultze says.

**Be selective**

Projected images can give worshippers a deeper understanding of a liturgical action or a sermon point. But Schultze says there are skills just as important as carefully selecting good images-"using an image long enough so its meaning sinks in and knowing when to turn off the projector."

While preaching at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Ottawa, Ontario, Kathy Smith noted that this congregation, pastored by Kenneth M. Gehrels, understands how to combine art, music, and presentational technology. The church projects words for readings and songs on a screen placed on the right side of the sanctuary, so the screen doesn't attract attention when not in use.

"After the congregation read words of confession, the pastor read an assurance of pardon from Scripture. While he read it, an artist's image-of a person with arms stretched upward-was projected. Then, as we sang a song of response, the words of pardon were superimposed on the image, so it stayed with us through the song," says Smith, director of continuing education for Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Calvin Theological Seminary.

Reinforcing the Scripture through liturgy, art, and music evoked pardon and forgiveness that Smith says felt "just right."

When she visited the same church during Lent, it projected a painting titled *Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down*, created by G. Carol Bomer of the *Soli Deo Gloria* studio in Asheville, North Carolina, and then wove those words through the prayers of the people.

**Match worship to your life**

No matter how they use technology, one value distinguishes churches that do it best. "They make a thoughtful match between who they are every day and how they worship. They don't separate worship from life," says [Brian Fuller](http://worship.calvin.edu/about/authors/?slug=brian-fuller), an Emmy Award-winning director and editor. He and Robb Redman produced *FutureWorship 1.0,* a DVD of best technology practices in churches.

When Fuller visited Church of the Apostles, a Lutheran-Episcopal church plant in Seattle's artsy Fremont neighborhood, Karen Ward brought him to a dance hall for a church rave, organized by its arts collective. In the middle of the rave, people were praying their way through a candle-lit labyrinth. "It was astoundingly contemplative, considering the event," Fuller says.

At a Saturday night service, the band was "rocking out, yet they were singing in Latin. The words on the screen were an English translation. The Arkaos software, which responds to beat and tempo, was projecting masses of color, light-and emerging images of liturgical significance, like historical icons of Christ.

"Church of the Apostles is young, wildly creative in using both high end and low tech. It's precisely what you'd expect from Christians in an artistic district within spitting distance of Microsoft," Fuller says.

**Indigenize technology to build New Testament fraternity**

Choosing to unite worship and life profoundly influences how a church chooses visual media. Fuller advises aiming for a balance among purchased, online, and local images.

His pastor recently asked two teams to illustrate his sermon on the Fall. "One team had a person scurry through Internet images. People went, 'Yeah. Uh huh. We get it.'

"The other team went out to do still photos for a PowerPoint background-not at all flashy. People said, 'Oh, golly, that's the homeless guy under the bridge by my house. I drive past that prison. I know that garbage dump,'" Fuller says.

Gathering local images creates two blessings. When a baby is born or someone goes in for surgery, projecting their photos knits the congregation closer together. When a church needs to make a quick collage for a wedding or funeral, many people get the chance to collaborate.

**Don't limit yourself to high tech**

"The grand fear of people who want to keep media out of church is that they will lose traditions. But experimenting with technology opens a liturgical treasure trove. A Pentecostal needs an image of a cross, goes online, and finds a ninth-century Greek Orthodox icon. It frees you up to acknowledge connections to a long tradition," Fuller says.

Many churches try technology to energize services and then make discoveries that deepen worship. They go beyond amplifiers, microphones, and retractable screens.

Learning about worship in other countries and centuries opens their eyes to low tech symbols, such as using Lebanese pita, Indian roti, and French brioche to remember that Christians around the world celebrate Christ's sacrifice when they break bread together.

Bruce Shannon attended a Calvin Worship Symposium to learn how to use new technology in the Presbyterian Church of Marion Center, Pennsylvania. "My 'ah-ha' moment came when Quentin Schultze advised us to think about the visual apart from the technical.

"Our sanctuary was new in 1995 and has a lot of natural light. As we seek to transform our worship for a new day, we now realize that the use of projection technology is going to be quite limited.

"We'll start with the visual and how it helps meet the overall purpose of worship. We will look at the total visual statement of our chancel area and the use of fabrics, natural materials, colors, and textures," Shannon says.

Stained glass, electric guitars, incense, bold banners, conga drums, projected images, fresh-baked bread, video cameras, Advent candles. All have potential to help worshipers commune with God and each other. After all, as Quentin Schultze notes, “In worship God transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary….We can invest our whole being in worship—including our imaginations, curiosities, and abilities.”

Published: March 19, 2004