

Starting Points for Revitalizing Worship

12 Suggestions . . .

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First, a disclaimer: I'm not an expert on worship. I've had no significant training in music or the arts (although I did have piano lessons as a kid—does this count?). But I have overseen corporate worship in the churches I've pastored, and I am passionate about the importance of genuine worship in our churches.

Frankly, I sense a need today for church leaders to look carefully at their corporate worship events and evaluate their true effectiveness. Toward that goal, here's a dozen basic suggestions to help us strengthen church services.

1. Commit to excellence.

The Biblical phrase “decently and in order” has a broader application than merely to business meetings. A church may not have the talented musicians and leaders that another church has, but it can strive for excellence in all aspects of worship, doing its best with what God has provided. And that means spending the necessary time to plan our worship. Sloppy and disorganized corporate worship does not honor God.

2. Vary the order of service.

Why make your worship predictable? Mix things up a little by using different worship service elements (see suggestion 9) and by varying the order of a service. Consider not printing the specific order of the service in the worship folder, perhaps just listing the major components. Eliminating this detail can help people keep focused on actual worship rather than looking ahead to what's coming, thus enhancing participation.

3. Keep prayer real.

Public prayer has its purpose, but it can become an empty formality if it is unplanned and unimpassioned. And beware of using prayer times merely as a cover for platform movements. Pastors need to be sensitive to the length of their prayers. In this regard someone once cautioned, “Pastors should be wary of using the pastoral prayer to catch up on their quiet time.”

4. Plan worship around specific themes.

As good as the various components of worship may be by themselves, there is added effectiveness when they are thematically related, especially when they build upon one another. Here's where pastors can help—by doing their best to plan their preaching texts/themes in advance. (When I was a pastor, I tried to do this three months ahead; it also helped me eliminate any Monday morning uncertainty about the coming week's preaching text!)

5. Invest in good sound equipment.

If you haven't purchased a new sound system in the last 30 years, it's probably time. Be sure your message is heard.

6. Use projection technology.

Take advantage of current technology to project announcements, songs, preaching outlines, and more. There's a cost involved, and people will need to be trained, but balanced use of projection technology can strengthen worship and participation.

7. Keep a lid on announcements.

Churches that are sensitive to newcomers realize that long announcement times are visitor insensitive. Train your people to read the bulletin or view projected reminders before and after services. Consider eliminating announcements altogether. At the very least, announce events that apply only to everyone.

8. Add additional instrumentalists and singers.

There's a healthy emphasis today on more participatory worship. Sharing the leadership and involving talented people from the congregation aids worship and gives others opportunity to use their gifts. Consider involving a vocal group and additional instrumentalists in leading the congregational singing (according to your philosophy and available talent).

9. Be creative.

Consider incorporating praise stories (my term for personal testimonies from church members who share on the theme of the day's Bible message), appropriate drama (I preached a series of messages on the 12 disciples in my last pastorate and, prior to my messages, asked several people to present first-person monologues in first-century dress), new music ensembles, and appropriate video clips that illustrate Scriptural themes.

10. Welcome guests without embarrassing them.

Think through ways to tactfully greet guests without singling them out. The days of asking them to stand while the congregation sings “There's a Welcome Here” or having them wear the red-and-white visitor's ribbon went out with the Baltimore Colts and eight-tracks.

11. Emphasize the proclamation of Scripture.

Always preach with clear application in view, and work on a delivery of truth that evidences passion. GARBC churches are Bible-preaching churches, and the truth of God's Word needs to be the central focus of our worship. But remember, it's possible to bore people with the Bible if we are not intentional about relevant and practical exposition. Keep listeners' attention by moving away from the pulpit at times.

12. Continually evaluate and improve.

Don't get into a worship rut! As leaders, take time to regularly evaluate the direction and effectiveness of your church's corporate worship, and make appropriate changes as needed.