

Worship the Lord

No. 73, July 2015



Graphic Design for Worship & Outreach

By Ian Welch

Visual communication is a vital part of how we interact with the world around us, and it is also an important method by which we connect the people and the gospel in worship. Spectacular art, architecture, stained-glass windows, paraments, and vestments are used within the worship space because visual art has a powerful impact on our minds. Visual communication has been embedded in the life and culture of the Christian church for centuries, and in today's digital age the need for excellent visual communication remains.

Much like traditional visual art, the printed materials and visual displays we produce at church visually communicate to the church and unchurched. The art of producing such materials is called *graphic design*. Graphic design, when done well, ultimately supports the gospel, and doing it well is not impossible. You do not need to be hip with the latest trends, nor do you have to be innovative. Graphic design is not plucking ideas out of thin air; it's applying art and communication principles to real-world problems.

Bad graphic design is not the real problem. The real problem is that many people do not know Jesus as their Savior. The solution is the gospel. By his grace and mercy, God sent his Son to pay for our sins, therefore offering us forgiveness of sins and eternal life.¹ Sensory art supports God's answer. We taste the bread and wine. We hear the music. We feel the ashes driven into our foreheads or hands. We smell the incense as we pray. We see the cross, stained glass, banners, and artwork. In the same way, graphic design is not the solution, but it is used to communicate the gospel to those online, our local communities, and in our sanctuaries.

This is how we approach graphic design, whether we are making flyers for canvassing, logos and branding for church, digital media, or worship folders.²

Church Branding

A church's external visual identity is its brand. The term 'brand' can make some squirm, worrying that it seems too close to a church-as-a-business model of marketing. And they are not entirely

wrong, since secular business-marketing principles don't always align with the mission of the Church. However, branding is one of those concepts that can help a church understand and establish a healthy, mission-focused visual identity and message—something that is important for both new and established missions. Simply put, your church's brand is the visual identity and message people associate with your church's name and its people. It merely supports the ministry of the gospel. The Holy Spirit through the gospel alone works on hearts, not branding. Your visual identity (branding, logos, graphics, website, etc.), is therefore treated similarly to how you would go about choosing a new organ, church building, paraments, banners, etc. These support the gospel, and therefore, we strive for a high level of quality in our approach to them. Here are five basic principles why branding is valuable and can help support your ministry and the gospel.

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Ian is a designer and composer of liturgical media living in San Diego, California. After graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 2010, he decided to continue his education at San Diego State University to attain a Master of Music degree with emphasis on composition. He currently serves as the choral director and musician at Risen Savior in Chula Vista, California, and owns a liturgical media company (paramentics.com) that focuses on producing well-designed graphics for churches and schools. His handout from the 2014 worship conference, available at the Worship website, contains a wealth of helpful information.

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1. **Branding visually defines who you are.** It's not just about the logo. Branding is, "when people look at us what are the key things we want them to see about us?"
2. **Branding clearly states your mission and values.** Branding forces a congregation to internally ask important and mission-centered questions, and then how to relate those answers in a clear and concise way to the community. What is our mission? What are the values we offer to our community? How do we articulate these things clearly? Does this make sense to a person who has never been to church?³
3. **Branding helps to intentionally communicate your mission and values.** Whether you have a defined brand or not, those outside the church will already have a perception of who you are. It's a matter of whether that brand is perceived as relevant to them or not. By having a specific brand, you are being intentional about visually communicating who you are.
4. **Branding is unique to you.** This is often the hardest part and takes a great amount of effort from a designer. Hours upon hours are spent poring over census data, demographic studies, church history, and other important church documents. A designer will look at the other churches in the area and what would distinguish your particular congregation from them, while still adhering to your congregation's mission statement and keeping that at the forefront of all decision making.
5. **Your brand comes from what you already do.** Logos, mission statements, tag lines, and outreach materials are simply ways of expressing who you are and the values you offer to the community and your members. What you already do as a church establishes your brand. Every visual interaction you have with your community, from your logo, your website, or even social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) must match what you do.

