

Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 4

How to Increase Worship Attendance

Why are we gifting you this volume? Because the mission statement of our primary publication—*The Parish Paper: New Ideas for Active Congregations*—is to help the largest possible number of congregations achieve maximum effectiveness in their various ministries. *The Parish Paper* is a monthly newsletter whose subscribers receive copyright permission to distribute to their constituents—more than two million readers in 28 denominations. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for subscription information.

Purpose of this Volume: Provides in-depth answers to questions that readers of *The Parish Paper* ask regarding principles and procedures that attract, retain, and spiritually enrich larger numbers of people in weekly worship; and provides a nine-month process for discussing and planning ways to strengthen the effectiveness of a congregation's worship services.

© Copyright 2009 by Herb Miller (Eighth Edition). You have permission to download this volume free at www.TheParishPaper.com and/or to distribute copies to people in your congregation.

Volume 4 – Contents

How to Use this Resource – Page 2

Study-Discussion Session #1—Why Is Effective Worship So Crucial?

- I. Why Is Worship So Important to Congregational Health? – Page 3
- II. Why Is Worshipping So Valuable to Worshipers? – Page 4
- III. Biblical Roots of Worship – Page 5
- IV. Five Historic Worship Styles – Page 6
- V. Universally Important Worship Components – Page 9

Study-Discussion Session #2—How Can We Evaluate Our Worship Service?

- I. Asking the Right Questions? – Page 21
- II. Does Our Worship Style Connect with All Five Generations? – Page 24
- III. Does Our Music Connect with All Four Generations? – Page 25
- IV. Is Our Style Traditional, Contemporary, Blended, or Seeker? – Page 30
- V. Should We Schedule Multiple Services? – Page 30
- VI. “Blended” Service(s) or “Contemporary” Service(s)? – Page 31

Study-Discussion Session #3—How Can We Get There from Here?

- I. How Can We Make Changes without Creating Conflict? – Page 37
- II. The Bottom Line – Page 39

Appendix – Page 41

How to Use This Resource

Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing. Positive change more often comes by discussions with other respected persons than by solitary individual reading. Therefore, this resource provides a nine-month process through which a congregation can arrive at new awareness, insights, and action directions.

Step #1: The congregation's governing board appoints a special taskforce, the "Worship Enrichment Team," to act on its behalf, comprised of six respected laypersons and the pastor. The ideal selection formula for the Worship Enrichment Team: Two people above age forty, two people under age forty, two adults who became members within the last three years, and the pastor. If possible, include one person from each of the following birth-date ranges: prior to 1946, 1946-1964, and 1965-1990.

Warning: No matter how small the number of active leaders in your congregation, do NOT hand this material to any presently existing group in your congregation, such as the governing board or the worship committee. Experience indicates that this *always* short-circuits the opportunity for positive results!

Avoid the temptation to think your church is an exception to this rule! Better not to use the process at all than to block its effectiveness, then say, "We tried that!" when you didn't actually use it.

Avoid the temptation to appoint a husband and wife to the Worship Enrichment Team. By reducing the number of viewpoints, you reduce the creativity.

Avoid the temptation to make the Worship Enrichment Team larger than six people plus the pastor. Research indicates that any kind of group, regardless of the excellence of its individuals, reduces the likelihood of thinking outside the box of recent history, reduces its insight-generating ability, reduces its creativity, and reduces its planning ability when it moves beyond five-to-seven members.

Step #2: The Worship Enrichment Team begins its nine-month ministry with three, one-and-one-half hour discussions of this resource during three consecutive weeks. Prior to the first session, photocopy this document, create three-ring notebooks, and distribute them to team members. Ask team members to commit themselves to reading the material in preparation for the three discussions.

Worship Enrichment Team Member: Prepare for your team's discussion sessions by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

Worship Team Discussion Leader: As you move through each discussion session, ask team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Step #3: The Worship Enrichment Team, across a nine-month period, meets monthly and leads the congregation in implementing and perfecting ideas and methods that achieve maximum effectiveness in spiritually enriching worshippers through our weekly services.

