

MUSIC MINISTRY

★ Nuts & Bolts

A Practical Field Guide for
Music Directors in
New Thought Communities.

..... ♥
HEART. EXCELLENCE.
PRESENCE.
TOGETHER WE MAKE
HEAVEN HEARD.



♥
Kim-Char Meredith

A WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

From the congregation, music ministry can look pretty simple: pick songs, rehearse them, show up Sunday, sing. And yes - that is part of it. But somewhere between choosing the song and singing it, a whole lot of other stuff tends to show up.

There are musicians to coordinate, charts to prepare, copyrights to understand, microphones to plug in, lyrics to get on screens, guest artists to welcome, budgets to work within, livestreams to consider, and occasionally a cable that was absolutely here five minutes ago.

How much of that actually belongs to the Music Director will vary enormously from church to church.

In a larger community, you may have a Tech Director, sound engineer, presentation team, livestream crew, communications staff, and other people who each own their piece of the Sunday experience. Wonderful.

In a smaller church, those same responsibilities may be divided among three people. Or two. Or... hi, Music Director.

At Unity in Naperville, my own role stretches beyond Music Director into Creative Director and managing our tech team. That does not mean I personally need to operate every piece of equipment or run every part of production every Sunday. It does mean I have found it enormously helpful to understand how the pieces connect.

If I understand what the sound person is trying to accomplish, I can communicate with them better. If I understand why the livestream mix needs something different from what we hear in the room, I can help troubleshoot why the music sounds wonderful in the sanctuary and strangely flat online.

If I understand what the person running slides needs from me, I can get accurate lyrics to them before Sunday morning. If I understand the basic path from microphone to mixer to livestream to YouTube, I do not have to be the person pushing every button to recognize where something may have gone sideways.

That is why this guide goes beyond songs and rehearsals.

It is not a suggestion that the Music Director should absorb every job in the building. Please don't.

We talk later about defining your role and protecting your boundaries. Knowing how to do something should not quietly turn into, "Great - now it's yours forever."

But music does not happen in isolation. The song, the musician, the microphone, the room, the screen, the lighting, the livestream, and the person sitting at home watching on a laptop are all part of one experience.

You do not need to become an expert in everything in this book. Know what belongs to you. Learn enough about the neighboring pieces to work well with the people who hold them. And when possible, make sure more than one person knows how the important stuff works.

The goal is not to become indispensable. The goal is to help create a ministry that works well together.

And then, yes... we get to make some music.

A practical note: this handbook is educational, not legal or tax advice. Licensing rules, tax requirements, and platform policies change, so verify current requirements with the appropriate licensing provider, accountant, attorney, or agency when the details matter.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE — THE JOB BEHIND THE JOB	3
1. What Does a Music Director Actually Do?	3
PART TWO — COPYRIGHT WITHOUT THE HEADACHE	7
2. Copyright Basics	7
3. emPower Licensing — A New Thought First Stop	8
4. Christian Copyright Solutions (CCS), CCLI & Broader Licensing	8
5. Licensing Map (Quick Guide)	11
6. Unity Worldwide Ministries & Community Resources	14
PART THREE — PEOPLE, PAY & EXPECTATIONS	15
7. Working with People: Volunteers, Paid Musicians & the Human Stuff	15
8. Employee or Contractor?	17
PART FOUR — BUILDING THE MUSIC	19
9. What Is the Music Here to Do?	19
10. Choosing & Finding Songs	20
11. Leading Congregational Singing	22
12. The Musical Arc: Let the Service Breathe	24
13. Playing Under Prayer & Meditation	27
14. Building & Arranging the Band	29
15. What If We Don't Have a Musician?	32
16. Starting a Choir	33
PART FIVE — RUNNING THE TEAM	35
17. Culture Comes First	35
18. Auditions (Without the Stress)	35
19. From Rehearsal to Sunday	37
PART SIX — PRODUCTION, SCREENS & CREATIVE TOOLS	39
20. Working with the Sound Team: Basic Live Sound	39
21. Stage Lighting Basics	41
22. Lyrics on Screen: Readability & Attribution	42
23. AI, Canva & Visual Ministry	43
24. Digital Music Stands: Finding, Building & Carrying the Chart	45
25. Service Planning & Team Scheduling Software	49
26. Church Presentation Software: What Goes on the Screens	51
27. Livestream & Live-Production Software	54
PART SEVEN — BEYOND SUNDAY	60
28. Concerts, Special Events & Community Outreach	60
PART EIGHT — STARTER FORMS & CHECKLISTS	63
Form A — Guest Musician Agreement	63
Form B — Guest Artist Tech & Hospitality Sheet	65
Form C — Music Team Expectations	66
Form D — Song Use & Copyright Checklist	67
Form E — Sunday Production Checklist	68
Form F — Music Director Role, Scope & Authority Worksheet	69
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	71
ABOUT KIM-CHAR MEREDITH	76
INDEX OF LINKS	77



PART ONE

THE JOB BEHIND THE JOB



SONG
SELECTION
+ FLOW



Many moving parts.
One sacred flow.



TO-DO:

- ★ Welcome Team
- ★ Rehearse
- ★ Set List
- ★ Sound Check
- ★ Youth Practice
- ★ Follow Up



PART ONE — THE JOB BEHIND THE JOB



1. What Does a Music Director Actually Do?

The visible job might be 20 minutes on Sunday. The real job is everything that makes those 20 minutes possible.

A music director may wear many hats:

- Musician & worship planner
- Team leader & rehearsal director
- Arranger & talent scout
- Mentor & volunteer coordinator
- Contractor/guest liaison
- Copyright & production support
- Budget & calendar manager
- Culture keeper
- And occasionally diplomat, cheerleader, tech support, and cable-finder

If you've ever thought, *"I just want to play music,"* and then found yourself managing schedules, licensing, and a missing drummer—you are absolutely in the right place.

The key question

What is actually mine to do?

Because if everything is yours, nothing is sustainable.

Clarify early:

- Who chooses music and has final say?
- Who hires musicians and approves expenses?
- Who handles licensing, payroll, and purchases?
- Who schedules rehearsals and guest artists?
- Who manages sound/livestream teams?
- What decisions can you make independently?

A written job description prevents the classic moment: *"I thought you were handling that."*

Clarity isn't bureaucracy—it's kindness.



Working with the Minister, the Board & Everyone Else Who Has Your Number



Music ministry does not happen in a vacuum. The music director is usually working in relationship with a senior minister, staff, board members, volunteers, event planners, and sometimes several very enthusiastic people who all have an idea for what should happen next Sunday.

The goal is not to build walls around the music ministry. It is to establish clear channels, so collaboration does not become confusion.

Different ministers, different planning rhythms

Every minister works differently. Some will give you sermon series, themes, scriptures, and topics weeks or months ahead. Others may still be listening for Sunday's message on Friday.

Neither style automatically makes someone difficult to work with, but the music minister still needs enough lead time to choose music thoughtfully, locate or prepare charts, schedule musicians, rehearse, create lyric slides, and handle any licensing or production needs.

If you need more lead time than you are receiving, communicate that early and specifically. Rather than, "I need things sooner," explain what additional time makes possible: better song choices, stronger preparation, fewer last-minute substitutions, and a more cohesive service experience.

A useful conversation might sound like:

"I can absolutely work with some flexibility. What helps me most is having the theme or general direction by Tuesday whenever possible. That gives me time to choose music thoughtfully and get materials to the team. If the message changes later, we can adjust from there."

The point is not to require the minister to work exactly as you do. It is to find a rhythm that allows both ministries to do their work well.

Know where direction comes from

One of the most important things to clarify is who has authority to make requests or change plans within the music ministry.





Questions worth settling early:

- Who is the music director's primary ministry contact?
- Who can request or approve changes to Sunday music?
- Who can authorize additional musicians or expenses?
- If a board member has an idea, where does that request go first?
- If a volunteer is planning an event, who approves the music component before the music minister begins work?
- What counts as a request, and what counts as a directive?

A music director should not have to sort out conflicting instructions from several people. If the minister says one thing, a board member says another, and the event chair says, "Oh, I thought you knew," the problem is not musical. It is structural.

Create a simple request path

For special events, decide in advance how music requests reach the music director. For example:

Event planner → Minister or designated staff lead → music director

Or, if the music director has been given direct authority for events:

Event planner → music director, with budget and scope already approved

The exact structure will differ by ministry. What matters is that everyone knows the structure before the week of the event.

This is especially important when the music director is paid for a defined scope of work. A board member, committee chair, or volunteer may have a perfectly reasonable request—but that does not automatically mean it has been approved, budgeted, scheduled, or included in the music director's role. Requests should come through the agreed channel so the music minister is not quietly accumulating new assignments from five different directions.

Protect the relationship, not just the boundary

Clear protocol is not about saying, "You're not allowed to ask me anything." People should still feel welcome to share ideas. The distinction is between an idea and an assignment.





A gracious response can be as simple as:

“That sounds like a fun idea. Would you run it by [the appropriate person] so we can make sure it fits the event plan and budget? Once it comes through that channel, I’ll be glad to look at what we can do musically.”

That keeps the relationship warm without leaving the music minister responsible for deciding whether someone else had the authority to make the request.

The larger principle

Good collaboration needs both relationship and structure. The minister and music director should be able to communicate openly, adapt when needed, and trust one another’s expertise. The board and volunteers should know how to bring ideas forward. And the music director should know whose direction actually governs the work.

It’s a little like being invited to a party and then hearing, “Oh—and could you bring your guitar?” Suddenly you’re not just attending the party. You’re working it.

Music ministry requests can arrive the same way: casually, relationally, and with every good intention. But if the request involves choosing music, rehearsing, arranging musicians, bringing equipment, or performing, it has crossed from “friendly idea” into music ministry work. That doesn’t mean the answer is no. It means the request should come through the agreed channel, with enough information and lead time to decide whether it can reasonably be supported.

“Could you just bring your guitar?” may be seven words. It is not necessarily a seven-word job.

Collaboration is not the same thing as being available for assignment by everyone who has your phone number.



PART TWO

COPYRIGHT WITHOUT THE HEADACHE



- ✓ Clarity
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Coverage
- ✓ Community

SONG USE

- ★ lyrics
- ★ arrangement
- ★ recording
- ★ streaming
- ★ reproduction
- ★ performance

LYRICS & MELODY



PERMISSION



STREAM



PROTECT
CREATE
SERVE

- ✓ GET CLEAR
- ✓ GET PERMISSION
- ✓ GIVE CREDIT
- ✓ STAY COVERED

LICENSE



SONG IDEA

CHECK RIGHTS

GET LICENSE

USE
CONFIDENTLY

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Know the path.
Protect the song.

MINISTRY
RESOURCES

emPower

CCS

CCLI

PART TWO — COPYRIGHT WITHOUT THE HEADACHE



2. Copyright Basics

A “song” isn’t one thing—it’s a bundle of rights:

- Composition & lyrics
- Arrangements & recordings
- Performance & reproduction
- Streaming & video sync

U.S. Copyright Office: <https://www.copyright.gov/what-is-copyright/>

The Religious Service Exemption — Helpful, but Limited

Before we start talking about licenses, there is one important exception to understand.

Churches may generally perform nondramatic music in worship services without a public performance license.

 17 U.S. Code §110: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/17/110>

But this does **not automatically cover**:

- Lyric projection or printing
- Copies of charts or recordings
- Livestreaming or uploads
- Non-worship events (retreats, fundraisers, concerts, etc.)

So yes—helpful. But not a blanket pass.

But I’m Only Changing One Word...

This is one of those practices many music ministers have probably done at some point, sometimes with the best intentions of staying aligned with our teachings. A word or phrase feels out of alignment, so we quietly swap it for one that fits better.





The catch is that if the song is still under copyright, changing the lyric generally requires permission from the copyright owner or publisher. The Religious Service Exemption lets us perform qualifying music in worship; it does not give us permission to rewrite it. emPower's own Licensee FAQ is explicit: modifications to covered compositions require written permission from the Publisher.

So if a lyric doesn't fit, the cleanest choices are usually:

- Sing it as written.
- Omit a verse or section when your license or permission allows.
- Choose another song.
- Ask the publisher or rightsholder for written permission to make the change.

The good news: if the song is part of the emPower repertoire, emPower already works with participating publishers and provides publisher information through its Music Rights program. If you are not sure whom to contact, their contact page is a practical place to start and ask for help identifying the appropriate publisher or songwriter contact.

emPower Licensee FAQ: <https://www.empowerma.com/licensee-faq/>

emPower Contact: <https://www.empowerma.com/contact/>

Whew. Good to know. Here's what we do going forward.

3. emPower Licensing — A New Thought First Stop

<https://www.empowerma.com/music-rights-information-for-churches/>

For New Thought, Unity, and progressive ministries, emPower Licensing is a natural first stop. It is often used in these communities, making it especially relevant when working with New Thought and progressive repertoire.

Because we're gathering at emPower Music Fest, it is worth saying plainly: start here. Then check any additional permissions your specific use may require.

4. Christian Copyright Solutions (CCS), CCLI & Broader Licensing

CCLI is useful—but for many New Thought ministries, it is a narrower tool than people sometimes assume.



Its Church Copyright License is built around covered worship songs and hymns and can provide permissions for uses such as projecting or printing lyrics,



making certain custom arrangements, and other specified church-singing activities. CCLI also offers separate streaming and rehearsal licenses for covered repertoire. 

CCLI Church Copyright License: <https://ccli.com/us/en/church-copyright-license>

Christian Copyright Solutions (CCS) is often the more relevant resource when a ministry uses broader cover music. CCS partners with ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC and offers performance licensing covering more than 43 million Christian and secular songs across genres.

Christian Copyright Solutions: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/>

Its PERFORMmusic Facilities License covers live and prerecorded music outside qualifying religious services—such as social events, fundraisers, classes, retreats, and other church activities—across church facilities and many ministry events.

PERFORMmusic: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/performmusic>

Its WORSHIPcast Streaming License covers live performances of music from the ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC catalogs when streamed through a ministry-owned website. It does not cover commercial sound recordings, backing tracks, multitracks, or stems, and it does not by itself grant permission to reproduce song lyrics.

WORSHIPcast: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/worshipcast>

So the practical question is not “CCLI or CCS?” as though one replaces the other. Depending on what your ministry sings, projects, performs, or streams, you may need emPower, CCS, CCLI, direct permission—or some combination.

For many New Thought ministries, a useful starting map is:

- emPower — New Thought, positive, and progressive repertoire.
- CCS — broader Christian and secular performance and website-streaming needs.
- CCLI — covered worship songs and hymns, especially lyric projection/printing and CCLI-specific streaming or rehearsal permissions.

Always check the specific song, the specific use, and the specific license.





Keep good song-use records



Licensing is not finished when the song makes it onto the screen or into the service. Reporting requirements vary by provider and by license, which is another reason to keep good song-use records.

emPower currently asks licensees to keep track of covered compositions and submit a report within fourteen days after the end of each calendar quarter. CCLI's manual-reporting process notifies a church when its reporting period begins; during that period, CCLI recommends reporting regularly, ideally weekly. CCS's WORSHIPcast license requires quarterly song-performance reporting. PERFORMmusic generally does not require routine song reporting for ordinary covered uses, although ticketed events have separate reporting and fee procedures. Always check the current terms for the license you actually hold.

