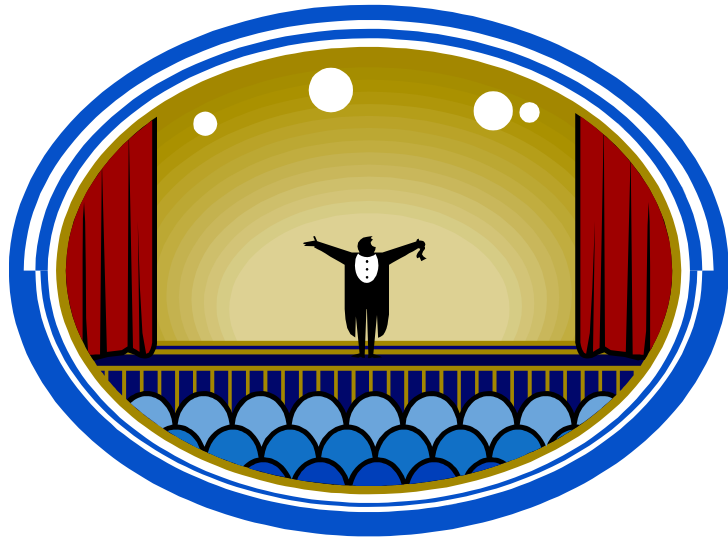


Countdown

to



CurtainUp



A guide to orderly planning, rehearsing and performing Christian drama
written for the novice or experienced director

complete with Director's Diary!



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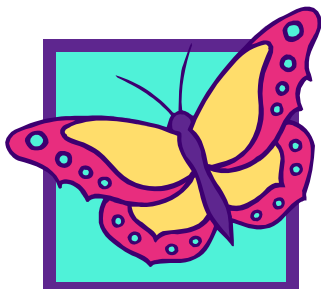
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Countdown

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CurtainUp



A guide to orderly planning, rehearsing and performing Christian drama
written for the novice or experienced director



Index

Section I

Introduction	Page 01
Getting Started	Page 03
The Rehearsal Process	Page 09
Duties & Responsibilities	Page 10
High Quality Rehearsals	Page 14
Getting Commitment	Page 17
Recruiting Personnel	Page 19
Inputs	Page 20
Training	Page 23
Rehearsal Mime Exercises	Page 27
Characterization	Page 32
Blocking	Page 34
Role Evaluation	Page 36
Memorization	Page 38
Building Blocks	Page 39
Time Line	Page 40
Weekly Rehearsal Schedule	Page 43

Section II

Director's Diary Main Page
Rehearsal Plan
Character Profile
Character Checklist
Character Profile Evaluation
Building Blocks 1
Building Blocks 2
Rehearsal Recap
Actor's Self Appraisal

Originals for Photocopying

Countdown to CurtainUp

Likely very few activities anywhere in the church receive less planning than Christian drama. It's a something that "just kinda happens".

Example: It's Friday afternoon, Pastor Lastminut contacts Nina Goodfellow, the drama coordinator. The pastor wants a 4-minute sermon starter; he asks if it can "happen". Nina is so shocked to be asked for something outside of Christmas and Easter that she is beside herself with anticipation. She excitedly asks, "And when do you want this drama to happen?" "Well, on Sunday, in the sermon, when would you expect it would be?", is the answer.

Now Nina has a problem. If she agrees to "make it happen" she will have actors and all others involved in the drama ministry upset with her last minute preparations. If, (as she is tempted to do to prove a point), she refuses to do the drama she knows she will likely not have another opportunity for another year. (The fact that the performance will be wooden and inadequate is seldom even taken into account).

So, what does Nina do?

There is simply no way to get the drama ministry members going at this late date. So Nina does what every resourceful drama coordinator does. She calls up EZ Tuconvince, the youth group leader and says she needs a "favor". "This one time." "Something quick and easy in the service." "Your kids'll get a real charge outta this one!"

Why does Nina contact the youth group, you ask?