Biblical Basis for This Study-Discussion Process: "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed (Proverbs 15:22)." "The ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Proverbs 18:15)." "Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5)."

Study-Discussion Session #1—Why Is Effective Worship So Crucial?

“If a church is in trouble or dying, the first place to initiate change is in worship,” a prominent church leader asserted. Worship is equally important in the healthiest of congregations. Worship is every congregation’s strength and power source. The worship experience generates much of the spiritual energy for every other aspect of the church’s ministry.

I. Why Is Worship So Important to Congregational Health?

Worship influences both the spiritual growth of attendees and the number of people who decide to serve God through that church’s ministry: In worship, we encounter God, and God empowers us for quality living and Christian service. Worship is also the entryway for people exploring the possibility of a relationship with our congregation.

After 2000 years, weekly worship is still a church’s most powerful program.

Commenting on the importance of having a good product, not just good marketing, a top-flight salesman said, “You can only sell a dead horse once!” Encouraging church members how to invite people to worship is a great first step in offering Christ to people outside the walls. But inviting is not enough! What if church members invite people to something that is *not* meaningful and worthwhile? They do not return.

A major cause of gradual membership decline in many congregations during the past three or four decades: failure to add sufficient young-adult families each year to counterbalance the approximately 7 to 12 percent attrition that all congregations experience each year through death, moving out of town, membership transfer, or becoming inactive members.

A major cause of this failure to attract young-adult families: exclusive use of a worship style that spiritually fed young adults during the 1940s and 1950s but does not connect with the majority of young-adult families in the 2000s era.

When young-adult worship visitors feel that a congregation’s worship services are boring, irrelevant, emotionally flat, and do not communicate in ways that connect with their spiritual needs, they judge those worship services an irrelevant waste of time and decide to shop elsewhere for a church home.

During the past forty years, worship service effectiveness has begun to exert a far greater influence on where people decide to attend church.

Prior to 1965, most people chose a church because of three reasons:

- Doctrine
- Denomination
- Family tradition

People currently choose a church because of three reasons:

- Worship style
- Quality of ministries
- Caring atmosphere

These changes in how people select a church create a complex challenge for pastors, worship leaders, and musicians. As churches did during the decades following the first two major worship-style changes in Christian history—364 A.D. and 1517 A.D.—every congregation in the United States is transitioning through major changes in worship-style preferences.

Effectively navigating our way through those changes is a primary predictor of our congregation’s health and vitality in twenty years from—because it determines our ability to add sufficient numbers of age-eighteen-to-forty-four young-adult families to create the next generation of church leaders.

II. Why Is Worshiping So Valuable to Worshipers?

What is there about the worship experience that causes such a large percentage of America's more than 300 million people to take a recess from daily routines and come to a special building every seven days? Why do more Americans attend worship services each year than the total attendance at every kind of sports event?

The short answer: people come to worship because they are convinced that it helps them.

The help that people find in worship takes several forms but summarizes below three general headings:

1. Worship strengthens.
2. Worship repairs.
3. Worship refocuses.

Of course, the *primary* purpose of worship is to glorify God!

Yet, if worship stops meeting these personal needs for strengthening, repairing, and refocusing, do people continue that behavior? Probably not!

A longer answer: Putting a magnifying glass on those three worship benefits enlarges them into a list of at least twelve ways worship helps people.

