Planning Your Puppet Program the Easy Way

A quick way to plan your program and packing list at the same time.

By Timothy Brown

Planning Your Puppet Program

Putting on puppet programs is exciting, fun, and rewarding and they greatly enhance your puppet experience. But to put on a great program, you have to plan and develop it first. That once was tedious and time-consuming until I developed a way to streamline the process.

Instead of getting all the tapes, CDs, and puppets out, all the information is recorded on a chart from which I do all my planning. When finished, the program is ready and I've developed a list of everything I need to perform the program. Taking the extra time up front to record the information in a chart allows me to spend less time planning each program.

Preparing the Puppet Planning Chart

The first time I put a program planning chart together all our plays were on cassette tape. Step one was to gather all the tapes. We had a series called "Quimper's Corner" that used the same puppets in each play, another series called "Building Blocks" with Bible centered themes, several cassettes with puppet songs, and other miscellaneous tapes.

Step two was to prioritize and categorize the tapes. We used the Quimper's Corner tapes the most, so they went on the top of the list. Next came the Building Blocks, the miscellaneous tapes, and the songs.

In step three the information from each tape was recorded on the chart. Most tapes had the name of the play and time listed on the label. I recorded the name of the tape in bold (example: Quimper's Corner $^{\#}1$) and listed each play and time below it on a separate line.

Step three was to add the other important information about the play.

Then, when it came time to plan the program, I didn't have to get all the tapes out and go through them one at a time. All the information was in front of me in a chart and allowed me to put a program together following whatever theme I had to work with.

What are other important things to include on the chart?

- Location—where the play is located. Is it still on the tape or CD or do you have it on a computer file? If it's on a computer, file, where on your hard drive is it located?

- Theme—Write a brief description of the play. Often the them is in the title.

- Characters—Write the names of the characters in the play. (Example: Skip, Herb)

- Puppets—List the puppet you will use for each character.

- Puppeteers—Insert the name of the puppeteer doing each puppet.

- Props—Not all plays will have props so just leave those lines blank. I also include clothing items in this slot. You may want to set up a clothing category if you change the puppet's clothes often.

Formatting the Puppet Program Planning Chart

The first chart I did on paper and stored it in a 3-ring binder. It also included pages for each completed performance that included programs, times, and venue information.

Another possibility is to record the information on a 3x5 card—one card for each play. You can organize them in a file box by theme or other category and use the cards to plan your program. A second section in the box could be where you record your programs and venue information. That way, when asked to perform a second time at a specific place, you have all the previous information so you don't repeat a play.

Today, I use a Microsoft Excel™ spreadsheet and keep it on my computer. (I also have a couple of backup copies stored just in case!)

Planning Your Program

I work directly from the computer, but you may want to print the spreadsheet and use a hard copy. Go through the chart and highlight the plays that follow the program's theme. If there aren't enough plays, go through it again and highlight any that can help you present the theme.

(For example, the theme may be that God loves you and demonstrates that love every day. You may not have a play with that specific theme, but may have one where a puppet shows love to another puppet. Present that play as a picture of how God loves us.)

Take your highlighted list and choose the plays you and check the times to make sure you cover the allotted program time. (I usually add one more, just in case.)

Place those plays in the order you want to present them and include any other program items and you have your schedule. On the schedule, list the needed puppets below each play and the name of the puppeteer for that part. (A sample of our weekly Children's Church schedule is to the right.)

PRAISE LAND
Sunday, April 4, 2010

1. Puppet Song—For Who You Are
   Soloist—Cindy (Center Window)
   Singer 1—Mary (Center Window)
   Singer 2—Mike (Far Window)
   Singer 3—Charlie (Center Window)
   Guitar—PT (Near Window)
2. Offering/Announcements
3. Object Lesson—Big/Little Sin—PT
4. Puppet Song—Saved By Grace
   Soloist—Mary (Center Window)
   Bass—Mike (Center Window)
   Out Front—Cindy, Charlie
5. Puppet Puppet Play—Faith
   Boy—PT
   Girl—Cindy
6. Object Lesson—PT—Cut'n'Restored Rope

Before closing the chart, make a list of all the needed puppets, props, and tapes or CDs. That way, you not only have the program planned, but a list of everything you need for the performance. That way you won't get to a venue and discover that you're missing a key puppet, prop or other item.

Help for Your Puppet Program Planning

If you're the type that loves producing forms and charts, feel free to take this information and develop your own program planning chart. For those who don't like doing that, but want the benefit of the chart, I've included a place on my website where you can download a chart and customize it to fit your needs. It's in three different formats: MS Word Excel, Lotus 123, and Open Office Calc. (www.ExperiencePuppets.com/worksheets.html)

Having all the information in front of me when planning helps save time, shows me the full potential of what we can do, and makes for better programs. Then I can spend more time with the team preparing and presenting the programs. My goal is for you to be able to do the same thing.