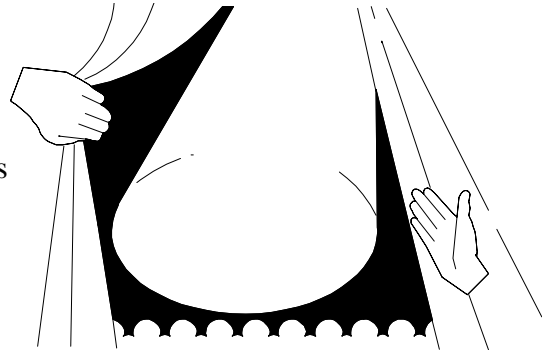
Everyone knows that youth will allow themselves to be talked into anything. They tend to be a little more outgoing, less intimidated with the idea of "doing skits". Hey, buy them a pizza and they will do most anything!

Unfortunately Nina forgot that the youth group were away at a youth retreat in the mountains this weekend. Now what?

Only one choice left – Nina does a monologue. Herself. Again. Seems like Nina does the last minute monologue shuffle quite a lot. And next time Pastor Lastminut sees Nina in church he thanks her profusely "for the fine skit", but suggests that perhaps Nina "oughta be looking around for others to fill in from time to time" cause "we wouldn't want you burning out from always doing the work yourself, Nina!"

Nope, all too seldom is there a whole lot of planning going into putting together and staging a Christian drama performance. And we wonder why people involved feel as if they are simply struggling through a performance, as opposed to giving "our utmost for His highest".

In conducting DramaShare workshops around the world one of the most common problems which surfaces is that of the lack planning the performances to maximize the ministry potential of Christian drama. Many people in our workshops

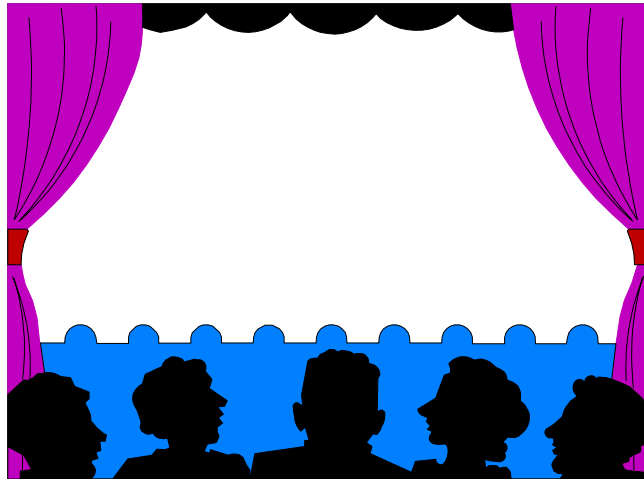


agree that more planning is required but are at a loss as to how one can actually plot out a plan and a timetable when using amateur volunteers.

It was to try to assist in these problems that this manual has been created. We appreciate the involvement of our DramaShare members around the world, the participants in our DramaShare workshops and seminars and the subscribers to the DramaShare “Christian-Drama-Forum” email list who are a constant source of information and ideas for us.

We trust that this manual will provide the framework for an improved preparation and rehearsal schedule in your church.

The purpose behind this manual is, as the title infers, “Countdown to CurtainUp”, a step by step look at what goes into creating a drama which is not only successful, not only well accepted by the congregation, not only pleasant and motivating to the cast and crew, but is also God-honoring, a good and righteous offering to our God.



Recently we posed the question to our subscribers on Christian-Drama-Forum: “When do you begin preparations for a major presentation such as Christmas or Easter?” The answers were very interesting.

A friend and fellow Christian dramatist and organizer, Elaine Morrison in Edmonton, Alberta, who is in charge of the Christmas presentation, answered, “January”. So, 52 weeks prior to the performance huh?

From this response came the sub-title of this manual:

“52 Weeks to an Awesome 2 Minute Sermon Starter”

Hey! Wait a minute. So maybe some eager beavers like Elaine might get off the mark really early on a really major presentation, but, hey, hold on here! A sermon starter? Since when do we need this advance planning thingie for a sermon starter?

