

## Spotlight on Worship Graphics

“How Photographers Jim & Mary Whitmer Use Creative Images To Support Worship”



The new millennium and the digital revolution brought a dramatic change to photography. Many visual professionals weren't quite ready for the new face of visuals, but for freelance photographers Jim and Mary Whitmer, the change arrived at just the right time to begin partnering with churches around the world that saw the benefit of image projection in their worship services. With hundreds of book and magazine covers to their credit, the opportunity to connect with worship leaders was a great opportunity to grow their ministry and business.

With a large number of churches adding video projectors to the technical side of worship, PowerPoint or one of the many presentation software alternatives became standard fare for giving a visual look to worship. And almost overnight, there was a strong need for “content,” or the graphics needed as backdrops for music lyrics, scripture, sermon notes and much more.

The Whitmers have an enormous photo library resulting from a wide range of professional assignments and international travel opportunities beginning in their Wheaton College days and extending throughout their career. This resource was the basis for building collections of graphics that fit the niche of what worship leaders have needed for their congregations. And also having been on a church staff as youth leaders years ago, they had a strong desire to be a resource and support for the staff person or lay person wanting to make a difference in the worship environment.

The net result was the launch of Worship Photos, a company

and ministry which has now grown to over 50 graphics collections featuring well over 4000 images covering a multitude of subject and seasonal categories available at the web site with the same name: [www.worshipphotos.com](http://www.worshipphotos.com). Currently, Jim and Mary continue to travel, often to international destinations to specifically photograph and create new worship imagery.

“We get some amazing e-mails from churches about our graphics,” says Jim. “When we realize that the creative work we do with our cameras and computers can help a church improve the worship experience, we're very grateful and have a greater appreciation for the opportunities that God has given us over the years.”

Mary has similar feelings about the value of creating a visual face for worship. “It's such a joy to be able to blend our photographs of scenic nature or diversified people, using a well designed and creative layout and often adding scripture with an appealing type face. To know that we are literally partners with worship leaders



around the world gives us great satisfaction.”

And thanks to the Internet, the reality of connecting with worship partners around the world has become a reality. Orders have come from such areas as Africa, Indonesia, Australia and some places the Whitmers don't recognize. "To be honest, I had never heard of the Faroe Islands before we received an order from there," reports Jim. "But we now serve a customer there and thank the Lord that the Internet is a vehicle for delivering a worship resource."

The challenges for the creative team come from many directions. Many customers were hoping for an "on demand" option so they could pick just the right images from various collections they really needed. With a re-design of their site and on-line store, Worship Photos is now able to offer that choice. "We sometimes receive an order for just one graphic at a time, and then later, we'll see an order for 15 or more come in. The most affordable graphics for a worship leader is ordering our collections which feature 100-200 images. We're just glad that our customers have the opportunity to get what they need."

Another concern in the church graphics industry is that the Internet has seen an enormous influx of images available to the church market. But that keeps the Whitmers in a position to appreciate the fact that their images have come from an extensive career of professional image making, and they can offer a quality and style that many of the newcomers in the graphics market are not able to produce on a regular basis. Jim notes: "We have been very fortunate to have had a world-view, quite literally, in our photo assignment work over the years. Our photojournalistic images from third world countries have provided our missions-based graphics, and some of the incredibly remote places we've been have given us a chance to show nature in a most dramatic way. In all situations, we're able to help people have deeper and more meaningful worship by what they view and experience on the screen."

On occasion, the Whitmers see their handiwork projected in other churches where they have visited. On a recent trip to Ohio, a communion graphic they produced came on the screen, which resulted in a confirming smile between the couple. As they greeted the pastor of the church after the service, they told him how delighted they were that a Worship Photos graphic was used that morning. The pastor and his wife were pleased that they could personally connect with the creators of one of their worship resources.



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Jim and Mary Whitmer

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In evaluating their work, Jim likes to point out that their worship graphics are a "win-win-win." The benefit of a high quality graphic is a win for the Whitmers, the local church, and for the glory of God. And Mary concludes, "We have a strong sense of fulfillment knowing that our creative work can go hand-in-hand with a worship leader designing a worship service to maximize the impact that worship can have in any local church."

The greatest reward in their work is when they receive this kind of comment, from an actual e-mail: "Your graphics always make our worship extra special."