That makes a simple song-use record worth keeping all year, even when no report is due. At minimum, keep the date, song title, writer information when available, and enough detail about how often and how the song was used to complete the reporting required by your licenses.

Some ministries let their worship or production software keep the record. For many small and mid-sized ministries, the trusty spreadsheet works just fine. What matters is that someone owns the task and the record stays current.

And this is one piece of administration with a very human reason behind it: reporting helps licensing organizations distribute royalties to the songwriters and publishers whose music we love and use. Submit the reports. It is part of honoring the people who created the music.

emPower Licensee FAQ: <https://www.empowerma.com/licensee-faq/>

CCLI Reporting: <https://ccli.com/us/en/reporting>

CCS WORSHIPcast: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/worshipcast>

CCS PERFORMmusic: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/performmusic>

Download the Song Usage Reporting Log Template:
<https://pxllnk.co/md-song-usage>



5. Licensing Map (Quick Guide)



Worship service performance

Often covered under the Religious Service Exemption

Lyrics on screens / print

Requires reproduction permission/license. For New Thought repertoire, emPower is often the first place to check; for worship songs and hymns in the CCLI catalog, the CCLI Church Copyright License may apply. CCS performance licenses do not by themselves provide lyric-reproduction permission.

🗣️ emPower Licensing: <https://www.empowerma.com/music-rights-information-for-churches/>

🗣️ CCLI Church Copyright License: <https://ccli.com/us/en/church-copyright-license>

Livestreaming

Match the streaming license to the repertoire and platform. For broader Christian and secular live performances, check CCS WORSHIPcast; for covered worship songs and hymns, CCLI Streaming may apply. WORSHIPcast does not cover commercial sound recordings, backing tracks, multitracks, or stems.

🗣️ CCS WORSHIPcast: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/worshipcast>

🗣️ CCLI Streaming: <https://ccli.com/us/en/streaming>

Rehearsal recordings

Sharing rehearsal recordings still requires permission. CCLI offers a Rehearsal License for covered repertoire; otherwise, check the rightsholder or applicable license.

🗣️ CCLI Rehearsal License: <https://ccli.com/us/en/rehearsal-license>

Backing tracks / recordings

Recordings carry separate rights from the underlying song. CCLI Streaming Plus may cover certain authorized recordings within its program; CCS WORSHIPcast does not cover



commercial recordings or backing tracks.

 CCLI Streaming: <https://ccli.com/us/en/streaming>

 CCS WORSHIPcast: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/worshipcast>

Events outside worship

Music outside qualifying religious services may require public-performance licensing. For churches using Christian and secular cover music, CCS PERFORMmusic is a practical first place to check.

 CCS PERFORMmusic: <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/performmusic>

PROs:

- ASCAP: <https://www.ascap.com>
- BMI: <https://www.bmi.com>
- SESAC: <https://www.sesac.com>

Core rule

Don't ask: *"Do we have a license?"*

Ask instead: **"Does this specific use qualify?"**

Livestreaming Audio (Music Ministry Considerations)

Live streaming changes everything about how music is heard.

In the room, sound is alive. It blends with the acoustics of the space—the natural reverb, the warmth of shared air, the way voices and instruments soften into each other.

Online, that disappears.

What the livestream audience receives is a much more exposed, clinical version of the mix—unless it's intentionally shaped for broadcast.





The key issue: no room sound



In a physical space, natural ambience helps:

- Smooth vocal edges
- Glue instruments together
- Add emotional warmth
- Mask small imperfections

On a livestream, that safety net is gone. I hear this immediately in the studio: what feels warm and blended in a room can sound startlingly exposed in headphones. A livestream is not simply “the room, online.” It is its own listening environment.

A completely dry mix can feel:

- Flat
- Harsh
- Exposed
- Emotionally distant

The solution: a separate aux mix

Most effective livestream setups use a **dedicated aux (auxiliary) mix** for broadcast.

This allows you to:

- Build a mix independent of the room
- Add controlled reverb and ambience
- Shape a more cohesive “produced” feel
- Balance clarity with warmth

Sweetening vs overproduction

The goal is not to turn worship into a studio record.

It’s to find the middle ground:

- Not too dry and exposed
- Not overly produced or artificial
- But warm, clear, and supportive



Think:

— a *present, spacious mix* rather than a *vacuum-sealed or over-polished album mix*.





Why this matters

For many people, the livestream is their first encounter with your ministry.

We're not chasing production for its own sake. We're removing barriers to connection.

6. Unity Worldwide Ministries & Community Resources

Unity Worldwide Ministries (UWM)

 <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org>

Resources, training, credentialing, and leadership development.

- Resources: <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/resources>
- Events: <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/events>
- Credentialing: <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/credentialing>

Unity Circle Portal

 <https://circle.unityworldwideministries.org>

A growing online community for:

- Music ministers and leaders
- Resource sharing
- Peer support
- Ministry collaboration



PART THREE

PEOPLE, PAY & EXPECTATIONS

TEAM

- ☒ volunteer
- ☒ paid musician
- ☒ partnership



ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

- ☒ clear roles
- ☒ communication
- ☒ boundaries
- ☒ accountability
- ☒ grace



CALL TIME

arrive early



VOLUNTEER

PAID MUSICIAN

VOLUNTEER

DIFFERENT GIFTS. SAME MISSION.



SERVE
LEAD
LOVE

W-9

Thank you!

PAY PLAN

Rehearsal	\$
Service	\$
Special	\$
Mileage	\$

Thank you!

BUDGET



WORK WELL TOGETHER

- ☒ communicate early
- ☒ set expectations
- ☒ honor commitments
- ☒ celebrate & encourage



Different roles.
One team.



- ☒ RELIABLE
- ☒ PREPARED
- ☒ KIND





PART THREE — PEOPLE, PAY & EXPECTATIONS

7. Working with People: Volunteers, Paid Musicians & the Human Stuff

Same team. Different expectations. Both matter deeply.

Everyone should:

- Communicate and show up prepared
- Respect others and the purpose of the ministry
- Support the team
- Maintain reliability and kindness

Volunteer ≠ “anything goes”

Paid ≠ “more important”

Spirit may be moving, but call time is still call time.

Different people, same team

Music teams bring together different personalities, temperaments, communication styles, and levels of experience. One person wants every detail a week ahead. Another thinks best in the room. One welcomes direct feedback; another needs a little time to process it. None of that is automatically a problem.

The goal is not to make everyone communicate or work exactly the same way. It is to learn enough about one another to work well together while keeping the shared expectations clear. A different temperament is not the same thing as poor behavior—and personality should never become a label we use instead of having a real conversation.

Communicate about behavior, not character

When something is not working, describe what actually happened rather than assigning motive or identity. Nonviolent Communication offers a useful pattern: observation, feeling or impact, need/value, and a clear request.





Instead of: "You're unreliable."

Try: "We've started rehearsal before you arrived three times this month. I get concerned because the whole team needs that rehearsal time. Can you commit to being ready by 8:30, or is there something we need to adjust?"

This keeps the conversation grounded in what can actually change. It also leaves room to discover information you may not have known.

A few good habits:

- Address concerns privately and as close to the situation as practical.
- Be specific. Avoid "you always" and "you never."
- Ask what the other person is experiencing before assuming motive.
- Say what the team needs and why it matters.
- Make a clear, doable request rather than hoping the person will infer what you mean.
- Listen for the person underneath the problem without pretending the problem does not exist.

Create a path back into alignment

Accountability works best when people know what "better" looks like. When someone is not meeting expectations, give them a reasonable path to realign:

1. Name the concern clearly and privately.
2. Listen for context or obstacles.
3. Restate the expectation and why it matters to the team or ministry.
4. Agree on a specific next step or change.
5. Set a reasonable point to check back in.
6. Follow through.

The goal is not punishment. It is clarity, relationship, and the possibility of change.

And sometimes, after honest conversation and a real opportunity to adjust, the role is still not a fit. That can be handled with dignity too. A person's worth is not determined by whether they remain on the music team, and protecting the health of the team is not the same thing as rejecting the person.

Volunteer and paid roles may require different administrative processes, but both deserve clear expectations, respectful communication, and honest feedback. Kindness without clarity eventually becomes confusion. Clarity without kindness becomes something else entirely.



8. Employee or Contractor?

Calling someone an independent contractor does not make them one. For federal tax purposes, worker classification depends on the actual working relationship and the degree of control and independence—not simply on the label in an agreement or the way the person is paid.

The IRS looks at the whole relationship, with facts generally grouped into three areas:

- Behavioral control — Who has the right to direct how, when, and where the work is done?
- Financial control — Who controls the business side of the work, including expenses, tools, payment arrangements, and the worker's opportunity for profit or loss?
- Type of relationship — Is the relationship ongoing or project-based? Are there employee-type benefits? What does the written agreement say, and how do the parties actually work together?

There is no single magic factor. An occasional guest hired for one service presents a different set of facts from a musician who works every week as an integrated part of the ministry—but either arrangement still has to be evaluated on its real circumstances.

If the relationship is regular or ongoing and you are uncertain about classification, involve the ministry's accountant, payroll professional, or attorney rather than simply continuing whatever label has always been used.

For a musician properly treated as an independent contractor, obtain a completed Form W-9 before the first payment and keep it with the ministry's records. For payments made in 2026, Form 1099-NEC generally applies when qualifying nonemployee compensation to one payee reaches \$2,000 for the calendar year. The threshold can change, so verify the current IRS requirement each year.

 IRS guide: <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/independent-contractor-defined>

- W-9: <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-9>
- 1099-NEC: <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-1099-nec>

You'll notice we haven't tried to tell you what to pay a musician; rates vary widely by region, church size, role, experience, expectations, and local norms.



Building a Music Budget



A budget is a ministry plan with numbers attached. Even a small music ministry benefits from knowing what it can realistically sustain.

Common budget lines may include:

- Music director or regular musician compensation
- Guest musicians and substitute coverage
- Special services, concerts, or seasonal events
- Licensing fees
- Charts, tracks, songbooks, and other music resources
- Cables, batteries, stands, adapters, and small equipment
- Repair and replacement of larger equipment
- Software or online services used by the music ministry
- Professional development, conferences, or training
- A modest contingency for the thing nobody knew would stop working in November

Start with the annual calendar. What happens every Sunday? What happens only at holidays or special events? What does the ministry already own, and what will eventually need to be repaired or replaced?

Be clear about what a musician's fee covers. Does it include rehearsal, service, preparation, charts or arranging, travel, or additional events? Consistency is kinder than renegotiating the meaning of a fee every time someone is asked to do something extra.

Volunteers matter deeply, but "volunteer" should not quietly become shorthand for "person who personally absorbs all the costs." If someone is regularly buying supplies, printing charts, driving long distances, or providing equipment for the ministry, have an explicit conversation about what the ministry can reimburse or provide.

Keep a wish list separate from the operating budget. Dreaming is good. So is knowing which column currently pays for the dream. And when a new request arrives—especially for an event—ask two questions before anyone starts working: Is there an approved budget?

Is this within the agreed scope of the music ministry?



PART FOUR

BUILDING THE MUSIC

SONG SELECTION

- ★ the message
- ★ the moment
- ★ the people
- ★ the heart
- ★ the song

NO MUSICIAN?

- ✓ use tracks
- ✓ keep it simple
- ✓ lead with heart
- ✓ invite others

TRACKS & PLAYBACK



PRAY & LISTEN

CHOOSE SONGS

BUILD THE SET

PREPARE THE TEAM

LEAD WITH CONFIDENCE



SET LIST

1. Opening Song
2. Worship Song
3. Message
4. Response Song
5. Sending Song

SONG IDEAS



FAMILIAR

+
NEW
=
ENGAGED

FIND THE RIGHT KEY

- ✓ congregation range
- ✓ comfortable
- ✓ confident
- ✓ worshipful

BUILD THE SET

- ✓ flow & variety
- ✓ energy & rest
- ✓ theme & lyrics
- ✓ musical transitions
- ✓ pray through it

START A CHOIR

- ✓ start small
- ✓ rehearse with purpose
- ✓ create community
- ✓ lead with joy

Build the sound.
Serve the moment.

CHARTS

LYRICS

CHORD SHEETS

TEAM RESOURCES

MUSIC MINISTRY
TOOLS

PART FOUR — BUILDING THE MUSIC

9. What Is the Music Here to Do?

Zoom out for a minute.

Before adding another song to the library, it helps to know what kind of music ministry you are actually trying to build.

I do not mean you need a six-paragraph mission statement framed in the rehearsal room. A simple, shared intention is enough to give you something to steer by.

Ask the minister, the music team, or whoever helps shape the service: When our music ministry is working well, what do we hope people experience?

- Belonging and participation?
- A sense of spiritual grounding?
- Music that helps the message move from the head into lived experience?
- A wide musical welcome rather than one favorite style every week?
- A place where musicians can offer their gifts with preparation, care, and room to grow?
- A Sunday experience that feels connected rather than assembled from separate pieces?

There is no magic wording. The value is in getting clear enough that the intention can help you make choices.

A simple working sentence might be:

Our music ministry helps people participate, connect, and experience the message through music that is prepared with care, offered with heart, and appropriate to this community.

Yours may sound completely different. Good. It should sound like your community.

Use the intention as a filter

Once you know what you are trying to create, that little sentence becomes surprisingly useful.

A new song? Does it serve the intention? A guest artist? Same question. A choir? A bigger band? A new software subscription? A fog machine somebody found on Marketplace?

The answer can absolutely be yes. Just know why.

This also gives you language when something is musically good but simply not right for this ministry or this moment. You are not saying the song, person, style, or idea is bad. You are asking whether it serves the experience you have agreed to create.

That is a much easier place to make decisions from than “I like it” versus “I don’t.”

Revisit it when the ministry changes

A music ministry can outgrow its original shape. A congregation gets younger or older. A choir appears. The livestream becomes important. A new minister arrives. The budget changes. The room changes.

Every so often, ask the question again.

Not because the ministry failed to stick to the plan. Because living communities move.

The goal is not to freeze the music ministry in place. It is to know what you are tending while it grows.



10. Choosing & Finding Songs

Finding a song with the word “joy” in it is not necessarily the same thing as finding the right song for a message about joy.

Start with the job the music needs to do. Is this song gathering the community, inviting congregational participation, deepening the message, creating space for reflection, offering a response, supporting meditation, or sending people out the door with some lift in their step?

Questions worth asking

Does the language fit the teachings and values of this community?

- If people are expected to sing, is the range comfortable and the melody learnable?
- Is there enough repetition for a congregation to participate without feeling as though they are sight-reading an audition piece?
- Does this moment need something familiar, something new, or a thoughtful balance of both?
- Can the musicians you actually have serve the arrangement well?
- Does the song fit the emotional and energetic arc of the service—not just the topic?
- Do you have the permissions, charts, tracks, and lyric information needed for the way you plan to use it?

Build a repertoire, not just a Sunday

Keep a living song library. It can be a spreadsheet, shared document, planning platform, or anything your team will actually maintain. Useful fields include title, writer, theme or keywords, function in the service, usual key, congregational range, source links, licensing information, and notes about what worked.