The fact is that every Christian drama performance, whether a multi-act extravaganza or a two minute sermon starter, (and all performances in between), follow the same planning regimen, requiring the same “to-do” checklist and the very same attention to detail. The activities and the time frame may be reduced but the need for a procedure remains, (and in some cases may become more crucial for short-term projects).

Therefore this manual is not in any way exclusively intended for use in staging major performances, but rather as a systematic, thorough, detailed and comprehensive method for establishing procedure for ALL Christian drama projects, whether major or minor. We deserve to give our best efforts regardless of the project.

So this means we have a one year planning cycle for our sermon starters?

No, this is likely unrealistic, (although it is quite amazing to think what God might be able to do through us if we gave this kind of preparation to our ministry). But we have set



this manual up on a 52 step procedure format, allowing the user to adapt the actual lead-time allotted into the available time-frame. So, as an example, if you are planning to stage a drama in two months time, the 52 weekly steps become compressed into (roughly) 52 days. And in most cases, all that would have been done in a one week period now must be completed in a day.

(Scary thought, huh?)

In using this manual we suggest that you guard against the thought, “this doesn’t apply to us in our situation”. While there may be items such as promotion or costumes which may not be totally applicable, the fact is that these functions still must be dealt with in one manner or another, even if it comes down to, “Freddie, you will wear a white shirt and black slacks for this part”, or, “this is what we need in the church bulletin for Sunday”. So make a conscious effort to treat every activity as important, regardless of the type or length of drama to be presented. Secondly, remember that one of the perceived hallmarks of Christian drama is “disorganization”. Things aren’t done, or are done in a rather sloppy manner, “after all, we are all volunteers”. But the fact is that nowhere is there a greater need for good, basic organization than in a volunteer organization. We need to bear in mind that volunteers, unlike paid professionals, donate their after hours time, their discretionary time if you will, time which could have been spent with family, friends, or, working in another ministry. So, plan now to organize!

Let the countdown begin!



Planning For Drama - When is the “Right Time” To Start?

We asked this question of a all of our friends on DramaShare’s Christian-Drama-Forum eMail list. Their answers were interesting:

Well, I like to start (for Christmas) about July. I like to pull my Production team together and discuss the staging, lighting, special effects, costumes, etc. If I hold any auditions, that is when I like to do them - that gives the costume director time to get everyone measured and costumed. Of course, that is the ideal. HOWEVER - if my Minister of Music & Drama can't make a decision (and it isn't the year for drama only, which is MY decision) then most likely, I'd get a script in September and have to do it all then! Aghrrrrrrr!!!!

In His service,
Ane Mulligan
The Seed Company
Suwanee, GA



My wife and I started thinking about Christmas shortly after Easter. We just finished a month of workshops offering general training to our team in the areas of acting, dance and make-up. The three classes were offered concurrently on three consecutive Monday nights (our normal rehearsal night). This allowed everyone to try each class.

The workshops let a few new people see if this is something they would like to do. It also gave our "regulars" a chance to experiment. The surveys had only positive things to say.

Rehearsals for the Christmas Production begin next Monday, (early Sept).

We are doing A Time for Christmas for the second time in three years.

Performance dates are December 5 - 7.

We are looking forward to serving HIM.

Brent Jenkins

Jubilee Christian Center

San Jose, California



I strongly believe that it is always better to finish up early than to run out of time. I believe that in all actuality you cannot make up time. So many people are blown away when we review next year's Christmas materials in January and begin rehearsals the following July. Typically we only touch on the actual material once or twice a month in July and August. We distribute material (i.e. scripts, music, listening tracks) and the actors and singers spend their personal time on it. Then at the beginning of September we buckle down and hit the books. We have rehearsals once a week for 1-1 1/2 hours in September and October. In November we will add a couple Saturday rehearsals (2 hours each.) What normally happens is we will have completely covered all material at least 3 times by late October to mid November. This allows us to back off the drive and coast into the presentation date (mid December) with only the last minute touches left. I find that with this strategy, the actors and musicians are not out of wind and life. Rather, we have a chance to catch our second wind, re-group and come into the presentation with a joy and anticipation to see how the Lord is going to work. I find very little burnout and agitation with exception of those members who have a tremendous, personal load in addition to our group.