Planning a Graphic Design Project

As with any major project—be it a new organ, stained glass windows, or tiling on the sanctuary floor—you'll want to formulate a plan when considering a new graphic design project. This applies to both small designs (flyers, stationery, web graphics) and large undertakings (logos, branding, websites). Good graphic design takes a lot of time, and therefore it is rarely cheap. You'll want to consider things like your church's budget, the timeframe in which you'd want the project completed, who will be the designer, and the leader or committee operating the project.

Budget

A budget can make or break a graphic design project, much as it would in any other substantial addition to your church. If you choose to use a professional graphic designer, it's wise to have money already set aside. It's also beneficial for the designer to know what this amount is, so that they can fully understand what can and cannot be done within the confines of the budget. This helps set clear expectations for both parties.

You can expect a logo to be \$1200-5000 when done professionally by a freelance designer or small studio. Branding can be from \$2000-8000 and includes the logo, stationery, and other supporting materials. Websites can be \$3000-10,000, depending on what you want to have done and how elaborate it is. Other print materials can cost \$250-1500. This would include stationery, t-shirts, posters, outdoor banners, and brochures.

Don't forget to factor in printing costs as well. You wouldn't want to use up all your budget on design only to have a few dollars left for printing the materials. Local printers can give you quotes and online print companies can give you a pretty accurate dollar amount for what you wish to print.

Timeframe

Set strict goals for the completion of logos, websites, and print materials. Sometimes you'll want the design finished for a church anniversary, the new school year, or another major event. For large projects, 6-12 months out is a good start date. A smaller projects could start a few months before its planned completion. Keep in mind that designers' schedules vary and that they often work on several projects at once, so plan accordingly.

Deadlines are also good for large projects in order to keep it on track. This helps the designer plan the execution of a project and can provide the church council or committee with positive anticipation for the new designs.

Designer

Decide whether or not to hire someone to do the design for you. Hiring a professional designer is almost always the best route to go when considering graphic design projects. Not only do they have knowledge and expertise, but from a church's perspective, you can build a long-term relationship with a designer who gets to know your congregation and its values.⁴ Yes, it is more expensive than using a salaried worker at church or using cookie-cutter graphic design companies on the internet, but the end result will be worth every penny.

If you have a graphic designer in your congregation, use their gifts to serve your congregation. It's truly a blessing to have someone in the graphic design profession in your church, even if they do it part-time. If they are willing to do the work pro bono, consider paying them for their work nonetheless. It doesn't have to be a substantial sum of money, but it certainly goes a long way in showing the church's appreciation for their work, and the time, money, and education it takes to achieve it. It always pays to invest in the gifts and skills that benefit the church.

Stay away from websites that offer to make logos and print materials for dirt cheap (a couple hundred dollars). They are quite often reused or copied designs and the results are frequently sub-par. You will not be receiving something that is unique to your church. The same can be said for crowd-sourced, winner-takes-all logos. The quality will be the same, and therefore does little to effectively communicate your brand to your community.

If you are hiring someone or using someone from the church, it's important that you set clear expectations and remain very transparent with what you want to accomplish. Here is a list of things to consider with any designer:

1. Do they have experience with churches? This can be a significant factor in deciding which designer to hire. Look at their portfolio. Ask them questions. There are far too many church logos out there that were obviously made by designers who predominantly work with corporations and have no knowledge of Christian symbolism and churches. Some churches pay \$5,000 for a logo that looks like it would work better for a tech startup in Silicon Valley. Not only is experience with churches important with how a design is made, a designer with experience with churches will know how a church operates and can ease the overall process.
2. What is their design process? Are they simply going to sketch out designs or create drafts before presenting them to the committee? Or are they going to take the time to research your church, pore over census and demographic data, and ask you multiple questions about your congregation, its mission, and church life? Research can span half the timeframe of a project or more. Will they be doing what is expected of them?
3. Are they a good communicator? Chances are if they are a bad communicator, they won't be good at graphic design since graphic design is communication. A good graphic designer needs to know how to communicate well with their clients, as well as communicate your content through graphic design. It's not so much about good verbal skills—although, that's a plus. A good communicator will be transparent with their client and also keep in steady contact throughout the entire process, especially around project deadlines. Those first phone calls or emails can usually give you an idea of how well the designer communicates.