Over time, this keeps you from beginning every week with a blank search box. Your best repertoire is not the biggest one. It is the collection your community can actually inhabit.





Where to look



For New Thought and progressive repertoire, emPower is an especially useful starting place. Its store includes songs, sheet music, performance tracks, congregational music, choral resources, and other tools for music ministers.

emPower Store: <https://www.empowerma.com/store/>

emPower Catalog: <https://www.empowerma.com/catalog/>

Two especially practical resources are:

- All Together Now Songbook — 40 positive, uniting songs selected for group singing, with a topical index.

<https://www.empowerma.com/product/all-together-now-songbook/>

- Positive Music Resource Book — a topic-based resource identifying more than 600 songs and where to find them.

<https://www.empowerma.com/product/positive-music-resource-book-2016-6th-edition/>

The emPower community itself is also a discovery resource. Festivals, Posi artists, colleagues, and other music ministers can introduce you to songs you might never find by searching a title. Unity Circle can be useful for peer recommendations as well.

A recommendation is not a license, of course. Someone can point you toward a great song without having the right to send you their copyrighted chart or recording. Once you find the song, check the permissions for the way you intend to use it.

A companion resource

Created by Richard Mekdeci and Sue Riley, *Music in Ministry – A Handbook for Ministers and Music Directors* goes more deeply into building, growing, and sustaining a church music program, including special events, choirs, house bands, service flow, and copyright. emPower currently lists a digital version in its bookstore, and the digital handbook is also included with Pro Church Membership.



11. Leading Congregational Singing

Leading a congregation is not the same job as singing a solo.

In a solo, the room is listening to you. In congregational singing, your job is to help the room find its own voice.

That changes almost everything: the key, the arrangement, how much you sing, where you look, and how you know whether the song worked.

Choose the key for the room

The key that makes your voice sound fabulous may not be the key that lets eighty other people sing comfortably.

For congregational music, favor a range that keeps most of the melody in an ordinary speaking-to-singing neighborhood. Watch repeated high notes especially. One exciting high note can be fun. Living up there for a whole chorus can turn the congregation into an audience very quickly.

If you are not sure, sing the melody without performing it. No belt. No falsetto rescue mission. Would an average person in the room be able to stay with you?

Give people a clear way in

The congregation should not have to guess when the song begins.

Give a recognizable intro. Establish the tempo. Make the entrance obvious. If there is an unusual pickup, a held note, or a place where everybody tends to come in one beat early, help them.

Your face and body can cue more than you think. Look up. Breathe with the room. Give the entrance as though you expect people to join you - because you do.

Do not out-sing the people you are trying to lead

This one can be surprisingly hard for good singers.

If the melody is being bent, riffed, delayed, ornamented, and reinvented every eight bars, the congregation loses its reference point. Save the lovely improvised stuff for the places where the room is not depending on you to tell them where the melody lives.

Lead singers should be easy to follow. Clear words. Clear rhythm. Clear melody. Warm energy. That is plenty.

Teach a new song without turning Sunday into rehearsal

New songs usually land best when the congregation gets something memorable early: a chorus, refrain, chant, or short response.

You can sing the refrain once and invite them in. You can let the music team sing the first verse while the room learns the shape. You can repeat the chorus enough times that people stop reading and start singing.



What usually does not help is a three-minute verbal explanation of the song before anybody gets to hear it.

Let the music teach as much as possible.

Sometimes the best thing the band can do is get smaller

If you want to know whether the congregation actually owns a song, pull the arrangement back.

Drop the drums for a chorus. Let the piano or guitar thin out. Let the lead singer back away from the microphone for a line. Listen.

When the room carries the song on its own, something shifts. They are not singing along with the music team anymore. They are the music.

If they are not singing, get curious

A quiet congregation does not automatically mean they do not like the song.

Maybe the key is too high. Maybe the melody is unfamiliar. Maybe the tempo is dragging. Maybe the band is so loud that nobody can hear anybody else in the room. Maybe the lyrics are arriving on the screen a beat late. Maybe the song has six verses and everybody has spiritually completed the experience at verse three.

Watch the room rather than taking participation personally. Then adjust what you can.

The screen is part of your leading

If lyrics are projected, the slide operator is part of the congregational music team whether they think of themselves that way or not.

Lyrics need to arrive early enough that people can breathe before the next phrase. Keep line breaks natural. Do not make the room search for where the sentence went.

A confident congregation needs three things at the same time: a melody they can follow, words they can find, and a leader who looks as though we are doing this together.

How do you know it worked?

For special music, applause may tell you something.

For congregational music, I would look elsewhere.

Did people enter the song? Did they stay with it? Did the room become more connected, more grounded, more alive? Did the song carry the moment it was there to carry?

The success of congregational singing is not that they heard you. It is that you helped them hear one another.



12. The Musical Arc: Let the Service Breathe

You can pick four terrific songs for Sunday and still have the whole thing feel a little... choppy.

Nothing is wrong with the songs. The problem is what happens around them.

I tend to think of a service a little like a set - except the congregation is part of the arrangement. People do not all walk through the door in the same place. Some are chatting and happy to see everybody. Someone had a lousy morning. Someone is visiting and wondering if they made a terrible mistake. Someone is already quiet and inward.

So where do we begin? And where are we hoping to go together? That is the arc.

Think journey, not playlist

There is no required formula. A service does not have to begin softly, build to a peak, and come gently back down for landing. But there is usually movement: gathering, opening, participation, listening, stillness, response, sending people back out the door.

Music can help carry that movement. Or it can stop it dead every four minutes.

When you look at the whole service, ask a simple question we have used elsewhere in this guide: What does this moment need to do?

The service starts before the opening song

Whatever people hear when they walk in is already part of the experience.

Maybe it is a live pianist. Maybe it is a playlist. Maybe it is lively and conversational. Maybe the room is intentionally quiet. Just know what you are doing.

If people are coming in hugging one another and catching up, a delicate instrumental piece that requires everyone's complete attention may be fighting a losing battle. That does not make it bad music. Wrong job.

Gathering music does not always need to be noticed. Sometimes its job is simply to hold the room while people arrive.

Energy is not the same thing as volume

A room full of people singing a quiet chorus together can have enormous energy. A full band playing at eleven while the congregation watches politely can have almost none.

So listen and look. Are people with you? Do they need another chorus? Are they done? Is it time to lift the energy, or would that bulldoze what just happened?

Sometimes the best choice is one more refrain. Sometimes the best choice is to stop playing. Both are musical decisions.

Watch the handoffs

This is where Sunday can get clunky very quickly.



Song ends. Everybody looks around. The next speaker is still getting to the microphone. Someone crosses the platform. The keyboard player thinks, I suppose I should play something... and here comes twelve bars of Holy Noodling.

We do not need to choreograph every breath. But the obvious handoffs deserve a plan.

Examples:

"Hold the last chord and the prayer will begin over it."

"Full stop here. Give it a few seconds."

"Go directly into the next song."

"Stay underneath while the offering finishes."

That little bit of conversation during rehearsal can make the service feel completely different.

Rehearse the edges

We are musicians, so naturally we rehearse the song: intro, verse, chorus, ending. Fine. Now rehearse what happens after the ending.

Where does the speaker come in? Does the congregation sit? Does the pad continue? Does the track stop cleanly? Who gives the cue for the next thing?

You do not need a full dress rehearsal every week. But if a transition involves several people, a track, a slide cue, a change in energy, or anything else with a decent chance of going sideways - run it once.

Thirty seconds. Done.

Let things land

Sometimes context helps a song. Sometimes the song already says what we are about to spend ninety seconds explaining.

Trust it.

And especially after a tender or powerful song, resist the feeling that somebody must immediately fill the air. There are times when the next right thing is a sentence. There are also times when the next right thing is... nothing.

Let it land.

Plan with the minister, not just around a topic

"Sunday is about forgiveness" is useful. But this is more useful:

- Where are you going after the message?
- Are we moving directly into meditation?
- Do you want the song before the message to open the question or really state it?
- How do you want people to feel as we close?



Now I can plan. Because "forgiveness" could be an intimate piano song, a congregational chant, a big joyful release, or twelve other things depending on what that moment needs.

The more I understand the movement of the service, the better I can choose music that helps carry it.

The congregation is part of the arrangement

A service is not a recording. Things move.

A chorus catches fire. A quiet moment goes deeper than expected. People sing a new song more confidently than you thought they would. Or... not.

Preparation gives us something solid to stand on. Then we pay attention. That is part of music ministry too.

Before you call the music plan finished, look at the whole service:

Where does the room gather?

Where are people invited to participate?

Where does the energy rise?

Where does it settle?

Which transitions actually need a plan?

Is there anywhere we should stop adding things and simply leave some room?

We are not just choosing songs and putting them into slots. We are listening for how the whole thing breathes.

And sometimes the most important musical decision of the morning happens between the notes.



13. Playing Under Prayer & Meditation

Playing under prayer or meditation can look easy from a distance.

Soft music. A few chords. How hard could it be?

The trick is that the better you do it, the less anybody is thinking about what you are playing.

This is one of those places where musicianship shows up as restraint.

You are supporting the spoken space

The words, the silence, and the inner experience of the listener are in the foreground. The music is there to hold the space underneath them.

That usually means fewer notes, simpler harmony, slower movement, and enough listening that you are not stepping on the speaker every time they take a breath.

Talk before Sunday

If possible, ask the prayer or meditation leader a few simple questions before you begin:

- About how long will this be?
- Is the feeling more spacious and quiet, or is there a clear emotional movement?
- Do you want music the whole time, or only at the beginning and end?
- How will I know you are ready for me to finish?

You do not need a script. You just need enough information that two people are not independently inventing the same five minutes.

Choose sounds that do not demand attention

On keyboard, warm pads, soft piano, gentle electric piano, or simple layered textures can work beautifully. Watch sounds with a sharp attack - bells, bright mallets, dramatic synth swells - unless that is genuinely what the moment needs.

On acoustic piano or guitar, play less. Open voicings, sustained tones, simple broken chords, and plenty of space will usually serve better than a stream of interesting ideas.

And be careful with recognizable melodies. The minute someone realizes you are playing a song they know, part of their attention may leave the prayer and start following the tune.

Play the breath, not the clock

Listen to the cadence of the speaker.

When they are speaking, the music can often become simpler. When they leave space, you may have room for a gentle chord change or a little movement. If they become quieter, you become quieter too.

Do not feel obligated to change harmony every four bars because that is what musicians do when left unsupervised.



A single chord can live much longer than you think.

Silence is allowed

You do not have to fill every pause.

Sometimes the most supportive thing you can do is let the sound fade completely and allow the room to be quiet.

Then, if music returns, it returns because the moment wants it - not because silence made the musician nervous.

Know how you are getting out

Beginnings are usually easy. Endings are where we discover whether anybody made a plan.

Agree on a cue if you can: a phrase the leader tends to use, eye contact, a hand movement, or simply a known ending point. Then finish clearly. Resolve the harmony, let it decay, and get out of the way.

The goal is not a theatrical ending. It is an ending that lets the next moment arrive without everybody wondering whether the keyboard player is still going.

Recorded meditation beds

Recorded beds can be useful when no live underscoring musician is available or when a particular texture has been created intentionally for the meditation.

Choose something that can sit underneath speech without calling attention to its form. Avoid obvious endings in the middle of the prayer, and make sure somebody knows how the fade will happen.

And, as always, make sure the recording is licensed or otherwise cleared for the way you are using it - especially if the service is streamed or archived.

Remember the livestream

A pad that feels almost invisible in the sanctuary may disappear entirely online because the livestream does not get the same natural room sound.

This is another reason that separate stream aux mix is useful. The sound operator may need a touch more of the meditation bed in the livestream than in the room, while still keeping the spoken word comfortably in front.

A simple practice exercise

Take a paragraph from a meditation, prayer, or reading and have someone read it aloud while you accompany them.

Notice when your playing competes with the words. Notice when you want to fill a pause. Notice how little you actually need.

Then do it again with half as many notes.

That second pass is often the one.



14. Building & Arranging the Band

A bigger band is not automatically a better band.

A good band is a group of people who know what job they are doing inside the song - and who are willing to leave some jobs for somebody else.

That can be two musicians. It can be eight. The principle is the same.

Build around the people you actually have

Start with reliability, listening, musical feel, and the ability to work with other people. Instrumentation comes after that.

If you have a strong pianist and percussionist, begin there. If your anchor is guitar and bass, fine. If you have one excellent keyboard player who can cover a lot of ground, let that be enough until the ministry can sustain more.

Do not build the imaginary band first and then try to force the available musicians into it.

Every instrument does not need to play all the time

One of the quickest ways to make a band sound crowded is to have everybody filling every available inch of the arrangement.

Think in layers. Who is carrying the pulse? Who is defining the harmony? Who owns the bass movement? Where is the melody? What texture would actually add something right now?

A guitar that enters on verse two can sound bigger than a guitar that has been strumming since the first count-in. A drummer who drops out for eight bars creates somewhere to come back from. A keyboard pad can be beautiful - unless the piano, guitar, organ, strings, and three vocalists are all already occupying the same space.

Arrange the song you can play, not the record you love

The recording may have twelve guitar layers, programmed percussion, background vocals, strings, and a bass part played by somebody with suspiciously many fingers.

You are not required to reproduce it.

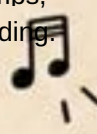
Find the bones of the song: groove, harmony, melody, important rhythmic figures, signature moments. Keep what makes the song recognizable and meaningful. Then arrange it for the musicians in front of you.

Sometimes the best church arrangement is simpler than the record. Sometimes it becomes something completely different and works better in the room because it actually belongs to the people playing it.

Give the band a roadmap

A band can be full of good musicians and still wobble if nobody knows the form.

Mark the practical things: intro length, verse/chorus order, instrumental sections, key changes, vamps, stops, holds, endings, and any place the arrangement differs from the reference recording.



If the minister may speak over a vamp or the song may repeat until the room is ready to move on, decide who gives the cue and what the cue looks like.

What kind of chart do I hand them?

Different musicians read different kinds of information. You do not need to turn every song into every format. Just know what you are looking at.

Chord / lyric sheet

Lyrics with chord symbols placed where the harmony changes. Fast, practical, and often enough for guitarists, keyboardists, and singers who already know the melody. ChordPro is a standardized text-based version of this idea that many apps can transpose automatically.

Lead sheet

A written melody line with lyrics and chord symbols. Useful when someone needs the actual tune on the page but the accompaniment can be improvised.

Nashville Number System

The chords are written as scale numbers instead of letter names: 1, 4, 5, 6m, and so on. Because the relationships stay the same when the key changes, a number chart can be wonderfully efficient when several singers need the same song in different keys.

Piano/vocal score

A fuller notation showing the vocal melody and a written piano accompaniment. This is often the most comfortable format for a pianist who wants the arrangement spelled out rather than implied.

Octavo / choral score

A choral arrangement with the vocal parts written separately - often soprano, alto, tenor, and bass or another specified voicing - along with accompaniment information. This is the world of choir parts rather than a simple band roadmap.

Tablature

A guitar- or bass-oriented system showing where notes are played on the strings rather than using standard notation alone. Handy for a player who works that way; nearly useless to the pianist sitting next to them.