I know every church and group have at least one person who doesn't quite see the urgency of planning and preparing well enough in advance. What I don't do is remind our people how much time they have in months, weeks, or days. Instead, I remind them of how many rehearsals they have left.

Months and weeks sound like a large time span and seem to lull them to a false sense of, "relax, you've got plenty of time." The term "days" is very deceiving because who actually rehearses and prepares every day? If you

get right down to it, counting the actual rehearsals is more factual and rather to the point. I remember when I first tried this on a group one year. One week I used the term "weeks" then the next week I used "rehearsals." I was amazed as to how many people came up, out of their seats and looking around like congress just put a ban on fast food. A couple asked why I cut out so many rehearsals and I explained to the group that they still have the same amount of rehearsals, however I was just phrasing it in a different light. Try it sometime and see what reaction you get.

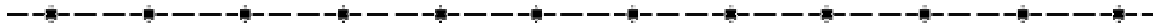
Blessings!

Erick McGraw
Tri-City Baptist Church
Parkersburg, WV



I try to get my co-director, who is in charge of choosing, to be ready to start rehearsing, at least music and read throughs in September right after Rally Day. But unfortunately, it's usually late October for an early December performance. As an actor, I can memorize easily but I need time on stage for blocking and fine tuning my lines.

Keith Dunham
Bunker Hill Lutheran Church
Princeton, NJ



I think unfortunately that Elaine hit it on the head. Getting pastoral and or board approval seems often to be the handicap. As a result of sluggish movement on the decision maker's part, production often gets off to a slow start. However some things will still be the same.

You will require rehearsal time. It will probably be one day a week for a few months and then perhaps a couple of days a week. Someone in an earlier response (forgive me, I forget who) spoke of getting in one-a-month rehearsals for months ahead to familiarize. That is great! Then go all out in October, on. Unfortunately you do have to believe in and trust the cast to do memorization on their own ahead of time. I would also count on having a few people who learn a couple of parts as understudies, you never know when you need them.

Costuming and sets and props are a real nightmare when time seems to tick away. I, myself, have developed a reputation that no matter how late they wait, I get it all done. Bad me. Many people will fill in at the last moment, so it seems, and it all gets done.

The nice thing is that, after its over, you get a whole lot of people willing to tell you how should have done it, and how next year you should start earlier.

Seriously folks, first and foremost, give it to God. Prayer, and lots of it. A firm understanding that our desire and goal is to glorify God. It all usually works out. We can do nothing without Him.

It would be nice to:

Cast it by Sept 1.

Costuming begins Sep 7. Scripts in hand.

Set designed by Sept 15.

Set construction begun Sept 21.

One-a-week rehearsals, (read throughs) Sept 21.

Blocking starts on stage Oct 1.

Two-a-weeks Oct 15, scripts gone. Prompter.

Full run-throughs Nov 15.

Costumes fitted and ready Nov 21. Sets completed.

Full dress Dec 1. Last dress Dec 7.

SHOWTIME

My Christmas wishlist.

Karl Wagner

His Acts

Toccoa, GA

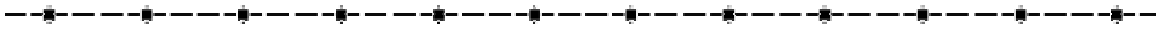
I think Karl hit upon a universal truth -- when dealing with humans, there is a certain inborn time clock for which a few people can never recover. Namely, if they know that showtime is X number of weeks away, their internal clock tells them they really don't need to be prepared YET, and they will not prepare, no matter how much encouragement from director and team members. It is frustrating.

Along the same vein, though, I believe that God has His own time frame for us, too. He knows far better than we do when thoughts and ideas we need will be meaningful to us and will only give us these needed ideas when His time is right, and He knows we can hear them and use them wisely. This, too, used to frustrate me a great deal, the planner that I am. But after many years of beating myself over the head and worrying things to death -- to the point of vivid dreams of apocalyptic events ruining my well-laid plans, I finally realized that God's timing was the best, and I needed to work on my own attitudes to get myself as prepared as I could, and leave the rest, in full trust, to God.

