

Adding a Second Worship Service

A strategy for increasing worship attendance is to start an additional worship service. Increasingly, congregations are discovering the value of varied types of worship services.

Seven reasons to begin a new service include: (1) it will reach the unchurched; (2) it will minister to more Christians; (3) it will reach new kinds of people; (4) it will help a church break out of the normal life cycle of growth, plateau and decline; (5) it allows for change while retaining the familiar of the existing service; (6) it will help activate inactive members; and (7) a by-product is improved denominational growth.

The greatest obstacle to beginning a new service is fear. According to one study, the most common fears of pastors in beginning a new service include fear of the following: lack of cooperation from people; small crowd; losing the dynamics of one large service; physical demands required; psychological letdown of going from a crowded sanctuary to one half-full; separate congregations; low morale; and conflict with people resisting change.

The same survey found that fear was not limited to clergy and staff but church boards as well. Uppermost on their list of fears were: (1) physical toll on the pastor; (2) loss of unity; (3) having two separate congregations, and not knowing everyone; (4) the effect of lower attendance in the existing service; (5) the new and unknown; and (6) a drop in attendance.

Pastor's risk of success and failure. It is likely that attendance in the new service may not only grow, but surpass that of the established service. In churches that have had only one service or style for ten years or more, the success of the new service may cause greater consternation among many members than would its failure. If the service is successful, the pastor's risk is the

reaction from those who have sanctified the status quo. The concern over a new service does not subside after it has a critical mass and is building momentum. Should attendance at the new service eventually surpass that of the established service, the risk, in fact, does not fully subside until eight to twelve months later.

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Stillwater First Adds Contemporary Service

First Christian Church, Stillwater, Oklahoma, began a new contemporary worship service on August 18, 1996. Since the addition of this service, worship attendance has risen by more than 23%, from an average of 275 to 340. Attendance in the traditional service averages 150 and the contemporary service 190.

Bill English has been senior minister of the congregation for the past six years. Recently, *Cutting Edge*

editor Gary Kidwell had a conversation with Bill about his experience of starting a new contemporary service.

Q: Bill, what prompted the start of the new service?

A: The idea to add a worship service came out of a long range planning process two years ago. The congregation actually had two worship services years ago but when

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The recently launched contemporary service at Stillwater First averages 190 worshipers, including many first time visitors.

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the 650 seat sanctuary was built the services were combined into one.

The long range planning group recommended that the new service be completely different from our current service. They suggested that conducting it on Saturday night be considered an option and even said to not rule out the possibility of using the regular 10:45 a.m. worship time.

Last spring, a task force was appointed to work on the second service. Easter was, of course, our largest attended Sunday of the year. However, attendance at last year's Easter service was 200 less than it had been six years before. Worship attendance had actually been dropping by 10 to 15 each year—this was a trend that had our attention.

There were a couple of young people on the committee who had attended some contemporary worship services, but for the most part we were clueless. We began with serious study, reading books about contemporary worship, watching videos and attending services.

When the task force finally presented its outline for the new service to the congregation, the main thing they stressed was that if the new service was going to be successful, it would need to be done in "prime time."

Q: You mean change the time of the regular service?

A: Yes. The traditional service would move to 9:00 a.m., Sunday school at 10:00 a.m., and the new contemporary service at 11:00 a.m.

Q: What kind of reaction did you receive?

A: People, of course, had varied responses. It quickly became the focus for the entire congregation; the new service was all anybody could talk about. There was a mailing to everyone in the church and we made at least one visit to all of the Sunday

school classes for dialogue. For six to eight weeks something about contemporary worship was in every newsletter.

At the congregational board meeting there were few vocal opponents. The plan was approved by the board in July and when presented to the congregation it was overwhelmingly endorsed—161 to 20.

Prior to the congregational vote, we actually did a contemporary worship service to show our people

what it would be like. As we went through the service we explained what we were doing and why. The band was there and I even gave an abbreviated sermon.

During our brief sample service, we arranged for some members to offer a testimonial, talking about why this service is important. Then one man, 75 years old, who was not on the agenda stood up. He told about his son, a dentist in another community, who was part of an evangelical

A note from the editor

Over the last year, the joint staffs of Board of Church Extension and Homeland Ministries have been developing a new resource for congregations—*The Faithful Planning Workbook*. The material was completed last December and is now available to congregations, Regions and Areas. Of course, this is not the only resource—and certainly not the first—to help congregations define their mission. But I cannot conceal my excitement about this new material, so I won't even try!

The Faithful Planning Workbook is a guide for congregations seeking the future God desires for them. We begin with the assumption that the church does not set its own agenda. Jesus Christ sets the agenda. Congregations are directed to pray and rely on the Holy Spirit to help discern God's purpose, while utilizing skills developed in other settings, such as business, to make reasonable decisions about the best match of the congregation's gifts and the community's needs.