The best chart is not the fanciest chart.

It is the chart that gives this musician the information they need without making them hunt for the song inside the paperwork.

Reference recordings help - if everybody knows which one

If you send a recording, say what it is for.

"Use this for the groove and form; we are doing it in C instead of D."

"Listen to this for the vocal feel, but ignore the long instrumental outro."



"We are using the acoustic version, not the album version."

That little sentence can save a rehearsal.

Substitutes change the arrangement

When a musician is out, do not automatically make somebody else cover every missing note.

Ask what the song truly needs. If the second guitar is gone, perhaps the piano opens up a little. If the percussionist is missing, perhaps the drummer simplifies. If the keyboard player is gone, maybe the acoustic arrangement becomes the arrangement for that Sunday.

A confident smaller arrangement will almost always serve better than a frantic attempt to pretend nobody is missing.

Make room for the song

The band is not there to demonstrate how many sounds can occur simultaneously.

Listen across the stage. Leave room for the lyric. Leave room for the congregation. Leave room for one another.

If everybody is listening, the arrangement usually starts getting better before anybody plays another note.





 Music in Ministry — Digital Book:

<https://www.empowerma.com/product/music-in-ministry-book-digital-version-only/>



 emPower Pro Church Membership: <https://www.empowerma.com/church-membership/>

15. What If We Don't Have a Musician?

It's okay to start exactly where you are.

I remember walking into Unity in Naperville for the first time nearly 20 years ago. There was no music team. There was Reverend Kitty singing to a track on a boombox. There was no projector or screen; there were half-sheet printed handouts with the words.

And it worked beautifully.

Music ministry does not begin when you acquire a band, a projection system, in-ear monitors, and a lighting rig. It begins when music helps people participate, connect, reflect, remember, or lift together.

If you do not yet have a regular musician, possibilities include:

- A minister or capable singer using properly licensed performance tracks
- Simple a cappella singing, chants, or familiar congregational songs
- One keyboard or guitar player rather than trying to build a full band immediately
- Rotating guest musicians
- Sharing or coordinating musicians with another nearby ministry when schedules, compensation, and responsibilities are clear
- Thoughtfully chosen prerecorded or instrumental music where the intended use is permitted
- Doing less—and doing it well

If you use a backing or performance track, remember that the recording has rights of its own. Check that the track and your licenses or permissions cover the way you will use it, especially if the service will be streamed or archived.





Grow what you can sustain



A simple music ministry offered with care does not need an apology attached to it. Build gradually. One reliable musician may serve the experience better than a larger team that cannot yet be supported musically, financially, or administratively.

A bridge while you grow: Mālama Kekahi WEMS

Mālama Kekahi's Worship & Event Music Support (WEMS) Program grew from a simple conviction: music matters, and sometimes a ministry values live music before its budget can fully support it.

Its Weekly Worship Musician Support component helps qualifying participating churches make an additional Sunday musician possible. Under the current procedure, the church engages and pays the musician directly, and Mālama provides the approved WEMS support amount for qualifying services.

Program terms and availability can change. For current WEMS information or an application, contact Mālama Kekahi at Malama.Kekahi.Org@gmail.com.

Start with the boombox if that's where you are. The goal is not to look like a larger ministry. The goal is to make the music you can offer feel intentional, welcoming, and alive.

16. Starting a Choir

A choir can be one of the simplest ways to widen participation in the music ministry—but it helps to know what you are building before you invite everyone to rehearsal.

Start with purpose

Is the choir primarily about congregational participation and community? Musical excellence? A holiday service? A few special appearances each year? An ongoing ensemble?





There is no rule that says the first choir has to rehearse every Thursday until the end of time. A seasonal or project choir is often an excellent place to begin. One event, a defined rehearsal period, and a clear finish line let everyone learn what works before committing to something permanent.

A simple first project

1. Choose the service or event first and work backward from the date.
2. Select a small amount of achievable repertoire. Two songs sung well can be plenty.
3. Publish the rehearsal schedule and participation expectations before people sign up.
4. Decide whether the choir is open/no-audition or whether a particular project requires an audition.
5. Provide lyrics, charts, parts, or learning resources early enough for people to prepare.
6. Use arrangements and keys that allow the singers you actually have to succeed.
7. If experienced section leaders are available, let them help others learn parts and model good ensemble listening.
8. Rehearse beginnings, endings, cutoffs, dynamics, entrances, and listening—not just the notes.
9. Plan the microphones, stage placement, and soundcheck before performance day.
10. After the event, celebrate what happened and ask what you learned before deciding what comes next.

Open does not mean unstructured

A no-audition choir can be genuinely welcoming and still expect people to attend rehearsal, learn the material, follow direction, listen to one another, and support the ensemble rather than compete for a solo.

If you make or distribute rehearsal recordings, confirm that your license or permission covers that use.

And let the choir be a real musical doorway, not a consolation prize for people who were not selected for the regular team. A community choir can have its own purpose, identity, joy, and musical life.



PART FIVE

RUNNING THE TEAM

CULTURE
COMES
FIRST

AUDITIONS
WITHOUT
THE STRESS

- ✓ clear & simple
- ✓ welcoming
- ✓ musical fit
- ✓ heart check
- ✓ next steps

REHEARSAL
SCHEDULE

	MON	TUE	WED	THU
Warm Up	🎵	🎵	🎵	🎵
Practice	🎵	🎵	🎵	🎵
Run Through	🎵	🎵	🎵	🎵
Wrap Up	♥	♥	♥	♥
Pray Together	♥			

ENCOURAGE
&
PREPARE

CLEAR
COMMUNICATION

- ✓ what we're doing
- ✓ why it matters
- ✓ what's next
- ✓ who to ask

FROM REHEARSAL TO SUNDAY

REHEARSE 🎵

CHECK IN & PRAY ♥

SOUND CHECK & RUN THROUGH

WORSHIP & SERVE ♥

DEBRIEF & ENCOURAGE ♥

MAKE ROOM
FOR PEOPLE
TO GROW

SAME MISSION

Rejoice in
the One Presence

ONE TEAM.
ONE HEART.
ONE PURPOSE.

SUNDAY FLOW

- ✓ arrive early
- ✓ pray together
- ✓ sound check
- ✓ last run
- ✓ prepare hearts
- ✓ lead with excellence
- ✓ serve with joy

SONG IDEAS

TEAM DEVOS

LEADER GUIDES

PLAYLISTS

TEAM RESOURCES

PART FIVE — RUNNING THE TEAM



17. Culture Comes First

A healthy music team should feel like ministry before anyone sings a note. How we communicate, rehearse, repair mistakes, and make room for one another is part of the message.

Healthy culture sounds like:

- Respect
- Preparation
- Kindness
- Humor
- Accountability without shame

Praise publicly. Correct privately.

18. Auditions (Without the Stress)

Auditions can feel especially tender in a ministry setting. Someone may be offering more than a voice or an instrument; they may be offering something deeply connected to identity, belonging, or spiritual expression. That deserves care. It does not mean every person is automatically a fit for every musical role.

An audition is not a verdict on someone's worth or even on whether they are "a good singer." It is discernment about a particular role and what that role requires.

Know what you are listening for

Before anyone auditions, decide what the team actually needs. Depending on the role, that may include:

- Consistent pitch and rhythm
- Ability to blend rather than always sing as a soloist
- Listening and adjusting to other musicians
- Following musical direction in real time
 - Preparation and reliability
 - Appropriate vocal or instrumental range for the repertoire
 - Openness to feedback and willingness to keep growing



If possible, communicate those criteria before the audition. “I’m looking for the right fit” feels very different when no one knows what “fit” means.



Not every musical doorway has to be auditioned

A ministry can protect the musical integrity of its core team and still create meaningful ways for more people to participate. Possibilities include:

- A periodic no-audition community or seasonal choir
- Special-event choruses for holidays, celebrations, or theme Sundays
- Song circles or congregational singing workshops
- Occasional ensemble pieces designed for a wider range of skill levels
- Opportunities to share music in less production-dependent settings
- A developmental path for singers or musicians who want to grow toward the regular team

A no-audition choir does not have to mean “anything goes.” It can still have rehearsal expectations, selected repertoire, clear leadership, and the understanding that everyone is part of an ensemble rather than competing for a solo.

When the answer is “not this role”

Do it privately, promptly, and kindly. Thank the person for offering their gift, then be clear enough that they do not have to decode what you mean. Focus on the needs of the role rather than making a global statement about their ability.

For example: “Thank you for being willing to sing with us. For the regular music team, I need singers who can consistently hold pitch, blend, and adjust quickly within the ensemble. I don’t think this particular role is the best fit right now. I would love to have you be part of our community choir, and if you want to work toward the regular team, I’m happy to talk with you about what would be most helpful to develop.”

The wording will change with the person and situation, but the ingredients are useful: appreciation, clarity, a reason connected to the role, and—when there genuinely is one—another doorway.

Do not turn a “no” into a vague “maybe later” just to avoid discomfort. If there is a realistic developmental path, name it. If there is not, kindness includes being truthful.

And remember that a technically strong musician may still not be the right fit if they cannot listen, collaborate, prepare, or support the larger experience. Likewise, someone who is still developing may bring wonderful musicality, warmth, responsiveness, and team awareness. Skill matters. So does fit. So does growth potential.





Think collaboration, not judgment. You are not assembling a reality-show panel; you are discerning whether this musician and this ministry can make good music—and build a good relationship—together.



The goal is not to create a velvet rope around the platform. It is to steward the experience well while continuing to make room for people to sing.

19. From Rehearsal to Sunday

A good Sunday usually begins several days before Sunday.

The goal is not to create more administration. It is to make sure everyone is working from the same version of the same plan.

Earlier in the week

Whenever possible, send the team:

- Song list and service order
- Keys
- A clear reference recording or arrangement when needed
- Charts or lyric sheets
- Call time and rehearsal time
- Tracks or playback files
- Any unusual transitions, cues, or production needs

If something changes, update it in one agreed place. “I sent a newer chart in a different text thread” is how alternate realities begin.

What rehearsal is for

Ideally, rehearsal is not where every musician first learns their own part. It is where the team learns how the parts fit together.

Use rehearsal time for beginnings and endings, transitions, harmonies, dynamics, tempo, cues, listening, and the places most likely to wobble. If the minister will move directly from a song into prayer, or a song needs to land under spoken words, rehearse that relationship too.



After rehearsal, communicate any changes clearly so people do not have to remember which version won the discussion.



Sunday morning

Leave enough time for setup, line check or soundcheck, monitors, tracks, transitions, and the unexpected. Once the service is close to beginning, change only what truly needs changing.

And have a Plan B. A musician gets sick. A cable dies. A track will not play. A message changes. The best emergency arrangement is often the one with fewer moving parts.

Preparation is not the opposite of spontaneity. It creates enough stability that when something does unfold differently, the team can respond without everything else falling over.



PART SIX

PRODUCTION, SCREENS & CREATIVE TOOLS

SOUND TEAM

- ★ clear mix
- ★ vocal first
- ★ serve the room



CREATIVE TOOLS

- ✓ slides
- ✓ backgrounds
- ✓ AI with care

PLAN TO SERVE

SOUNDCHECK

SCREEN CHECK

READY TO SERVE

SOUNDCHECK

↓
SCREEN CHECK

↓
READY TO SERVE

Clear the way.
Support the moment.

STAGE LIGHTING

- ✓ see faces
- ✓ warm & simple
- ✓ avoid distraction

LYRICS ON SCREEN

- ★ big enough
- ★ easy contrast
- ★ credit the song



CAPTURE WITH PURPOSE

- ✓ respect
- ✓ excellence
- ✓ permission

PRODUCTION TOOLS



PART SIX — PRODUCTION, SCREENS & CREATIVE TOOLS



20. Working with the Sound Team: Basic Live Sound

The person at the sound board is part of the music team too—even if they never sing a note.

Good live sound begins before soundcheck. The sound person cannot mix what they have not been told is coming. For anything beyond a very simple setup, communicate the basics ahead of time:

- Who is singing or playing what
- What needs a microphone or DI
- Whether tracks are mono or stereo and how they will be played
- Monitor needs
- Any guest musician or unusual equipment
- Who will give musical cues or communicate changes

At soundcheck

Give the sound team the level you will actually use. A whisper during soundcheck followed by full-volume singing during the service does not give anyone much to work with.

When asking for a monitor change, be specific: “a little more vocal and a little less guitar” is much more useful than “I can’t hear anything.” Keep stage volume reasonable, especially with amps, drums, and wedges. What feels exciting onstage can make the front-of-house mix almost impossible to control.

Separate monitor mixes

The musicians onstage do not all need to hear the same thing. On a mixer with enough auxiliary (aux) sends, each monitor wedge or in-ear monitor (IEM) system can have its own mix.

The singer may need more vocal and keyboard. The drummer may need more bass and acoustic guitar. The pianist may want mostly vocals and very little piano.

These monitor mixes are separate from the front-of-house mix, so changing what the audience hears does not necessarily have to change what the musicians hear. A useful phrase for the music director to know is: “Can we give them a separate aux mix?”



Sound 101: follow the signal

You do not need to become the sound engineer. It does help to know what is happening between the microphone and the loudspeaker.

Very simplified signal flow:

Microphone / instrument / playback source → DI or mixer input → preamp & gain → channel processing → aux sends / main mix → speakers, monitors, livestream, or recorder

DI box

A DI helps connect instruments and other sources to the mixer in a clean, balanced way. Guitar, bass, keyboard, or playback devices may use one depending on the setup. If a guest says, "I need a DI," this is what they mean.

Gain is not the same thing as the fader

The gain or preamp control sets how strongly the incoming signal hits the mixer. The channel fader sets how much of that already-established signal is sent into the mix.

If the input gain is set badly, the fader cannot magically fix the signal. This is one reason a proper line check and soundcheck matter.

Phantom power

The "48V" or phantom-power switch supplies power through an XLR cable to equipment that needs it, such as many condenser microphones and some active DI boxes.

It is not a "make this microphone stronger" button. Let the sound person manage it, especially when channels are live or equipment is being connected and disconnected.

Feedback is a loop

Feedback happens when amplified sound gets back into a microphone, is amplified again, and keeps looping. The fix may involve microphone position, speaker or monitor level, stage volume, gain, or EQ.

Moving the microphone, lowering the right source, or reducing stage volume is often more useful than randomly turning knobs until the squeal stops.

Line check versus soundcheck

A line check asks, "Is every source connected and reaching the mixer?" A soundcheck asks, "Does the whole thing actually sound and feel right?"

Do both when the setup warrants it. Finding out during the first song that the acoustic guitar exists only spiritually in the PA is avoidable.

Basic microphone kindness

Sing into the microphone from a consistent distance. Do not cup the grille. Do not point a live mic directly into a monitor. And during soundcheck, sing at something close to your real service level so the sound person is not mixing a different human being than the one who shows up at 10:00.

The point of learning this vocabulary is not to take over the booth. It is to make collaboration easier when something needs to be communicated quickly.



Technical note: pre-fader aux sends are commonly used for monitors because front-of-house fader moves do not automatically change the musicians' monitor levels.