As drama ministers, we can and should be as prepared as we can be, but never forget to leave God room. We all have seen time and time again how well He moves when the time is right. And His ways are totally awesome!

In Christ,

Karen Dickson



We pick our shows over a year in advance. We start rehearsing for Christmas by the end of September, for a typical non-musical. Then we rehearse 3 times a week, for about 8 weeks, and open the show late November. If it's a musical, we add 3 weeks to the schedule.

Moira Thornett
ACT1
Spreading the Word

another from Moira:

Ane, the number of people depends on the production. Those who want to do a particular production know what the schedule is in advance. We lay it all out before the first read-through. Of course, we sometimes have to work around work/travel schedules etc. I "allow" two misses out of the 25 or so rehearsals. I try to be careful with the schedule, so that folks who aren't in every scene don't have to be at every rehearsal. So, for some shows I might rehearse scene 1, 5 and 8 together, or something like that, because those scenes include mostly the same people. If I know someone has a problem with a particular day, I try to work their scenes so they're not on that day. Some first-timers have a hard time understanding the rehearsal requirements ... until they've done a show!

Moira

And then there is this one from Elaine:

let's see....

Once the *rush* of Christmas and New Years is officially 'over', I start searching for next years script. I usually have a fresh idea of what 'worked' and what didn't 'work' from the previous month, make notes and try to avoid the pitfalls again. There are often times when I come across a particularly good script so I will print it off and give a copy to my pastor for his opinion.

The script usually sits on his desk for a total of 3 months as he attempts to find time to 'look it over'. I do remind him on the odd occasion...to 'take it with you' when he goes to conferences, or retreat....I even suggest it would make great bathroom material. (he only laffs at me)

Usually around Easter, when the whole drama department is in full gear do I remind him once again that I've put a script on his desk...only to discover that it has made its way into file 13.

I reprint after Easter, and again remind him of his commitment to read and give his opinion on my selection. Again, the script usually sits on his desk until the umpteenth reminder, in which he usually returns with a comment like "I glanced at it, but what if we want to do something a little different

this year? " This usually means that he's actually taken a little time to think about the next Christmas season, and his personal creative juices get moving.

Then begins the long drawn out process (of which I am presently experiencing) of trying to convince the pastor that my original script is well thot out, easy enough to perform and wouldn't require an elaborate set design. (the latter being a major problem for us) He continues to bring up 'ideas' for our Christmas presentation and the 'battle' continues.

Traditionally, I've won the battle, with the reasoning being that he doesn't have any actual part to play in it. The presentation is usually self-sufficient and doesn't need pastoral 'wrap-up' of any kind. This year tho, its proving to be a little more difficult, as we have decided the independent presentation will become a part of one of our services and of course, the pastor wants to be a part of it.

Unfortunately....we have a very talented pastor, both musically and dramatically...but his attention span is that of a 10 y/o and he is unable to memorize lines. (he uses cheat sheets taped to almost anything he can get his hands on..hehheheh)

SO!!....I start the process in January....and usually start rehearsals in October (if the script is picked) or December 11th if it is to be a creation from the pastor himself.

you asked.....

:)

Elaine



So, after all this input the perfect time to start the drama project is ????

Seems like it's up in the air, huh?

So, what we have done is based this manual on 52 weeks of preparation, yep,



52 Weeks to an Awesome 2 Minute Sermon Starter

We realize that many will not take this amount of lead-time, and that's OK. What we are setting out to show is the overall track which can be followed. It is up to the individual person and ministry to modify as necessary. We trust that ideas in this manual will help bring about a more intense opportunity to worship God, dramatically!

