

Top Ten Rules for Leading Church (at City Church and Unichurch International)

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1. Start exactly on time

New people get to church on time. And the time between the advertised start time and the actual start time is the awkwardest time of all for new people. Don't reward regulars for being late. Reward newcomers for believing what our sign said. Start on time.

2. Make your first words and your last words about God

Never start with "Hey, so it's great to be here today! Or, "How about those Rabbitohs!" No! People come to church worship God, to seek him, because they are broken and lonely and joyful and serious. Whatever else you need to say, begin with God and end with God. And preferably, with God's words about God. A psalm, a prayer, a call to worship, a benediction.

3. Go with the flow

Your big job as a service leader is to make things flow. To flow theologically through thanksgiving and repentance and confession and forgiveness and so on, and to flow practically as we move from songs to announcements to preaching to conclusions and so on. And flow is achieved by deliberateness (on your part) so that we hardly notice what's holding things together (on our part). Your job is not to make a comment about everything, but to make sure everything flows: and sometimes less is best.

4. Keep your commands in sub-clauses

Don't say, "Please take a seat" when you can say, "While you all take a seat, let me read these words from Psalm 23." Don't say, "Please stand as we sing our next song" if you can say, "as you stand, let's declare God's praises with these words..."

5. Make your tone true to your content

If you are praying for women and children killed in Syria, please say it in a way that indicates (a) you are actually thinking of real women and children really killed in Syria and (b) that that's a really bad thing. If you are welcoming people, please look like you actually want to meet new people. If you are telling people their sins are forgiven, say it like they actually have been forgiven.

6. Pick the moment

Part of your job is to keep up with the sense of where things are going. If we have just heard a powerful sermon, or just sung a moving song, or just heard from a missionary in a

Palestinian refugee camp, make sure what you say next is sensitive to what just happened. (Not the phrase 'is sensitive to'; not 'comment on.' Sometimes silence, prayer, or song is a perfectly good way to pick the moment.)

Remember: Standing for the creed, sitting or kneeling for confession, doing something for prayer (stand, sit, bow) are all part of picking your moment.

7. Never leave a gap (unless you mean to leave a gap)

Please be at the lectern ready to speak as soon as possible. It is highly illegal in our church to shuffle from where you are sitting to do your thing while we all sit there and watch you saunter to the front. Note that, after a song, this means coming to the front before the song has ended, not beginning to move when it ends.

8. Pray for something

To pray is to ask God for something. We come together to bring our prayers and request to God. Therefore, pray for something. You have not "prayed for the Prime Minister" until you have prayed "that the Prime Minister will seek and implement just and compassionate legislation for asylum seekers to our country." Replace the word "prayer" with "ask" and then ask yourself, "Have I asked for something worth asking for?"

9. Trust the sermons and songs

Remember: we don't need commentary, we need flow.

A point already made, but please trust the songs, the prayers, the preaching etc to do their work. Usually, we don't need to know that 'that song was very moving' or 'that sermon made me think of the time I was cycling in Brazil.'

Trust the content of the sermon and help us, like a good guide at an art gallery, not by standing in front of the paintings and tell us what they are like, but most often by standing out of the way so we can see them ourselves.

10. Don't make assumptions about who is there, and why, and feeling what.

Please don't set a narrow band of emotions and experiences for who is there. Don't say, "I hope you've had a great week!". Maybe this week they had a miscarriage. Maybe they don't know if God is even there. Maybe they feel about as dark and as broken and as guilty as they have ever felt. A qualifying exam for knowing you should be at church not having had a good week; it's being a sinner saved by grace, come to receive strength from the Lord in word, sacrament and fellowship.