One musical voice to the booth

If possible, designate one person to communicate larger musical or production changes to the sound team. Six musicians giving six simultaneous instructions is not collaboration; it is surround sound of another kind.

Remember that the room mix, the monitor mix, and the livestream mix are three different listening environments. A change that helps one may not help the others.

When something goes wrong, solve what needs solving and debrief later. The middle of a service is rarely the best time to litigate whose cable, cue, or fader caused the problem.

Treat sound volunteers and professionals as partners. Share information early, respect their expertise, and make room for them to communicate what they need from the musicians too. Good sound is a team sport.

21. Stage Lighting Basics

Stage lighting does not have to be elaborate to be effective. Start by asking what the light needs to do: let people see faces, create a little depth, and support the feeling of the room.

Three simple jobs

- Front light — faces first. If people cannot see expressions, everything else is decoration.
- Back or side light — separates musicians from the background and adds depth.
- Color or wash — helps establish atmosphere. Use it with restraint.

For livestreams, judge the lighting through the camera as well as from the seats. A room that feels warm and bright in person can look flat, dark, or wildly colorful on camera.

Keep projection screens in mind too. Bright stage light spilling onto a screen can make lyrics much harder to read.

Start simple. A few well-placed lights used consistently will usually serve better than every fixture doing something different.



22. Lyrics on Screen: Readability & Attribution



Good lyric projection should support singing without calling attention to itself.

A few basics:

- Use large, readable type and strong contrast.
- Avoid decorative fonts for song lyrics.
- Keep the screen uncluttered; do not make people hunt for the next line.
- Break lyrics where the musical phrase naturally breaks.
- Advance slides just before the congregation needs the next line—not after they have stopped singing.
- Proof every lyric, title, writer name, and copyright line.

Attribution is part of the job.

Under current CCLI terms, when a covered song is reproduced for projection, the projected copy should include the song title, writer credit(s), copyright notice, and the church's CCLI license notice and number. On a song with multiple slides, that information only needs to appear once, commonly at the beginning or end. Use the church's license number, not the song's CCLI number.

A simple template:

[SONG TITLE]

Words & music by [WRITER(S)]

© [YEAR] [COPYRIGHT OWNER/PUBLISHER]

Used by permission. CCLI License # [YOUR CHURCH LICENSE NUMBER]

For streamed songs, CCLI allows the corresponding song title, writer credits, copyright notice, and streaming-license information to appear in the stream or in the video description.

For emPower-licensed songs or music used by direct permission, use the copyright and credit information supplied with the song or permission and verify the current notice/reporting requirements with the licensing source.

A good practical habit: build a place for the attribution into your standard lyric-slide template instead of relying on someone to remember it five minutes before service.



23. AI, Canva & Visual Ministry

Most music ministries do not have a full-time graphic designer, video editor, social media team, and production department waiting in the wings. Sometimes the department is you, your laptop, and the 45 minutes you found between rehearsal and dinner.

That is where tools like Canva—and increasingly, AI—can be genuinely useful. They can help small ministries create polished, welcoming visual communication without requiring professional design training or a large budget.

Useful ways AI can help

AI can be a creative assistant for things like:

- Brainstorming visual concepts for a sermon series, concert, class, or event
- Generating first-draft slide layouts or presentation structures
- Creating or adapting background images and supporting graphics
- Suggesting headlines, captions, or shorter on-screen text
- Removing backgrounds, resizing graphics, or repurposing one design for several platforms
- Helping create lyric-video concepts, storyboards, and visual pacing
- Creating draft alt text or captions to improve accessibility

The operative phrase is creative assistant. AI can get you to a first draft quickly. It should not be the final set of eyes.

A few guardrails

Before something goes on the sanctuary screen, website, livestream, or social feed:

- Read every word. AI can be confidently wrong—and occasionally creatively wrong.
- Check names, dates, quotations, scripture references, song titles, and credits yourself.
- Do not upload confidential pastoral, personnel, financial, or member information into a public AI tool.
- Be especially careful with generated images of real people or real events. Do not create something that could reasonably be mistaken for documentary reality.
- Check the platform's current terms and usage rights before using AI-generated material commercially or in widely distributed media.
- Keep accessibility in mind: readable fonts, strong contrast, uncluttered slides, captions where appropriate, and enough time for people to actually read what you put on the screen.

In other words: let AI save time. Do not outsource discernment.



Canva: a very practical starting place

Canva is particularly useful for ministry because the same platform can handle presentation slides, social graphics, flyers, video, lyric videos, thumbnails, signage, and other everyday visual needs. Canva Free is available at no cost, with a substantial library of templates and media plus limited access to AI tools. Features and AI allowances change, so check the current plan when a particular feature matters.

Canva: <https://www.canva.com>

Eligible charitable nonprofits may also qualify for Canva for Nonprofits, which currently provides premium Canva features and collaboration tools at no cost for qualifying organizations. Churches and ministries should check Canva's current eligibility requirements rather than assuming nonprofit status automatically qualifies.

Canva for Nonprofits: <https://www.canva.com/nonprofits/>

Eligibility: <https://www.canva.com/nonprofits/eligibility-guidelines/>

And since we are together at emPower Music Fest...

I'm also teaching a hands-on workshop here at the conference called "Create a Lyric Video Using Canva." We'll take a song, lyrics, and a laptop and actually build one. No video-editing experience is required—which is partly the point. Good visual communication is becoming far more accessible to small churches, artists, and ministries than it used to be.

The goal is not to make everything look slick. The goal is to communicate clearly, beautifully, and in a way that supports the experience you are trying to create.



24. Digital Music Stands: Finding, Building & Carrying the Chart



Somewhere in the history of almost every music ministry is The Binder.

The Binder contains seventeen songs in the wrong key, three versions of the same chart, somebody's handwritten harmony notes, one page with a coffee ring on it, and at least one song whose page two has apparently entered another dimension.

Digital music tools can help. But before choosing one, start with a less exciting question: What problem are we actually trying to solve?

Finding or building the chart: Chordify & Ultimate Guitar

Before we worry about where to store the chart, sometimes we first need a chart. You hear a song that would be perfect for Sunday. Maybe somebody sends you a YouTube link. Maybe the minister says, "Do you know that song by...?" Maybe you know the song perfectly well but have never actually played it. And now you need lyrics and chords. Preferably before rehearsal.

Chordify - "I have the recording. What are the chords?"

Chordify is especially useful when you have a recording but no chart. It analyzes the audio, identifies the chord progression, and synchronizes the chords with the recording. Depending on the plan, you can transpose, use capo settings, loop or slow sections, upload your own audio, save songs into setlists, and export chord sheets. Its Chords & Lyrics view can also put lyrics and chords together for supported songs.

I think of Chordify as a very fast set of musical ears. It can get you from "I like this song" to "Okay. It's basically G-D-Em-C, the bridge does something different, and I can work from here."

Do not assume every automatically detected chord is perfect. Listen. Check the bass movement. Watch for inversions, passing chords, altered chords, and places where the algorithm has made a perfectly reasonable decision that your ears may still disagree with. Chordify gives you a starting point. You are still the musician.

Chordify: <https://chordify.net/>

Chordify app & features: <https://chordify.net/pages/chordify-app/>

Ultimate Guitar - "Has somebody already made this chart?"

Ultimate Guitar approaches the problem from the other direction. Its large library contains user-created and licensed chords, tabs, and lyrics. For a working music director, the simplest use may be the most valuable: search the song. Chances are reasonably good that somebody has already created a chord-and-lyric version.

Often there will be several versions. Look at the ratings, compare them, and listen to the recording rather than assuming the first result descended from the mountaintop on stone tablets. You can also create and edit personal tabs, and paid features add tools such as transposition, autoscroll, printing, and export.

Ultimate Guitar: <https://www.ultimate-guitar.com/>



A handy way to remember the difference

- Need to find an existing lyric/chord chart quickly? Try Ultimate Guitar.
- Have a recording and need help figuring out the chords? Try Chordify.
- Already have the chart and need to organize, carry, annotate, or share it? Now we are moving into OnSong, SongbookPro, MobileSheets, forScore, BandHelper, and Music Stand.

And there is nothing wrong with using more than one. You might find the basic lyric/chord sheet on Ultimate Guitar, listen against Chordify when a progression seems questionable, move the finished chart into OnSong, and put it into Sunday's team library. That is not software indecision. That is a workflow.

OnSong - the Swiss Army knife

OnSong has grown far beyond "my chord sheets on an iPad." It is particularly strong for musicians who think in lyrics, chords, keys, capos, and setlists. You can organize songs and sets, transpose chord-based charts, change capo positions, annotate, autoscroll, and use Bluetooth foot pedals.

Current OnSong 2026 features can also include backing tracks, click tracks, vocal cues, lyric projection, external displays, MIDI automation, video, and even stage-lighting control. That can be very handy if you are the music director, guitar player, track operator, and person everyone is looking at when something needs to start.

One important limitation for a church team: current OnSong 2026 is Apple-only. If your whole team lives happily in Apple World, no problem. If half the team has Android tablets, that matters.

OnSong: <https://onsongapp.com/>

OnSong features: <https://onsongapp.com/features/>

OnSong pricing: <https://onsongapp.com/pricing/>

SongbookPro - simple, affordable, cross-platform

SongbookPro is one of the first alternatives I would look at for a ministry with a mixture of devices. It runs on Android, iOS, Windows, and Amazon Fire. It can import PDFs, ChordPro, OnSong files, and other common formats; create setlists; transpose text-based songs; add capo information and handwritten notes; work with a metronome; and respond to Bluetooth foot pedals.

For a team, SongbookPro Groups adds something especially useful: one shared music library. Songs and setlists can be managed centrally, synchronized to everyone's devices, and controlled with permissions so not every volunteer accidentally becomes the Supreme Editor of All Chord Changes.

SongbookPro: <https://songbook-pro.com/>

SongbookPro pricing: <https://songbook-pro.com/pricing/>

SongbookPro Groups: <https://songbook-pro.com/groups/>



MobileSheets - for musicians who really use sheet music

MobileSheets leans more toward the serious digital music-stand side of things. It handles PDFs, images, text and ChordPro, plus audio. You can create setlists, crop and rearrange pages, annotate extensively, use a Bluetooth page-turn pedal, autoscroll, import from cloud storage, play associated audio, and use MIDI.

This may be especially useful if the pianist has full notation, the flutist has a score, the guitarist has a lead sheet, and somebody has three pages of handwritten reminders about where the minister wants to speak.

MobileSheets: <https://www.zubersoft.com/mobilesheets/>

forScore - an excellent Apple music library

forScore is another strong choice for musicians whose primary material is already in PDF form. It is a polished way to carry and organize a large score library on Apple devices, with annotations, setlists, page-turn pedals, audio, and MIDI support.

OnSong tends to think like a chord-chart performing musician. forScore tends to think like a musician carrying a music library. Neither is better in every situation. They are solving slightly different problems.

forScore: <https://forscore.co/>

BandHelper - when the “band” has become a department

BandHelper begins with repertoire and then keeps going. It handles songs, chord charts, lyrics, recordings, setlists, backing tracks, click tracks, autoscroll, MIDI and remote control. Higher plans also add scheduling, musician availability, contacts, checklists, stage plots, files, practice logs, and income/expense tracking.

For a music director coordinating regular musicians, substitutes, guest artists, rehearsals, concerts, and special events, it starts looking less like a digital binder and more like a small music-department operating system.

BandHelper: <https://www.bandhelper.com/>

BandHelper features: <https://www.bandhelper.com/main/features.html>

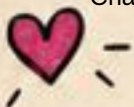
BandHelper pricing: <https://www.bandhelper.com/main/pricing.html>

ChartBuilder / MultiTracks - powerful when your repertoire lives there

MultiTracks' ChartBuilder offers customizable charts, setlists, annotations, transposition, capo and number-system views, rehearsal audio, and integration with MultiTracks Playback. It can be very powerful when the songs your ministry uses are actually in that ecosystem.

And there is the important part. New Thought music ministries often draw from emPower artists, independent singer-songwriters, original congregational songs, secular material, older New Thought repertoire, and music received directly from writers and publishers. Do not choose a platform because its website says “worship.” Choose it because it handles your music well.

ChartBuilder: <https://www.multitracks.com/products/chartbuilder/>



The New Thought test

Before committing the whole team to any chart system, try five or ten songs you actually use. Not five songs the software company picked for the demo. Your songs.

Can you import them easily? Can you keep songwriter and copyright information attached? Can you change keys without creating a mess? Can singers see lyrics while instrumentalists see chords or notation? Can a substitute find Sunday's material without requiring a guided tour of your personal filing system? Most importantly, will the people on your team actually use it?

Technology should reduce friction from ministry. It should not become another ministry to manage.

One copyright reminder

These tools are wonderful for research, learning, preparation, and performance. They do not erase the copyright questions we covered earlier in this guide. A website or app allowing you to view, transpose, print, or export material under its service does not automatically give your church permission to reproduce that material however it wishes, distribute copies to the whole team, project lyrics, livestream the song, or retain copies outside the terms and licenses that apply.

So use the tools. Build the chart. Then ask the familiar question: Does our permission cover what we are about to do with it?



25. Service Planning & Team Scheduling Software

A good Sunday usually begins several days before Sunday. The next question is where all those plans live.

The songs are in an email. The service order is in Google Docs. The drummer's availability is in a text message. The minister changed the meditation in another text message. The revised chart is in somebody's Dropbox. The sound person has last week's plan.

And everyone is very sincere.

This is where service-planning software can help. A planning system answers questions like: Who is serving? What are we doing? In what order? At what time? What music are we using? Where are the files? Has everyone seen the change?

Presentation software, which we will look at next, answers a different question: What goes on the screens?

Planning Center Services

Planning Center Services is probably the best-known dedicated church service-planning system. It allows a church to build an order of service, schedule volunteers by team and position, keep song and media information with the plan, communicate with team members, track availability and blockout dates, send reminders, and create reusable planning templates.

This becomes useful well beyond the band. A Sunday plan might include the music team, sound operator, slides operator, livestream volunteer, prayer chaplain, platform assistant, hospitality team, or anyone else who needs to know where they fit.

The real gift is not more administration. It is having one common reference point where the current plan lives.

Planning Center Services: <https://www.planningcenter.com/services>

Planning Center pricing: <https://www.planningcenter.com/pricing>

Planning Center Music Stand

If the church already uses Services, Music Stand is a natural extension for the musicians. It pulls the music from the scheduled Services plan into a digital music reader. Musicians can annotate charts, listen to attached audio, loop sections for practice, use a metronome, turn pages with a foot pedal, and synchronize page changes from a leader's device.

This creates a very clean workflow: the song is selected in the service plan, the right chart is attached, the musician opens Sunday's plan, and there it is. No "Which attachment was the right one?" Blessed silence.

Planning Center Music Stand: <https://www.planningcenter.com/music-stand>



WorshipTools Planning - interesting for smaller ministries

WorshipTools connects several church-production functions inside one ecosystem. Its Planning product can build the service flow, add songs and notes, schedule volunteers, send invitations, and allow people to accept or decline assignments. The same service can synchronize into WorshipTools Charts for musicians and Presenter for sanctuary screens.

That “build it once” approach is attractive. The team is not recreating Sunday independently in three different pieces of software. WorshipTools Charts can also accept custom PDFs and ChordPro files in addition to integrations with church-music services.