Some good ideas on the rehearsal process

from DramaShare's Servant Director

Karen Dickson denk7@juno.com

It (is) essential to have someone who oversees all aspects so there can be some continuity in your efforts. Whether you want to call this person the director or just coordinator, try to have someone be willing to be the 'person in charge'. Mainly, there needs to be some one person who will have the final say and can be counted on to have answers and make decisions. Of course, this person can delegate as much as he/she wants, as in having someone to do the costumes, another for props, someone for advertising and programs, and perhaps even sub-directors who will lead separate rehearsals if there are portions of the program to be done by different groups of people. Yet, it would be helpful if the director could attend as many rehearsals of each group as possible, so that he/she can keep everyone focused on the whole and can trouble-shoot if any parts seems to be out of line (as in not as well-prepared as other elements by a certain time) with the other groups. As for a rehearsal schedule, it is usually helpful to start from the end. Plan a full dress rehearsal two days before the presentation. Work backwards from there -- perhaps two days prior to dress rehearsal, do a run through with all the technical elements (sound, lights, sets, costumes, props). At this rehearsal, you can stop and start as necessary but the aim is all the technical parts -- not the acting or singing. Then back up and the week before the presentation, plan at least two full run-throughs with the whole cast, but not necessarily with all the technical pieces (if there are costumes - like the angels, that may present problems in movement, you may want those actors to work in costume more to get them used to the costumes.)

In the weeks prior to these last two weeks, schedule as many rehearsals as you think will be necessary for each group. In those cases where the piece is divided into sections that utilize differing groups of actors/singers, it makes rehearsing a lot easier in that you don't have to find a time when the entire cast can meet, but use these small group rehearsals to bring each element together. Not knowing how difficult the play is, I really can't judge exactly how often you'll need to meet, but generally speaking, everyone should have their lines and/or songs memorized at least one month before the presentation. At that point, you should tell everyone to plan to be "off book"...that means you literally don't allow anyone to carry a script with them. The sooner they feel the fact that they have hands that need to be used in acting, and that they won't always have their lines in front of them, they will realize they really need to know them well --- and they will get them memorized!

Lastly, since we've been working backwards, I would plan to have a first rehearsal with as much of the entire cast/crew as possible. Start with prayer together, and then just plan to read through/sing through the entire play. Have everyone seated. This is just to hear the whole piece so everyone knows where you are all headed. This rehearsal is a great time to hand out the whole rehearsal schedule so everyone knows in advance how they need to plan their rehearsal time.

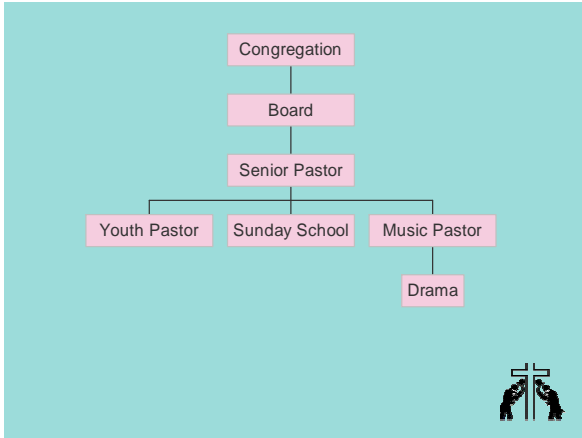
God bless you as you prepare. The rehearsal process can be a wonderful time of fellowship and fun, so enjoy it! May the Holy Spirit fill you with all the wisdom you need as you lead the process.

til next time I'm . . . your servant director . . .

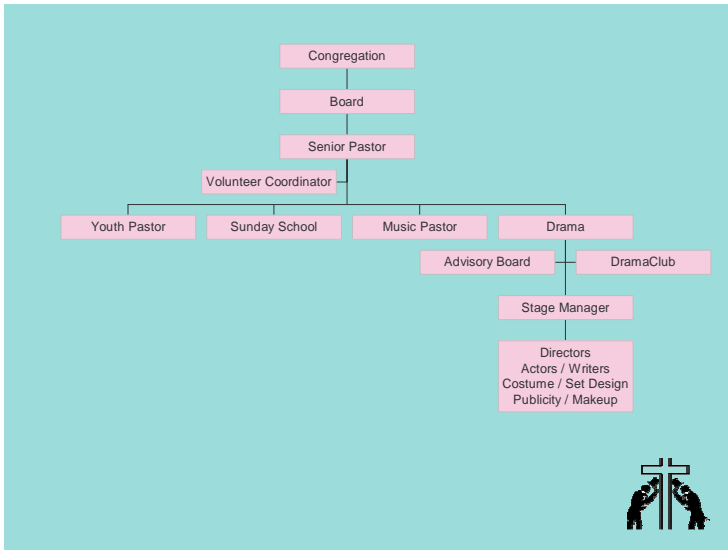
The Distribution of Duties and Responsibilities

The Church

It is the duty of the church, through the Board of Elders, through to the Senior Pastor, (possibly to another delegated superior), to appoint a Drama Coordinator, (who may or may not also carry along other duties such as Director).



