

How to Build and Maintain a Theatre Ministry

Neil Mowles and Dejah Moore, presenters

Why Start a Theatre Ministry?

- A Theatre Ministry creates a new and joyful opportunity to express Spirit.
- A Theatre Ministry creates lasting friendships and dedicated volunteers.
- A Theatre Ministry offers creative opportunities for people to become emotionally vested in your church.
- A Theatre Ministry is fairly easy to start and fund.
- Church size is not a factor of success for a Theatre Ministry.
- There's no need for special lighting or sound for many productions.
- A Theatre Ministry is an excellent extension of your Music Ministry.
- If you have no choir, an acting program can help fill that creative void.
- A Theatre Ministry can offer opportunities for all age groups to participate.
- A Theatre Ministry can be used as a resource for dramatic material that could be a part of a Sunday talk, etc.
- Theatre productions will draw new people to your church (actors, technicians and audience members) with the potential of having them become regular-attending congregants.
- A Theatre Ministry is a potential revenue source for your church. Small productions with low overhead/production costs can raise thousands of dollars for your church!!

How to Start a Theatre Ministry

- As with all things, *set the intention*.
- Go it alone or seek out another interested thespian. It really only takes two: one to perform and one to watch!
- Spread the word. Promote your new ministry creatively with a fun, "dramatic" announcement using costumes and lots of joyful energy. *Make it look like the fun it is!*
- In all your promotion, focus on the theatre ministry as being a new and joyous opportunity to express Spirit—and you don't have to carry a tune!
- Start off by offering an evening or afternoon of acting "classes" involving Improvisational Acting, Play-Reading, Prose Interpretation, etc.
- **Important:** Create and foster a safe, inviting, playful, respectful, nurturing space that encourages beginners as well as more-experienced actors.
- **Even more important:** Include your spiritual practices (meditation—great for actors, prayer—*really* great for actors! etc.) in your theatre activities. *Deepen the connection with each other and the connection with that expressive spirit energy at every opportunity!*

How to Mount Your First Production

- Keep it simple!
- Choose a script that doesn't involve elaborate sets, costumes, lighting or sound. As your program continues to grow, so can your production values.
- Spread the word that you are offering this new ministry. There are many people in your congregation (as well as their family and friends) who acted in high school and college and would love the opportunity to experience the thrill of live theatre again.
- Canvass your community not only for actors but also for "techies" to help with any technical needs and publicity. Later, with larger scale productions, you can find volunteers eager to help with carpentry, costuming, prop gathering, assistant direction, stage managing, box office, ushering, etc.
- Choose a low- or no-cost script such as:
 - Readers Theatre
 - Scripts don't have to be memorized
 - No costumes or staging required
 - Radio Show
 - Scripts don't have to be memorized
 - Minimal costumes and staging
 - Fun to add old-fashioned sound effects
 - Music of the period can be incorporated, live or recorded
 - An Evening or Afternoon of Prose and Monologues
 - Theme can be seasonal, specific or broad
 - Only a few coaching and staging rehearsals needed
 - Material can be tailored to the personal strengths and preferences of the actors, but strive for variety
 - Melodrama or Mystery Theatre
 - Often fairly short, one-act scripts
 - Campy, fun, broad style
 - Often involve audience participation: hissing the villain, throwing pop-corn, etc.
 - Can incorporate dinner or dessert as an additional FUNdraiser
- As suggested above, offering some simple acting "classes" and activities will give you a good idea of your talent pool and will give you a sense of the direction you should go in choosing your first production.

Securing the Rights to Produce Your Play

- If producing a published play (i.e. not one written by yourself or a congregant), make sure you have secured the rights to produce it before publicizing your production. See the attached list of resources for a good list of publishing houses. Some offer downloadable scripts and low royalty fees payable online. However, most require a more complex licensing process.

- First, determine which publishing house handles the rights to the play you wish to produce. A great source for this is www.FINDaPLAY.com which is a free online service that will identify who owns the rights to any published play. Most of the major publishing and licensing agencies for plays and musicals have very user-friendly websites to help you navigate this process.
- Be aware that the fees charged will usually be based on several criteria: the type of organization producing the play, the number of performances, the number of seats available for each performance and the ticket price to be charged.
- Remember, there is a good amount of material available that is part of the Public Domain and therefore free to produce, but research thoroughly to make sure it is, *for sure*, in the Public Domain.