For a small church trying to move beyond spreadsheets and text threads without taking on a large monthly bill, this is worth exploring.

WorshipTools Planning: <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/planning>

WorshipTools Charts: <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/charts>

WorshipTools pricing: <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/pricing>

Software cannot fix a workflow nobody follows

The church can buy excellent planning software and still have exactly the same chaos if everyone continues treating text messages, hallway conversations, email attachments, and “I told somebody Sunday” as equal sources of truth.

Choose a home for the plan. Then use it. If the minister changes the service order, change it there. If a musician substitutes, change it there. If the key moves from D to C because we have finally decided to stop punishing the congregation, change it there.

Other communication can simply point people back to the plan: “Sunday has been updated.” That is very different from creating a new version of Sunday in six separate messages.

And decide who owns the information. Software does not magically know the new key, the changed call time, or that the guest cellist is bringing her own DI. Someone still has to keep the plan current. Clarity remains kindness - even when there is an app for it.

A licensing reminder

Many church-planning systems integrate with CCLI or SongSelect, and some can assist with reporting. Excellent. But software integration is not a music license. The fact that a program can find lyrics, import a chart, display a song, or report it to one licensing service does not mean every song your ministry uses is covered for every use.

Keep applying the rule from our copyright section: check the specific song, the specific use, and the specific permission.

emPower Music Rights information: <https://www.empowerma.com/music-rights-information-for-churches/>

CCLI Church Copyright License: <https://ccli.com/us/en/church-copyright-license>



26. Church Presentation Software: What Goes on the Screens

There was a time when “church presentation software” meant: open PowerPoint, put lyrics on slides, try not to click the wrong thing. And PowerPoint can still work perfectly well for a small ministry.

Dedicated church-presentation software exists because Sunday presents a peculiar collection of needs: song lyrics, message slides, videos, announcements, a countdown, an affirmation, a meditation image, a copyright notice, and perhaps different information on the screen facing the musicians than on the screen facing the congregation. Then somebody changes the song order two minutes before service.

Audience screen, stage screen, livestream screen

The audience display is what people in the room see. A stage display or confidence monitor can show information to people onstage - perhaps current lyrics, next lyrics, a countdown timer, chords, speaker notes, or a reminder that the next thing is the offering.

A livestream output may need something different again. Rather than filling the online picture with giant sanctuary-style lyrics, you might want two-line lower-third lyrics over the camera image. Once a church needs those outputs to be different, ordinary slide software begins to feel more cramped.

WorshipTools Presenter - a strong low-cost starting place

Presenter by WorshipTools is designed specifically for churches. It handles songs, slides, images, and video and synchronizes through the WorshipTools cloud. It connects directly with Planning and Charts, so a service built in one part of the ecosystem can appear in the others.

That makes the ecosystem interesting for a smaller ministry: plan the service, give the musicians their charts, put the lyrics on the screen. Same ecosystem. Paid levels add production features such as stage display, remote control, and additional outputs.

WorshipTools Presenter: <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/presenter>

WorshipTools pricing: <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/pricing>

EasyWorship - built with volunteers in mind

EasyWorship has been around church production for a long time. It is built around a service schedule and lets volunteers organize and present lyrics, video, media, and message slides from one interface.

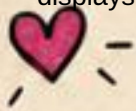
Its niche is sensible: more church-specific than PowerPoint, less intimidating than a full production system. The most powerful software is not necessarily the best choice if only one person in the congregation can operate it without breaking into a sweat.

EasyWorship: <https://easyworship.com/>

EasyWorship pricing: <https://easyworship.com/software/pricing>

MediaShout - and yes, you can still buy software once

MediaShout is another long-established church-presentation platform. It handles lyrics, Scripture, message slides, announcements, images, video, and separate control, audience, and stage/confidence displays. It also offers SongSelect integration and CCLI reporting features.



One thing may catch the attention of ministries experiencing Subscription Fatigue: MediaShout still offers perpetual-license options. That purchasing model may matter as much as any individual feature.

MediaShout: <https://mediashout.com/>

MediaShout pricing: <https://mediashout.com/pricing/>

ProPresenter - when production has become production

ProPresenter sits toward the professional end of church presentation. It handles worship lyrics and copyright information, media, multiple screens, stage displays, and sophisticated video and broadcast workflows. It can send different content to audience screens, stage monitors, lobby displays, and broadcast outputs.

This is where it helps to be honest about your room. If your ministry has audience screens, a confidence monitor, livestream graphics, video playback, multiple operators, and increasingly complex events, ProPresenter may be exactly the tool you need.

If you have one 55-inch television and Mildred advances the lyrics from the second row, you may be purchasing a Formula One car to go to Jewel. Nothing wrong with the Formula One car. We simply want to identify the transportation need.

ProPresenter: <https://www.renewedvision.com/propresenter>

ProPresenter multi-screen management:

<https://www.renewedvision.com/propresenter/multi-screen-management>

Proclaim - collaborative church presentation

Proclaim is another church-specific presentation system and is especially oriented toward teams preparing a service collaboratively. Team members can work on the presentation remotely rather than requiring everything to be built on the sanctuary computer.

Proclaim is closely connected to the Logos ecosystem, including Bible and sermon resources. For churches already working in that environment, that can be a significant advantage. For many New Thought communities, those particular integrations may not be the primary reason to choose presentation software. Evaluate the features you will actually use.

Proclaim: <https://proclaim.logos.com/>

FreeShow - free does not necessarily mean flimsy

FreeShow is free and open-source presentation software for Windows, macOS, and Linux. It supports multiple outputs, stage views, overlays, timers, MIDI control, NDI output for streaming, cloud synchronization, ChordPro, and imports from several other presentation systems.

For a small ministry with a capable tech volunteer and little or no software budget, FreeShow deserves serious consideration. Free software still requires learning, setup, maintenance, and somebody who knows where the files went. But the price of admission is certainly friendly.

FreeShow: <https://freeshow.app/>

FreeShow features: <https://freeshow.app/docs/features>



OpenLP - another established open-source option

OpenLP is also free and open-source, with versions for Windows, macOS, and Linux. It can display songs, Bible passages, presentations, images, and media; can be operated remotely; and includes a stage-view option. It may not have every high-end broadcast feature of the paid production systems, but for straightforward sanctuary projection it can do a great deal without adding another subscription to the budget.

OpenLP: <https://openlp.org/>

Do not buy by reputation

The right presentation software is the one your actual ministry can operate reliably. Ask what outputs you need now - not what the 3,000-seat church in the demonstration video has. Ask who will build the service, who will run it when the regular operator is sick, whether your computers can handle it, whether cloud collaboration matters, whether a stage display would genuinely help, and whether livestream graphics need to be different from sanctuary graphics.

And invite an ordinary volunteer to try it. If the software is technically magnificent but requires the music director to run across the room every Sunday because nobody else understands it, we have not removed friction. We have installed some.



27. Livestream & Live-Production Software

A livestream is not simply the sanctuary with an internet connection attached. The people watching online are in a different room.

In the sanctuary, people can turn their heads. They hear the room itself. They can see what is happening off to the side. Online, they get whatever we send them - which means somebody has to decide what they see and hear.

In a large church, this may belong to an A/V or broadcast team. In a smaller community, it has a funny way of landing on the Music Director's desk.

"You understand computers and cables, right?"

Well... apparently we do now.

First, remember the separate aux mix

Earlier we talked about why the room mix is not automatically a good livestream mix. The room gives us natural ambience; headphones and laptop speakers do not. That is why we recommended a separate aux mix for broadcast - one we can sweeten a little with controlled reverb and ambience so it feels present and spacious instead of vacuum-sealed.

That sweetened stream mix becomes the audio side of the program we are about to send out.

Think:

Cameras + graphics + sweetened stream mix -> OBS / Ecamm / vMix -> streaming service -> YouTube / Facebook / website / wherever your people are

Once you see the path, the vocabulary gets a lot less mysterious.

OBS Studio - a very good place to begin

OBS Studio is free, open-source, and remarkably capable. It runs on Windows, Mac, and Linux and lets you build scenes from cameras, capture cards, images, text, computer windows, prerecorded media, and other sources.

You might have one scene for the whole platform, another for a closer camera, another for message slides, and another for a prerecorded video. The operator switches among them as the service unfolds.

OBS costs nothing. Learning it will cost you a little time. Somebody still needs to understand scenes, sources, audio routing, and what to do when the computer develops a sudden spiritual practice of its own five minutes before service.

OBS Studio: <https://obsproject.com/>

Ecamm - Mac-centered and friendly

If your production computer is a Mac, Ecamm Live is another good option. It wraps cameras, scenes, titles, overlays, screen sharing, recording, and streaming into a fairly approachable Mac workflow.



It is not that OBS cannot do many of the same things. Sometimes the value is simply that the path from "I want this on screen" to "there it is" feels shorter.

Sometimes paying for simpler is money well spent.

Ecamm Live: <https://www.ecamm.com/mac/ecammlive/>

vMix - when this has become a real broadcast operation

vMix sits farther toward professional live production. It runs on Windows and can handle multiple cameras, graphics, titles, remote guests, NDI and SRT sources, recording, streaming, and considerably more.

That is wonderful if you need it. If your entire streaming department is one volunteer and a folding chair, it may be more system than you need right now.

Let the ministry grow into the tools instead of buying the tools and hoping a ministry team appears around them.

vMix: <https://www.vmix.com/>

vMix features: <https://www.vmix.com/software/features.aspx>

Presentation software can feed the broadcast too

This is where the pieces start talking to one another. Some presentation programs can send a separate graphics output directly to the streaming system, often over NDI or another network connection.

That means the sanctuary can see large full-screen lyrics while the online viewer sees two clean lines across the bottom of the camera picture.

Same song. Different room.

Much better than pointing a camera at the sanctuary screen and hoping for the best.

Getting the stream out: Restream, StreamYard & friends

Okay. We have the finished program. Now where does it go?

YouTube is a destination. Facebook is a destination. Your website may be another destination. A multistreaming service sits in the middle and helps get one finished program to several places at once.

Restream - send it once

Restream is especially handy if you already like producing in OBS, Ecamm, vMix, or another encoder. You send one stream to Restream, then Restream distributes it to the destinations you have connected.

As of August 2026, Restream supports more than 30 destinations plus custom channels. The practical appeal for a small church is simple: produce once, upload once, send it several places.

Restream multistreaming: <https://restream.io/multistreaming>

Restream supported platforms: <https://support.restream.io/en/articles/872029-supported-social-platforms>



StreamYard - more of it happens in the browser

StreamYard comes at the same problem from a more browser-centered direction. You can bring in cameras and guests, share screens, add graphics, and send the finished program to multiple destinations without asking a volunteer to manage quite as many separate pieces of software.

Its cloud relay also means the church sends one stream up; StreamYard makes the additional copies from there. That can be easier on the local internet connection than sending a separate full stream to every platform.

That may not matter if you have a seasoned tech crew. It may matter a great deal if Sunday's streaming department is Pat, who agreed to help because Pat once successfully connected a Roku.

StreamYard: <https://streamyard.com/>

StreamYard multistreaming: <https://streamyard.com/multistreaming>

BoxCast and Resi - when livestreaming is an established ministry

BoxCast and Resi move farther into dedicated organizational and church broadcasting. They become interesting when livestreaming is no longer "maybe we should put Sunday on Facebook" and has become a regular ministry with scheduled broadcasts, archives, multiple destinations, volunteers, and a real need for reliability.

BoxCast is built around scheduled broadcasts, website and social delivery, cloud management, and workflows that can use software or dedicated hardware encoders.

Resi is especially known for resilient delivery and automation. Its system is designed to buffer and recover when the internet misbehaves rather than simply losing that piece of the service.

You do not have to start there. You may never need to go there. Choose for the ministry you actually have.

BoxCast for Houses of Worship: <https://www.boxcast.com/solutions/house-of-worship-streaming>

Resi Church Live Streaming: <https://resi.io/church-live-streaming/>

A few words worth knowing

Encoder - The hardware or software that turns the finished audio and video into a stream. OBS can do this.

Destination - Where the stream is going: YouTube, Facebook, your website, and so on.

Stream key - A credential that lets the streaming software send to your account. Treat it like a password. Do not put it on the bulletin board.

RTMP - One common way a stream gets from an encoder to a streaming service. You do not need to understand the transmission to drive the car. You just need to know where the information goes.

Multistreaming - One program, several destinations.

If broadcasting has become one of your hats

First, recognize that it is another hat.



Livestreaming involves software, accounts, passwords, scheduling, testing, audio, video, copyright questions, and the occasional Sunday-morning mystery. It should not quietly become, "Oh, the Music Director knows technology."

Maybe the Music Director helps design the system but somebody else runs it. Maybe the sound operator manages the stream audio while another volunteer handles video. Maybe the MD schedules the broadcast but does not touch the cameras.

There are lots of workable arrangements. The dangerous one is: only one person knows how any of it works.

Cross-train somebody. Better yet, cross-train two somebodies.

Because sooner or later you will be onstage playing the opening song when the streaming computer decides it has never heard of YouTube. You cannot fix that from the piano.

Small churches have to wear a lot of hats. They do not have to balance all of those hats on one head.

Camera height matters more than you think

We learned this one the practical way.

If the congregation stands to sing and the cameras are mounted too low, the online viewer may suddenly get a beautifully framed shot of... the backs of everybody's heads.

Not quite the participatory worship experience we were going for.

Mount sanctuary cameras high enough that standing congregants do not block the platform. Then test the shot with actual people standing in the room - not just with an empty sanctuary on Tuesday afternoon.

While you are at it, check what the camera sees when people move through the aisles, when the choir is up, when someone speaks from a different spot, and when something happens off to the side of the usual frame.

Use a wired connection if you can

Wi-Fi is wonderful. Guest Wi-Fi, three phones uploading photos, a children's tablet streaming video, and the church livestream all competing for the same connection? Less wonderful.

If possible, give the primary streaming computer or encoder a wired Ethernet connection. And test it under conditions that look like an actual Sunday, not only when the building is empty.

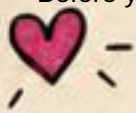
Schedule first. Panic less.

Whenever the platform allows it, create the Sunday broadcast ahead of time: title, description, thumbnail, destinations, privacy settings, whatever your normal setup requires.

Then the operator is not creating Sunday at 9:57 while people are walking through the doors.

Test from the other side

Before you trust a new setup, run a private or unlisted test and watch it on another device.



Not on the production computer. Watch it the way an actual person will.

- Can you understand the speaker?
- Can you hear the music without riding the volume?
- Does that sweetened aux mix sound warm, or did we get a little happy with the reverb?
- Can you read the lyrics?
- Is the picture and sound in sync?
- What does the camera show when everyone in the sanctuary stands or starts moving around?

This is where we discover that our beautiful online congregation has spent four minutes looking at a ficus. Good to know before Sunday.

One livestream gotcha: copyrighted media

This one can bite you in real time.

Suppose somebody has a terrific clip from a major studio movie, a commercial recording, a music video, or a television segment they want to use during the service.

Fine in the room does not automatically mean fine on the livestream.