The faithful planning process will

help your congregation answer three key questions: Where are we now? Where is God calling us to go? How do we get there? The process involves

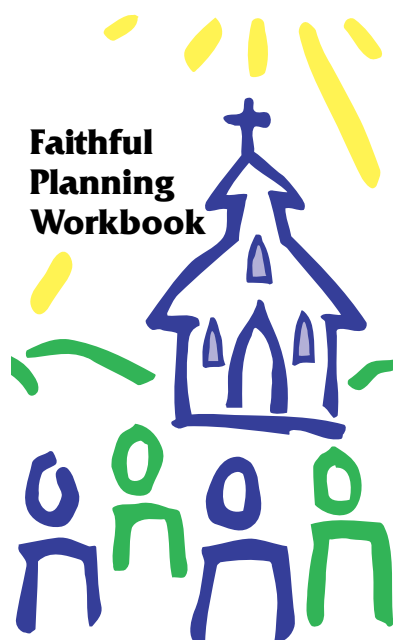
several elements:

- Prayer and scripture reflection
- Community demographics
- Congregational demographics
- Assessment of congregational strengths and weaknesses
- Analysis of connecting points between church and community
- Congregation members' dreams and hopes for the future

- Formulation of possible new directions in ministry
- Setting priorities
- Setting goals
- Developing action plans

The service is being delivered to congregations primarily by the Center for Growth and Vitality of Homeland Ministries. You may call Roger Pierce, Vice President of Homeland Ministries, at 317-635-3100, extension 376, for additional information and/or to request the service.

—Gary W. Kidwell



new congregation that used a contemporary style of worship. He told how upset he initially was and even wrote a five page letter detailing why contemporary worship is wrong. The elderly gentleman continued, “but when I saw how that church is reaching young people I wondered, why can’t that happen here at First Christian?”

Q: What makes your contemporary service unique from the traditional?

A: Music. Music is the most important aspect of the contemporary service. We have a band that consists of a drummer, lead guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, lead singer, and a sound engineer.

Basically, everything else in the service is the same. We, unlike some, receive an offering as part of the contemporary service because I believe the offering is an important act of worship. I do preach in the contemporary service while sitting on a stool.

Currently the contemporary service is in the fellowship hall, instead of the sanctuary. Our sanctuary was designed for only one style of worship. We hope to someday alter it to allow for flexibility in worship.

In addition to the music, we have a really good drama team. They do a great job of bringing life to biblical stories. About every three weeks we now try to have some drama in both worship services.

Q: What were some of the surprises you encountered?

A: We were surprised by the level of success. Prior to the launch of the service, we made sure the nursery was in top shape. We rearranged some rooms and updated the space. The nursery staff had been receiving minimum wage, creating a lot of turnover. We raised the pay significantly and now have three outstanding nursery attendants. That was a great move because the number of

children in the nursery has risen from two or three to fifteen.

However, we were not prepared for the increased programming needs for young adults and college students. We have several new families and about 20 college students attending regularly, with many more visiting occasionally. For the first time in a long time we have the critical mass needed for a church college group. We are now quickly trying to catch up with programming needs. Also, people often come looking for ways to serve the community and we are trying to develop service options for them.

There is a lot of contemporary Christian music, but much of it contains what I would deem as poor theology. Finding theologically appropriate, language inclusive, politically correct contemporary music is impossible. The mainline church is way behind the curve. There is a lot of material that we will not use. We simply try to use the best of the offerings.

Our musicians are paid (\$25-\$35 per week) and they are college students at Oklahoma State University. Fortunately, there are many talented students; unfortunately, they require a lot of supervision. These young musicians have been prepared all of their lives to perform, but we must continue to remind them that

they are not performers, they are leading worship.

Perhaps my biggest surprise is the number of seniors who love it. We have a solid core of 80-year-olds who won’t miss it. One said, “I’ll never go to the traditional service again—too boring.”

Q: What advice do you have for those church leaders who might be considering starting a new worship service, particularly a contemporary service?

A: Do your homework! Take your time and be clear about what you want to do.

Of course, there is no use in starting a new service if you don’t tell anybody about it. Publicity is critical. Two weeks before the launch of the new service, we had 120 people distribute flyers throughout the community. In about 3 1/2 hours we blanketed 85% of the city. The flyers were very well done with color and lots of pictures. They promoted the entire church, not just the contemporary service. We also placed several ads in the community newspaper and the university campus paper.

I am certainly no expert, and we are still learning plenty! By no means do we know everything we intend to learn. But it is really exciting to see people feeling a spirit that they haven’t felt for awhile.



Music provided by a band plus an atmosphere of warmth and fellowship are key ingredients for a successful contemporary worship service.

Some Ideas for Making the Move to a Second Service Successful

- If your church has a mission or purpose statement that includes reaching and ministering to people, give it visibility prior to discussing a second service. A second service should then be introduced as a *means* to that *end*.

- Determine if your second service will be identical to the first (with the understanding that your present worship is appropriate and you simply need more room to accommodate the people) or a different style of service (meaning that you intend to reach a different type or group of people). Adding a different style of service will require more research on the group you are trying to reach and planning for the appropriate worship style to reach them.

- In evaluating the option of a second service, discuss it as an *addition* to what the church is already doing, not a *change* from

what it is doing.

- Introduce the second service as an *experiment* rather than a new policy. Select a three to four month period that is already high in attendance (such as September through December or February through April), and run the second service during that period. Keep careful records both before and after the move to two services.

- Spend at least six weeks prior to the first Sunday promoting the new service. If the second service will be a different style than the first, highlight the difference.

- Make a special effort to communicate the new service to less active members and visitors who attend only periodically. Non active people more often will come to a new church activity than to an existing one. If the

second service is a different style of worship, identify the group most likely to be attracted to it and direct special communication to this group.

- Analyze the results toward the conclusion of the experiment. The decision to implement or conclude the experiment will be much easier after you determine whether the second service did, in fact, result in additional attendance. If it did, the decision to continue will be easier. If it did not, you should examine other reasons worship attendance is not growing.

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