Above is an example of the structure of a dramatic arts ministry in many churches. The unfortunate fact is that this structure may limit the involvement of non-musical people in your congregation since it may be perceived as a musical ministry. We prefer the format below:



In this format there is greater opportunity for wider participation throughout the church, and also this structure will be perceived to offer greater flexibility. For additional information on organizational structure see DramaShare Organizational Manual 3.0

Drama Coordinator

- ❖ Responsible for the overall direction of the ministry under the authority of the Senior Pastor.
- ❖ Identify the limits of this authority, particularly as it relates to finances, choosing scripts and selecting participants.

Directors, Stage Managers and other supervisory personnel

- ❖ Identify the role, duties, responsibilities and authority of each

Actors and Stage Crew

- ❖ Ensure that they have the necessary input and skills training.

Director's Duties

Main Duties of the Director

- **with others, to choose the script**
- **to conceptualize the overall direction**
- **to select the actors**
- **to guide and correct**

Do-oriented Duties



The duties of the director include:

- being aware of what scripts are available in printed and electronic form. (A large listing of sources is shown in DramaShare Organizational Manual 3.0)
- framing in her/his mind the overall direction and progression of the piece, what did the author have in mind, are there any problems apparent in the flow of the piece. The director needs to have in mind the overall general character and tendencies of each role in order to communicate this with the actor. Use the forms in the Director's Diary to record this information for each character.
- (unless auditions will be used), the director must have good ideas in mind as to who in the congregation is available for acting, and matching these people with roles in the drama. Director must be very careful to be open in bringing in new people, avoiding using the same people in major roles every time, and also avoiding the tendency to typecast people.
- Likely the most important duty of the director is to ensure that a qualified Stage Manager is in place. Without a Stage Manager the Director will be committing to a time of hectic scurrying around, ensuring that small details are done, and

thereby abdicating the important function of watching with an attentive eye to view the “big picture”, and to be there in minute by minute support of the actors.

These are what we call the “Do-Oriented” duties of the director. Beyond this, there are other important duties:

Main Duties of the Director

- to ensure that actors have necessary characterization skills
- ensure off-stage personnel have necessary training
- to prepare for personnel for next project

Plan-oriented Duties



These duties are more in the organizational sphere, ensuring that things are done behind the scenes.

- perhaps the most important is providing characterization skills for each actor. Because:

Director's duty is not:

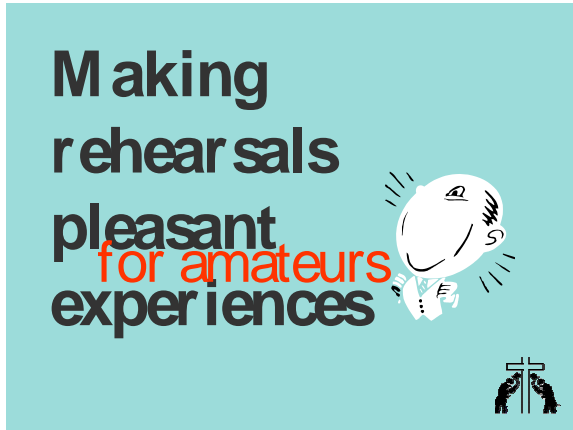
to show an amateur actor
how to play a role