YouTube and Facebook use automated copyright systems. Copyrighted media can trigger muting, blocking, warnings, or an interrupted broadcast - yes, right in the middle of Sunday. And even if you have permission, the automated system may not know that.

So before prerecorded media goes into the service, ask two questions: Are we allowed to show this in the room? Are we allowed to send it out on the livestream?

If something is cleared for the room but not for the stream, the broadcast operator can switch the online feed to a camera or cleared graphic while the sanctuary sees the clip.

One more trap: make sure the clip audio is not still sneaking into the livestream through open room microphones. Otherwise the picture may be gone while the platform is still listening to the soundtrack.

The Copyright section covers the licensing side in more detail. The point here is simply: do not discover this rule when the stream suddenly disappears.

Record locally too

When practical, make a local recording in addition to the livestream.

The internet is not an archive strategy. A platform can fail. A connection can fail. An account can have a problem. If the event matters enough to broadcast, it may matter enough to keep a clean copy.

The online folks are still the congregation

This is the piece I do not want us to lose in all the software talk.

There are people on the other side of that camera. Some are home sick. Some live three states away. Some are checking out your church for the first time. Some may never be able to attend in person.



So when we think about the arc of the service, think about their arc too.

If the room goes quiet, can they hear why? If everyone stands to sing, can they see the lyrics? If something happens off-camera, do they have any idea what is going on? If the sanctuary spends five minutes greeting one another, is there some way the online folks can feel included instead of parked outside?

That is not really a technical question. It is a hospitality question.

Keep it sustainable

Your goal is not to build the most sophisticated broadcast system your church can possibly afford. Build the system your people can run reliably, repeatedly, and without the Music Director singing the opening song while also wondering why Facebook says "No Signal."

If the ministry grows, the system can grow.

For now: let people hear. Let people see. Let people participate.

And please teach somebody else where the Go Live button is.



BEYOND SUNDAY

A chalkboard sign with the text "LIVE MUSIC IN THE COMMUNITY ALL ARE WELCOME" written on it in white and pink chalk. The words "LIVE MUSIC" are in large white letters at the top, "IN THE COMMUNITY" is in smaller white letters below it, and "ALL ARE WELCOME" is in large pink letters at the bottom. There are some blue chalk marks resembling musical notes or stars around the top text.

concerts
+ outreach

OPEN MIC
NIGHT
YOU BELONG
HERE
♡

music
beyond the
sanctuary

**WORSHIP
NIGHT
IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD**

TAKE
A CUP.
STAY A
WHILE

YOU MATTER
= TO US 

MADE
- TO -
WORSHIP

28. Concerts, Special Events & Community Outreach

Sunday morning is not the only place a music ministry can do ministry.

Concerts, workshops, open mics, listening rooms, seasonal programs, songwriter events, and community collaborations can create a completely different doorway into relationship.

They can also create an astonishing number of emails if nobody decides who is doing what.

Start with the purpose

Before booking the artist or designing the flyer, ask why you are doing the event.

- Community outreach?
- A fundraiser?
- An opportunity to support a visiting artist?
- A special experience for the congregation?
- A way to invite local musicians into relationship?
- A workshop that builds the skills of your own music team?

An event can do more than one of those things. It helps to know which ones matter most, because the answer affects budget, room, ticketing, promotion, schedule, and how you measure success.

Match the room to the event

Twenty-five people in an intimate room can feel wonderful. The same twenty-five people scattered across a 500-seat sanctuary can feel as though everybody forgot to tell their friends.

Use the room that helps the gathering feel alive. Think about sight lines, stage size, sound, seating, merch, refreshments, accessibility, and where people will actually enter and leave.

Put the agreement in writing

Even with friends. Especially with friends.

Confirm the date, call time, soundcheck, performance length, compensation structure, travel or lodging arrangements, what equipment the venue provides, what the artist brings, whether merchandise will be sold, and who is responsible for ticketing or the door.

If the event will be recorded or streamed, say that before the artist arrives. Performance permission and recording/streaming permission are not the same conversation.

Form A and Form B in this guide give you a simple place to begin.

Do not make the artist guess about production

Ask for tech information early. How many vocals? Instruments? DIs? Tracks? Stereo or mono? Stands? Stools? Keyboard? Special power needs? Monitor preferences?

Then give that information to the tech team early enough that “special guest” does not become “surprise input list.”



If you have a stage plot or input list, wonderful. If you do not, a clear email is still vastly better than discovering at soundcheck that the duo is actually a seven-piece band.

Promote the actual experience

People are more likely to respond to a clear invitation than to a flyer that assumes the artist's name explains everything.

What kind of evening is this? Listening-room intimate? Full band? Family friendly? Songwriter stories? Community sing? Fundraiser? Give people enough information to imagine themselves there.

Ask the artist for current photos, bio copy, social links, and anything they want included. Give them your event graphic and ticket or information link so they can share it too.

Build a small event team

The Music Director does not need to personally become box office, merch table, sound engineer, hospitality host, photographer, and janitor.

For even a modest event, decide who owns:

- Artist contact / hospitality
- Room setup and cleanup
- Door, tickets, or donations
- Sound and livestream
- Slides or visual media
- Merchandise table
- Refreshments, if any
- Promotion and social posts

One person can hold more than one job. The point is that the jobs are named before everybody arrives.

Open mics and listening rooms need a little structure too

A community open mic can be one of the loveliest ways to meet local artists and create a low-pressure doorway into your space.

Set expectations: sign-up process, time limit, number of songs, what equipment is provided, how tracks are handled, content boundaries if there are any, and who has final say when the list is full.

If the room is meant to be a listening room, say so. If conversation is welcome, say that instead. People are much better at honoring the culture of a room when somebody actually tells them what the culture is.

Community outreach is not bait-and-switch

Someone may come because they love the artist, because their friend is performing, or because they saw the event online and thought it sounded fun.



Let the event be genuinely good on its own terms. Welcome people. Let them know where they are. Make information about the community available without turning the concert into a disguised recruitment pitch.

Music can introduce people to a spiritual community simply by letting them experience the kind of community you are.

Close the loop after the event

Settle payment promptly. Thank the artist and volunteers. Save the final attendance and income/expense notes somewhere useful. If photos or video are going online, confirm permissions and credits.

Then take ten minutes and ask:

- What worked?
- What felt clunky?
- What did we underestimate?
- Would we do this artist or format again?
- What do we want to remember next time?

That tiny debrief is how the next event gets easier.

Consistency builds trust

If special events become part of the ministry, quality and consistency matter more than frequency.

A quarterly event people trust can do more than a frantic calendar full of things nobody quite has time to produce.

You do not need to become a concert venue.

But if music is one of the ways your community opens its doors, do it with the same care you bring to Sunday.

Make the room welcoming. Make the plan clear. Then let the music do what music does.



PART EIGHT

STARTER FORMS & CHECKLISTS

Good systems make room for great ministry.

GUEST MUSICIAN AGREEMENT

- ☒ Personal Info
- ☒ Expectations
- ☒ Rehearsals
- ☒ Sunday Info
- ☒ Compensation
- ☒ Release

X _____

REHEARSAL CALENDAR

TO-DO:

- ★ Plan
- ★ Communicate
- ★ Prepare
- ★ Rehearse
- ★ Follow Up

TECH & HOSPITALITY SIGN-UP SHEET

NAME	ROLE	DATE

SONG USE & COPYRIGHT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Permissions
- ☐ CCLI License
- ☐ SongSelect
- ☐ Credits
- ☐ Reporting

SUNDAY PRODUCTION CHECKLIST

- ☒ Sound
- ☒ Lights
- ☒ ProPresenter
- ☒ Stage
- ☒ Musicians
- ☒ Livestream
- ☒ Welcome
- ☐ Next Steps

ROLE / SCOPE WORKSHEET

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- Time Commitment
- Giftedness
- Training

TEAM ONBOARDING CHECKLIST

- ☒ Vision & Mission
- ☒ Values
- ☒ Expectations
- ☒ Communication
- ☒ Training
- ☒ Resources
- ☒ Next Steps

Form A — Guest Musician Agreement

Ministry/Organization: _____

Guest Musician: _____

Service/Event: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Role/Instrument: _____

Arrival/Call Time: _____ Rehearsal/Soundcheck: _____

Service/Event Time: _____

Compensation: \$ _____

Payment Method/Timing: _____

Parking/Meals/Hospitality: _____

Ministry will provide: _____

Guest will provide: _____

Repertoire/materials due by: _____

Recording/Livestream: ☐ Expected ☐ Not expected ☐ Other: _____

Cancellation understanding: _____

Guest musician agrees to arrive prepared, follow the agreed schedule, and communicate promptly if plans change. The ministry agrees to provide the agreed compensation, schedule, and reasonable production information in advance.

Guest Musician Signature: _____ Date: _____

Ministry Representative: _____ Date: _____

Before first payment: Obtain a completed Form W-9 from the guest musician and retain it with your records.

 IRS Form W-9: <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-9>

2026 reporting note: Form 1099-NEC generally applies when qualifying nonemployee compensation to one payee totals \$2,000 or more during the calendar year. The threshold may change, so verify the current IRS requirement each year.

Practical note: calling someone an “independent contractor” in an agreement does not by itself determine legal worker classification. Classification depends on the actual working relationship and applicable law.

Form B — Guest Artist Tech & Hospitality Sheet

Artist/Musician: _____

Contact / Mobile & Email: _____

Arrival / Load-in Time: _____

Instrument(s) / Vocal(s): _____

Inputs Needed: _____

Microphones / DI Boxes Needed: _____

Monitor Preference: _____

Tracks or Playback Device: _____

Music Stand / Stool / Keyboard / Other: _____

Power or Special Equipment Needs: _____

Parking / Load-in Instructions: _____

Hospitality / Dietary Needs: _____

Merchandise Table Needed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Accessibility or other considerations: _____

Day-of Contact: _____

Form C — Music Team Expectations

Our shared commitments:

- ☐ Arrive on time and prepared.
- ☐ Learn assigned music before rehearsal whenever possible.
- ☐ Communicate promptly about absences, substitutions, or problems.
- ☐ Bring needed charts, instruments, cables, and personal gear unless otherwise arranged.
- ☐ Treat one another, staff, volunteers, and guests with respect.
- ☐ Receive feedback without shame and offer it without humiliation.
- ☐ Support the service or event rather than competing for attention within it.
- ☐ Ask questions when expectations are unclear.

Volunteer or Paid Role: _____

Typical Call Time: _____

Rehearsal Expectations: _____

Absence/Substitute Procedure: _____

Primary Contact: _____

Form D — Song Use & Copyright Checklist

Song Title: _____

Writer(s): _____

Copyright Owner / Publisher: _____

Source of lyrics/chart: _____

License or direct permission covering this use: _____

☐ Song confirmed as covered by the applicable license/permission

☐ Projected/printed lyrics are permitted for this use

☐ Required copyright/credit notice is included

☐ Livestream permission checked, if applicable

☐ Track/master-recording permission checked, if applicable

☐ Video/lyric-video rights checked separately, if applicable

☐ Required reporting completed or assigned

License/Permission Notes: _____

Form E — Sunday Production Checklist

Before rehearsal/service:

- ☐ Song list, keys, charts, and arrangements are final
- ☐ Guest musicians confirmed; call times communicated
- ☐ Lyrics proofed for spelling, order, and attribution
- ☐ Slides/service order checked
- ☐ Sound inputs, monitors, tracks, and playback tested
- ☐ Stage lighting checked from the room and on camera
- ☐ Projection remains readable with stage lights on
- ☐ Livestream audio and camera framing checked
- ☐ Stream description/licensing information prepared when needed
- ☐ Batteries, cables, adapters, and backup essentials available
- ☐ Guest payment/W-9 or other required paperwork routed appropriately
- ☐ Song use logged for licensing/reporting records
- ☐ Someone knows who is responsible for each moving part

The point of a checklist is not to make worship feel mechanical. It is to handle the mechanics ahead of time so the people in the room can be present.

Form F - Music Director Role, Scope & Authority Worksheet

Use this as a conversation starter between the Music Director and the minister, executive lead, or appropriate supervisor. The goal is not to turn ministry into paperwork. It is to make sure everybody means the same thing when they say, "the Music Director handles that."

Reporting & decision path

Music Director: _____

Primary supervisor / ministry contact: _____

Who gives final direction on Sunday service content? _____

Who may request changes directly from the Music Director? _____

If a board member / volunteer / event lead has a music request, where should it go first?

Music responsibilities

☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Music selection / repertoire
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Congregational music leadership
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Rehearsal direction
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Choir / ensemble leadership
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Scheduling regular musicians
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Scheduling guest artists / substitutes
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Charts / arrangements / tracks
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Music library / repertoire records

Production & technology responsibilities

☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Sound-team coordination
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Running front-of-house sound
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Livestream / broadcast scheduling
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Operating livestream / broadcast
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Lyrics / presentation slides
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Stage lighting
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Website / social graphics / Canva
☐ Included	☐ Shared	☐ Not included	Podcast / recording / post-production

Administration, compensation & boundaries

Music budget authority / spending limit: \$ _____

Copyright / licensing administration: _____

Song-use reporting responsibility: _____

Payroll / contractor paperwork responsibility: _____

Regular services included in compensation: _____

Regular rehearsal(s) included: _____

Special services / holidays included: _____

Events that require separate compensation or approval: _____

Time off, substitutes & boundaries

Who arranges substitute coverage? _____

How many Sundays / services off are included? _____

Who approves additional musicians or production expenses? _____

What responsibilities are specifically outside this role?

Review

This scope should be revisited when the ministry, staff structure, technology, service format, or event load changes.

Music Director: _____ Date: _____

Ministry Representative: _____ Date: _____

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SHARED
LANGUAGE



- ☒ clear communication
- ☒ common understanding
- ☒ same page

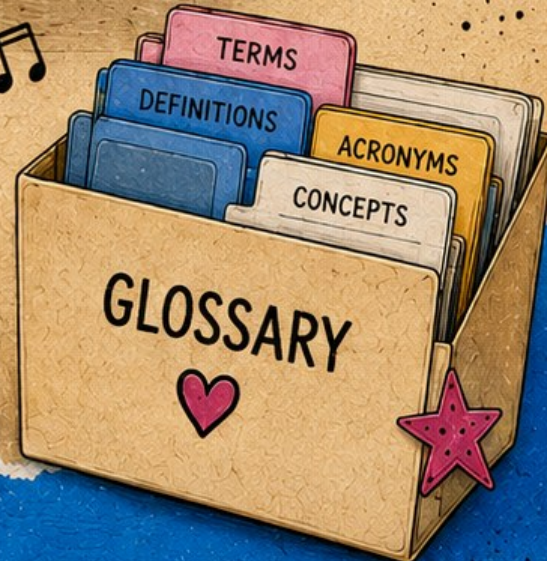
DEFINITIONS
BUILD UNITY
& CLARITY

WORDS
MATTER

Know the terms.
Speak the language.
Serve together.

GLOSSARY

- ★ understand
- ★ communicate
- ★ collaborate
- ★ lead well



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1099-NEC - IRS information-return form used to report qualifying nonemployee compensation. Filing thresholds can change, so verify the current IRS requirement each year.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) - Computer systems that perform tasks commonly associated with human intelligence, including generating or transforming text, images, audio, video, and designs.