Leader

Assign a liaison to bring questions to the designer and relay their comments to the committee if necessary during the project. This person could be a pastor, committee member, or councilman. This will ensure that communication is focused and the graphic designer will not be bombarded with emails and phone calls that may potentially have conflicting messages. A conference call may be scheduled at the very beginning for a Q & A session, but limit the communication channel to just one person afterwards. Design by committee rarely works.

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A good leader will make sure to keep in contact with the designer during the entire process. Communication goes both ways. When you have a designer and project leader who can communicate well, then you are setting yourself up for a smooth and painless process.

Conclusion

Even though the production methods have changed and communication channels have been extended over the centuries, the fundamental concepts of graphic design and how we understand human communication remain largely the same. Graphic design provides yet another way to present to your members and your community the life-changing message of Christ. Utilizing graphic design to its full potential does not come overnight, but through prayer, planning, faithful research, and much trial and error, you will improve your visual communication.

In the end, it glorifies God by using the gifts he has given to the Church. May you find this article useful for you and your ministry as you use graphic design to support the gospel.

¹ John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19

² For more information that's specific to worship folders and their design, you can view the WELS CCC resources at connect.wels.net/ccs and my personal collection of resources at ianmwelch.com/worship.

³ The WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC) helps congregations plan and develop these kinds of planning tools. I highly recommend contacting the CCC if you do not have any of these tools established at your congregation. They are invaluable, especially if you plan on using graphic design.

⁴ As is the case in other fields of design, graphic design is interdisciplinary. Therefore a graphic designer needs to have knowledge in other areas such as photography, typography, and visual perception.



The following material is excerpted from “Welcoming Worship,” a seminar prepared by Jonathan E. Schroeder in 2008 for WELS Commission on Evangelism.

The Service Folder

How does an organization’s printed material affect its ability to communicate? What does your service folder say to the first time visitor?

Form

- Clean copies; crisp lines
- This will require a good digital imager; get one that collates and saddle staples.
- Consider the additional cost of installing a printer board in your imager to get higher quality output.
- Saddle staple every time there is more than one page.



Format: Print out your entire service every week.

Yes, this is a lot of work. Yes, it costs more money. Yes, it involves stapling. And yes...it is worth it. Why?

- Going from page 17 in the front of the hymnal to Psalm 85 on page 97, to hymn 370 in the no page number section of the hymnal, back to page 19 for the Creed, is nearly impossible for a first time visitor without pedantic instructions at every step of the service.
- Address that problem by printing the entire liturgy in the service folder every Sunday: all the words, all the responses, all the canticles appear in full. With this format, no one has a problem following the service. No one is lost.
- Put a hymnal in the hand of every worshipper for two reasons: because it shows we are part of a body larger than our congregation, and because the hymnal has great benefit as the prayer book of the people. So the order of service is in the service folder in its entirety, but the hymns are sung from the hymnal.
- Printing the entire service every week allows for great variety in an accessible format. A gathering rite for Advent can be seamlessly brought into the service. Adornments of the liturgy that incorporate congregational sung responses are handled in their place in the service without any page flipping.
- This format provides the opportunity to explain the words, the actions, and the symbolism of liturgical worship to worshippers new to the faith and old. Footnote and explain the history and the content of the *Te Deum*. Footnote and explain the seasons and festivals of the Church Year. Teach some and remind some of the meaning of *Maundy*, and *paschal* and *Agnus Dei*. Explain the advent wreath, the farewell to Alleluia, the reasons we do what we do. [Search for Worship Service Notations at the Worship Website.]

Printing a full service, multipage service folder costs an extra \$10 a week.... Can you get a better bang for your outreach buck?

- Printing a full service, multipage service folder costs an extra \$10 a week for a congregation that makes 175 bulletins. Can you get a better bang for your outreach buck?