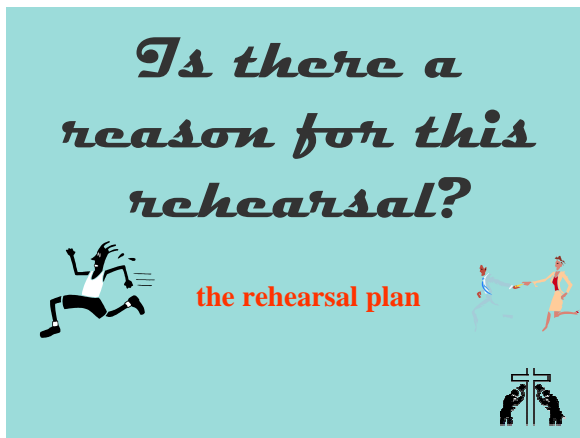
- that's right! Although this is what we often perceive the director to be doing, it is totally unacceptable to have the director “walking” an amateur actor through the various moves, gestures, vocal tendencies, etc., for to do so creates an additional stress on the amateur actor, for now the actor must not only memorize lines but must also memorize **the director's interpretation** of the role characterization. So the actor is characterizing someone else's characterization.

- the second component of the director’s “Plan-Oriented” duty is to be looking forward to the next performance, looking for actors and opportunities.

Rehearsals



Most drama organizers will speak of the incredible problems in getting people out for rehearsals. The fact is, it doesn’t have to be that way.



Why do you arrange for rehearsals?

Dumb question, right?

Not really. In our workshops when we ask this question, the most common answer is, “to help actors learn their lines”. But the fact is that actors can do the memorization equally well, likely much better, at home.

So why come to rehearsal?

Learning about things like blocking, stage movement, interaction with other actors, these are all important things which can only happen in a group setting, which we may choose to call a rehearsal. Then why do we spend all, or most, of our rehearsal time learning lines?

It is important that we have a rehearsal plan in place, and that all participants know what is planned and why we are meeting. Motivation is a key element in getting people out, don’t make the rehearsal appear to be drudgery.

Planning and Conducting High Quality Rehearsals

Only one thing will be more fruitful than good quality rehearsals, and that's prayer. Since we expect that you are already fully aware of the importance, and the methodology of prayer, we will concentrate our comments toward quality rehearsals. Effective drama demands consistent high quality rehearsals.

1. Conduct planned purposeful rehearsals
 - a. clearly identify the purpose and plan for the individual rehearsal
 - b. take care that the plans set out for the rehearsal are "doable" within the time allotted. Too often we set out to accomplish four hours material in two hours, resulting in poor coverage. Better a thorough coverage of a small subject area than skimming too much material.
 - c. communicate this purpose to all involved
 - d. provide leadership and direction which is energetic and focused
 - e. create an eager expectation for excellence in your ministry and this will transmit through into your rehearsals
 - f. provide an example through your own involvement and commitment
 - g. have fun but don't let rehearsals become social gathering times
 - h. set the tone for a happy, pleasant, yet focused, atmosphere in the very first rehearsal and this will follow through all of the rehearsal schedule.
2. Preparation and Vision for the drama ministry
 - a. Establish long term plans for the coming year
 - i. Highlight major productions and events upcoming
 - ii. Select the scripts and the people to be involved
 - iii. Don't over-commit people, have a ministry group sufficiently large that you can give all people a rest from time to time. Set a maximum number of performances for all actors, directors and off-stage personnel.
 - iv. Have a supervisory team and Prayer Support Committee in place
 - b. Within the framework of the long-term plans, establish plans for each individual performance
3. The Rehearsal Process
 - a. As earlier mentioned, ensure that there is a plan for what will transpire in each rehearsal. Use the forms in the Director's Diary to establish major and minor themes.
 - b. The 80/20 rule is definitely true for rehearsals, a 20% increase in effort and planning will result in an 80% increase in the overall performance and effectiveness, plus the more focused the rehearsal, the more motivated and productive the cast and crew.
 - c. ensure that trained and capable Stage Managers and assistants are in place. Nowhere does there need to be more unity of purpose than within the organizer/director/stage manager/assistant group. Actors and crew will very quickly sense whether the management/supervisory group are on the same page, and will respond with purpose or confusion based on what they see happening. Spend extra time to ensure unity at the top.