Arrangement - The specific musical treatment of a composition - such as its structure, key, instrumentation, harmony, vocal parts, or style.

ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) - A U.S. performing rights organization (PRO) that licenses public performances and distributes royalties to affiliated songwriters, composers, and publishers.

Aux (Auxiliary) Mix - A separate audio mix sent independently from the main room mix. Aux mixes are commonly used for stage monitors, in-ear monitors, and livestream audio.

Backing Track - Prerecorded accompaniment used to support a live singer or musician. The recording has rights separate from the underlying song.

BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.) - A U.S. performing rights organization (PRO) that licenses public performances and distributes royalties to affiliated songwriters, composers, and publishers.

Call Time - The time a musician, volunteer, or guest is expected to arrive and be ready for setup, rehearsal, soundcheck, or an event.

Canva - Online visual-design platform used for presentations, social graphics, flyers, video, lyric videos, and other media.

Capture Card - A device that brings video from a camera or other HDMI/SDI source into a computer so production software can use it as a live video input.

CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) - A church-licensing organization focused on covered worship songs and hymns, with permissions and reporting systems for specified uses such as lyric reproduction, streaming, and rehearsal sharing.

CCS (Christian Copyright Solutions) - A church music-rights organization that partners with ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC to provide performance and streaming licensing for broad Christian and secular repertoire through products including PERFORMmusic and WORSHIPcast.

ChordPro - A plain-text song format that stores lyrics and chords using simple markup. Many chart apps support it because the text can be reformatted, transposed, and shared across systems.

Cloud Relay - A streaming service that receives one outgoing stream from the church and makes the additional copies in the cloud for multiple destinations, reducing the upload work required at the local site.



Composition - The underlying song itself - music and lyrics - distinct from any particular recording of that song.

Copyright - Legal protection for original creative works. In music, different rights may apply to the composition, lyrics, arrangement, and sound recording.

DI (Direct Input) Box - Audio device used to connect instruments or other sources to a sound system by converting the signal into a form better suited for a mixer and longer cable runs.

Digital Music Stand - A tablet or computer app used to organize and display charts, scores, lyrics, setlists, and annotations during rehearsal or performance. Some also handle tracks, MIDI, or team sharing.

emPower Licensing - A licensing resource especially relevant to positive, progressive, and New Thought music, including repertoire commonly used in Unity and related communities.

Encoder - Hardware or software that turns finished audio and video into a live stream that can be sent to an online platform. OBS, Ecamm, and vMix can all serve as software encoders.

Front-of-House (FOH) Mix - The main sound mix heard by the audience in the room.

Gain (Preamp Gain) - The input-level control that sets how strongly a microphone, instrument, or other source enters a mixer before the channel fader. Proper gain helps avoid noisy or distorted signals.

Generative AI - AI tools that create new text, images, audio, video, or designs in response to prompts or other input.

IEM (In-Ear Monitor) - An earpiece system that lets a musician hear a monitor mix directly in the ears rather than through a floor wedge.

Independent Contractor - A worker who is self-employed rather than treated as an employee for the work performed. Classification depends on the actual working relationship, not simply the label in an agreement.

IRS (Internal Revenue Service) - The U.S. federal agency responsible for administering and enforcing federal tax laws.

Lead Sheet - A music chart showing the written melody, lyrics, and chord symbols, usually without a fully notated accompaniment.

Licensee - A person or organization that has been granted permission under a license to use specified copyrighted material in specified ways.



Line Check - A quick technical check confirming that each microphone, instrument, DI, or playback source is connected and reaching the sound system correctly.

Livestream - A live online broadcast of a service, concert, class, or event; the recording may also remain available afterward as an archive.

Livestream Mix - An audio mix created specifically for online listeners rather than simply sending the room mix to the stream.

Local Recording - A copy recorded directly on the production computer or recorder while a livestream is happening. It gives you a local file independent of whatever the streaming platform archives.

Master Recording - A particular recorded performance of a song. Rights in the master recording are separate from rights in the underlying composition.

MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) - A standard that lets musical devices and software send control messages to one another. MIDI can trigger patch changes, playback, page turns, lighting cues, and other actions; it carries instructions rather than recorded audio.

Monitor Mix - A separate audio mix created for a musician or group of musicians to hear onstage through a floor wedge or IEM. Different performers can have different monitor mixes when the system provides enough aux sends. See Chapter 20, Working with the Sound Team: Basic Live Sound.

Mono - Audio carried as a single channel or signal.

Multistreaming - Sending one finished program to more than one online destination, often by routing a single outgoing stream through a cloud service such as Restream or StreamYard.

Nashville Number System - A chord-chart system that represents chords by their scale-degree numbers rather than letter names, making the same chart easy to use in different keys.

NDI (Network Device Interface) - A network video protocol that lets compatible software and devices send video, graphics, and sometimes audio across a local network. It can be useful for feeding presentation graphics into a livestream production.

Octavo - A printed choral score that shows the individual vocal parts - often soprano, alto, tenor, and bass or another

specified voicing - along with accompaniment information.

Pad (Keyboard Sound) - A sustained, often soft keyboard or synthesizer texture used to create a smooth harmonic bed underneath music, prayer, or spoken words.

Performance Rights - Rights related to publicly performing music. A worship-service performance may qualify for a legal exemption, while other uses may require licensing.

Performance Track - A prerecorded accompaniment track intended to support a live performance, often with lead vocals removed.



Phantom Power (48V) - Electrical power sent through an XLR cable to equipment that requires it, including many condenser microphones and some active DI boxes. It should be managed intentionally, not used as a volume boost.

Piano/Vocal Score - A notated score that includes the vocal melody and lyrics together with a written piano accompaniment.

PRO (Performing Rights Organization) - An organization that licenses certain public performances of music and distributes performance royalties. U.S. examples include ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC.

Publisher / Music Publisher - A person or company that administers rights in musical compositions and may handle licensing, permissions, and royalty collection for songwriters.

Religious Service Exemption - A U.S. copyright-law provision that generally allows qualifying performances of nondramatic music during religious services without a public-performance license. It does not automatically cover lyric projection, copying, streaming, recordings, or lyric changes.

Repertoire - The collection of songs a musician, team, choir, or ministry knows and can realistically use.

Reproduction Rights - Rights related to making copies of copyrighted material, including printed or projected lyrics and copied music materials when applicable.

Rightsholder - The person or organization that owns or controls a particular copyright or specific right and can grant permission for that use.

Royalties - Payments made to songwriters, publishers, artists, labels, or other rightsholders when licensed uses of music generate compensation.

RTMP (Real-Time Messaging Protocol) - A common protocol used by encoders to send live audio and video to a streaming platform or multistreaming service.

Scene (Live Production) - A prebuilt combination of video, graphics, audio, and other sources inside production software. An operator can switch among scenes during a service or event.

SESAC - A U.S. performing rights organization (PRO) that licenses public performances and distributes royalties to affiliated writers and publishers.

Signal Flow - The path an audio signal takes from its source - such as a microphone or instrument - through equipment such as DIs, mixer inputs, processing, aux sends, and outputs to speakers, monitors, a livestream, or a recorder.

Song-Use Reporting - The record and submission of which covered songs were used, including dates and other required details, so licensing organizations can administer licenses and distribute royalties.



Soundcheck - A rehearsal or technical check used to set and confirm microphone, instrument, track, monitor, and room levels before a service or event.

Stage Display / Confidence Monitor - A screen facing performers rather than the congregation. It may show lyrics, the next line, chords, timers, speaker notes, or other service cues.

Stereo - Audio carried as two channels - left and right - to create width and spatial separation.

Stream Key - A credential that allows an encoder to publish a livestream to a particular account or destination. Treat it like a password.

Streaming Destination - The online platform or service receiving a broadcast, such as YouTube, Facebook, or a player on the church website.

Streaming License - A license that grants specified permissions for music used in an online stream or archived video, subject to the terms and repertoire covered by that license.

Sync Rights - Permission to pair music with visual content such as a video or lyric video. Sync permission is separate from simply performing or reproducing the song.

Tablature (Tab) - A guitar- or bass-oriented notation system that shows where notes are played on the strings and frets rather than relying only on standard music notation.

Unity Circle Portal - Unity Worldwide Ministries' online community platform for connection, resource sharing, and collaboration.

UWM (Unity Worldwide Ministries) - The international support organization serving Unity ministries with resources, training, credentialing, events, and leadership development.

Vamp - A short musical section or chord pattern repeated until a cue is given to continue, end, or move to the next part of a song.

W-9 - IRS form used by a payer to collect a contractor's legal name, tax classification, address, and taxpayer identification number.

WEMS (Worship & Event Music Support) - Mālama Kekahi program that helps qualifying participating churches make additional live music support possible for worship and events, subject to current program terms.

Worker Classification - The determination of whether a worker is properly treated as an employee or independent contractor based on the actual working relationship and applicable law.

XLR Cable - A common balanced audio cable with a locking connector, widely used for microphones and professional audio connections.



ABOUT



Kim-Char Meredith



Kim-Char Meredith is an award-winning singer-songwriter, Music Director at Unity in Naperville, a member of the Unity Worldwide Ministries Music Team, co-founder of Mālama Kekahi, and host of Shore Road Open Mic in Naperville, Illinois. She is also the owner of Pahzee, a project recording studio, giving her firsthand experience with the sometimes-surprising difference between what sounds wonderful in a room and what arrives in someone's headphones.



Her approach to music ministry is rooted in relationship: prepare well, communicate clearly, make room for people to bring their gifts, and remember that the music serves something larger than the music. Whether leading a Sunday service, writing a song, supporting another artist, or troubleshooting a livestream, the goal is the same—remove barriers to connection and help create a space where people can experience something real together.



"We listen
for hearts."



kim-char@malama.community



(630) 465-0277



INDEX OF LINKS



COPYRIGHT & LEGAL

U.S. Copyright Office - <https://www.copyright.gov/what-is-copyright/>

Religious Service Exemption (17 U.S.C. §110) - <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/17/110>

MUSIC LICENSING

emPower Licensing - <https://www.empowerma.com/music-rights-information-for-churches/>

emPower Licensee FAQ - <https://www.empowerma.com/licensee-faq/>

emPower Contact - <https://www.empowerma.com/contact/>

Christian Copyright Solutions - <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/>

CCS PERFORMmusic - <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/performmusic>

CCS WORSHIPcast - <https://www.christiancopyrightsolutions.com/worshipcast>

CCLI Church Copyright License - <https://ccli.com/us/en/church-copyright-license>

CCLI: Copyright Notice on Projections & Prints - <https://ccli.com/us/en/5-questions>

CCLI Reporting - <https://ccli.com/us/en/reporting>

Song Usage Reporting Log Template - <https://pxllnk.co/md-song-usage>

CCLI Streaming - <https://ccli.com/us/en/streaming>

CCLI Rehearsal License - <https://ccli.com/us/en/rehearsal-license>

ASCAP - <https://www.ascap.com>

BMI - <https://www.bmi.com>

SESAC - <https://www.sesac.com>

MUSIC MINISTRY RESOURCES

emPower Store - <https://www.empowerma.com/store/>

emPower Catalog - <https://www.empowerma.com/catalog/>

All Together Now Songbook - <https://www.empowerma.com/product/all-together-now-songbook/>

Positive Music Resource Book - <https://www.empowerma.com/product/positive-music-resource-book-2016-6th-edition/>

Music in Ministry - Digital Book - <https://www.empowerma.com/product/music-in-ministry-book-digital-version-only/>

emPower Pro Church Membership - <https://www.empowerma.com/church-membership/>

NEW THOUGHT & UNITY

Unity Worldwide Ministries - <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org>

UWM Resources - <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/resources>

UWM Events - <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/events>

UWM Credentialing - <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/credentialing>

Unity Circle Portal - <https://circle.unityworldwideministries.org>

DIGITAL MUSIC & SERVICE PLANNING

Chordify - <https://chordify.net/>

Chordify App & Features - <https://chordify.net/pages/chordify-app/>

Ultimate Guitar - <https://www.ultimate-guitar.com/>

OnSong - <https://onsongapp.com/>

OnSong Features - <https://onsongapp.com/features/>

OnSong Pricing - <https://onsongapp.com/pricing/>

SongbookPro - <https://songbook-pro.com/>

SongbookPro Pricing - <https://songbook-pro.com/pricing/>

SongbookPro Groups - <https://songbook-pro.com/groups/>



DIGITAL MUSIC & SERVICE PLANNING (continued)

MobileSheets - <https://www.zubersoft.com/mobilesheets/>
forScore - <https://forscore.co/>
BandHelper - <https://www.bandhelper.com/>
BandHelper Features - <https://www.bandhelper.com/main/features.html>
BandHelper Pricing - <https://www.bandhelper.com/main/pricing.html>
ChartBuilder / MultiTracks - <https://www.multitracks.com/products/chartbuilder/>
Planning Center Services - <https://www.planningcenter.com/services>
Planning Center Pricing - <https://www.planningcenter.com/pricing>
Planning Center Music Stand - <https://www.planningcenter.com/music-stand>
WorshipTools Planning - <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/planning>
WorshipTools Charts - <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/charts>
WorshipTools Pricing - <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/pricing>

PRESENTATION & LIVESTREAM TOOLS

WorshipTools Presenter - <https://www.worshiptools.com/en-us/presenter>
EasyWorship - <https://easyworship.com/>
EasyWorship Pricing - <https://easyworship.com/software/pricing>
MediaShout - <https://mediashout.com/>
MediaShout Pricing - <https://mediashout.com/pricing/>
ProPresenter - <https://www.renewedvision.com/propresenter>
ProPresenter Multi-Screen Management - <https://www.renewedvision.com/propresenter/multi-screen-management>
Proclaim - <https://proclaim.logos.com/>
FreeShow - <https://freeshow.app/>
FreeShow Features - <https://freeshow.app/docs/features>
OpenLP - <https://openlp.org/>
OBS Studio - <https://obsproject.com/>
Ecam Live - <https://www.ecamm.com/mac/ecamlive/>
vMix - <https://www.vmix.com/>
vMix Features - <https://www.vmix.com/software/features.aspx>
Restream Multistreaming - <https://restream.io/multistreaming>
Restream Supported Platforms - <https://support.restream.io/en/articles/872029-supported-social-platforms>
StreamYard - <https://streamyard.com/>
StreamYard Multistreaming - <https://streamyard.com/multistreaming>
BoxCast for Houses of Worship - <https://www.boxcast.com/solutions/house-of-worship-streaming>
Resi Church Live Streaming - <https://resi.io/church-live-streaming/>

CREATIVE TOOLS & AI

Canva - <https://www.canva.com>
Canva for Nonprofits - <https://www.canva.com/nonprofits/>
Canva Nonprofits Eligibility - <https://www.canva.com/nonprofits/eligibility-guidelines/>

CONTRACTOR & TAX

IRS: Independent Contractor Defined - <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/independent-contractor-defined>
Form W-9 - <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-9>
Form 1099-NEC - <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-1099-nec>

CONTACT

Kim-Char Meredith - kim-char@malama.community
Mālama Kekahi / WEMS - Malama.Kekahi.Org@gmail.com