Beginning the Production

- **Auditions**
 - Schedule your auditions at a convenient time, perhaps a Sunday afternoon following morning services.
 - Provide an audition form with tentative rehearsal dates and times and ask for potential conflicts. This often helps thin out the possibilities for each role. Also include a place for those auditioning to indicate any interest they might have in technical areas: costuming, set construction, ticket sales, etc., for those not cast.
 - For the initial auditions, select a couple of short scenes with as many characters as possible involved in order to hear voices, establish “types” and read everyone. After hearing everyone, move to shorter, “meatier” scenes to cast main characters.
 - If possible, schedule a follow-up time for “call back” auditions. This will give you a chance to see anyone who was unable to come to your initial auditions as well as giving you the opportunity to try different combinations of actors.
- **Building the Production Team**
 - Once casting is complete, pull together those who will be assisting in technical areas: props, set, lighting, costumes, publicity, etc. You may have to go to congregants that you know have specific skills and ask them to come aboard.
 - The director has final say in all artistic areas so that there is a cohesive tone to the production. Sketch out a ground plan for your set, a simple diagram of where any set pieces will be. On more complex productions, there may also be walls and doorways to construct, but often these are not necessary as long as the acting space is defined by set pieces.
 - An assistant director can be a great help during rehearsals, writing down blocking (stage movement), reading for absent actors and helping with coordinating other aspects of the production. For performances, the assistant director can act as stage manager, “running” the show by communicating with the actors backstage and the “front of house” staff (box office, ushers, etc.), making sure that everyone is on the same schedule prior to curtain.

- Once the Production Team is in place, it is very helpful to hold a production meeting in order for the director to give his/her vision of the piece, define roles and clarify the time frame for the various parts of the production to have their portion completed.
- Rehearsals
 - Value the time your volunteers are donating.
 - Begin and end rehearsals on time.
 - Create a rehearsal schedule that uses your actors efficiently so that they don't sit around idle while others are rehearsing. Only "call" those actors who are needed for the section of the show you will be rehearsing.
 - Strive to make rehearsals fun but challenging and rewarding.
 - Stress the importance of "Stage Etiquette" including good hygiene and respect for each other's personal space.
 - Promote good acting discipline Be an example. Remain joyful, positive and gracious even when the pressure of the upcoming production is looming. You are Divinely guided and blessed to be a part of this creative process! Remind your actors and technicians of this when things get "hairy"!

Resources for a Theatre Ministry

Publishing and Licensing Agencies for Plays and Musicals

- Anchorage Press** www.applays.com
 Good source for youth and family-oriented plays
- Bakers Plays** www.bakersplays.com
 Good source for youth and family-oriented plays, monologues, etc.
- Brooklyn Publishers** www.brookpub.com
 Good source for youth and family-oriented plays, downloadable scripts
- Drama Source** www.dramasource.com
 Low-cost scripts and royalties for plays, melodramas, etc.
- Dramatic Publishing** www.dramaticpublishing.com
 Good source for youth and family-oriented plays and some major works
- Dramatists Play Service** www.dramatists.com
 Major publisher of plays and musicals
- Eldridge Plays and Musicals** www.histage.com
 Low-cost scripts and royalties for plays, melodramas, some spiritually-oriented material

Music Theater International www.mtishows.com
Major publisher/licenser of mainstream musicals

Pioneer Drama Service www.pioneerdrama.com
Good source for youth and family-oriented plays and musicals

Playscripts, Inc. www.playscripts.com
Good source for radio plays, melodramas, etc.

Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization www.rnh.com
Major publisher/licenser of mainstream musicals

Samuel French, Inc. www.samuel french.com
Major publisher/licenser of mainstream plays and musicals

Tams-Witmark Music Library www.tams-witmark.com
Major publisher/licenser of mainstream musicals

Theatrical Rights Worldwide www.theatricalrights.com
New publisher/licenser of contemporary mainstream musicals

Other Online Resources for Monologues

Monologue Archive www.monologuearchive.com
Great source for monologues for all ages and needs

Theatre History www.theatrehistory.com
Good source for information and monologues

Resources for Skits and Reader's Theater With a Spiritual Slant

Disclaimer: Unfortunately, there are few outlets for exclusively New Thought material. Sifting and shifting is required.

*Spirit Expressing - ministry headed by Unity minister Rev. Ed Townley who has created several plays and musicals with New Thought themes. For information, contact Dejah Moore. dejahthorism@sbcglobal.net

*Willow Creek Association - excellent source for contemporary worship arts materials
<http://www.willowcreek.com/resources/>

*The Skit Guys - well-designed sight with downloadable skits, monologues, reader's theater materials, etc. Also, some very good short videos to incorporate into Sunday and Special Services

<http://skitguys.com/>

*Over the Top Publishing - pretty good site with some adaptable sketches, monologues, etc.

<http://www.overthetoppublishing.com/>