Place a check mark beside each of the following ways that describe how worship has often helped you, personally, during the past few years:

1. Dispels loneliness
2. Brings hope
3. Counters self-centeredness
4. Reminds you of important values you tend to forget
5. Strengthens courage
6. Gives you the opportunity to express thanksgiving
7. Brings you a sense of forgiveness
8. Renews your faith
9. Empowers creativity
10. Helps you to see reality more clearly
11. Increases feelings of self-worth
12. Helps you to make positive changes in your life

We can also add health to that list:

- More than two dozen medical studies demonstrate the physical and mental health-promoting effects of regular church or synagogue attendance. (Larry Dossey, *The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine* [New York: Harper Collins], p. 252-253)
- Research at Duke University involving 1,700 adults over age 65 reported measurable differences in an immune-system protein associated with age-related illnesses for people who attend worship at least once a week. (*USA Today*, 2-9-98)

Like the parables Jesus told, worship is a multifaceted diamond. Worship meets the needs of different kinds of people at every life stage.

A story from John Wesley's life says that a despondent farmer told Wesley that he did not know how to handle his worries. Pointing to a cow in a nearby field, Wesley asked whether he knew why she was looking over the stone wall. When the troubled man shook his head, Wesley said, "She is looking over the wall because she cannot see through it."

Worship gives people a different perspective! Worship enables people to pay attention to God so God can strengthen, repair, and refocus their lives in ways that address their personal needs.

III. Biblical Roots of Worship

During their forty years of wilderness wandering after escaping Egyptian slavery, the Old Testament Israelites worshipped God in only one location—the tent of the covenant.

After their conquest of Palestine, the Israelites replaced their portable worship center with a temple at Jerusalem. Worship included *burnt offerings*, *prayer*, *music*, *dancing* (2 Chronicles 29:27; 2 Samuel 6:14; Psalms 149:3, 150:4), *adoration* (Psalms 99:5), *praise* (Psalms 34:3), *thanksgiving* (Psalms 103:2; 107:8), *confession* (Psalms 38:18), *seeking God's presence* (Psalms 42:1-5), and *humble consecration* (Psalms 119:10).

The fifth century BC brought a major paradigm shift in Old Testament worship. After the Israelites *began viewing God as capable of being in more than one place at the same time*, the synagogues became worship centers alongside temple worship. At that point, the Israelites added *Scripture reading* to their list of worship components, as a way of making God's requirements known to the worshipper. In the synagogues, worshipping God "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24) replaced worshipping God "in the temple" with burnt offerings.

After Christ, the Apostle Paul and other missionaries established house churches across the Roman Empire. To a worship style modeled after the Jewish synagogues, Christians added the *breaking of bread* (Acts 20:7,11), a rich symbolism that included (a) Old Testament animal sacrifice, (b) the Passover meal celebrating the migrating Hebrews' exodus from slavery in Egypt in approximately 1290-1224 BC, (c) Christ's Last Supper with his disciples (1 Corinthians 11:23-29), and (d) believers receiving the Spirit of Christ (John 6:53-58).

Today's Christian worship in every culture across the world stands on those biblical foundations:

- Worship *content* is Jesus Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament through birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.
- *Structure* includes the four-fold pattern of entrance, word, table, and dismissal—as worship gathers, proclaims, gives thanks, and sends forth.
- The *transcendence* of God encounters people in a drama that includes invocations, Scripture, preaching, prayers, hymns, responses, and benedictions.
- Worshipers experience *intimacy* in which the God who became *incarnate* in Christ dwells among them.
- *Participation* takes place in a hospitable faith community. (Robert Webber, *Worship Old & New* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan])

Yet, within that general framework, Christian worship contains no "required" core of specific forms or practices (both liturgical "high church" services and non-liturgical worship provide biblical structure and content):

- The *style* with which worship leaders weave together the biblical-worship components more profoundly influences whether people view worship as effective or ineffective than do the individual components themselves.
- In every congregation across the world, worship *style* is culture-rooted, determined by the ethos, language, metaphors, and experiences of the people in that geographical area of their nation.

Designing and leading worship is somewhat like ice-skating. Olympic competition judges score skaters in two ways—*technical merit* and *style*—by what they do and how they do it. For example, we often hear announcers say, "That was a marvelous triple-axial!" We never hear, "Wow! I don't know what that was!" Everything people can do on ice skates has already been done! So the skater weaves together basic components into a particular style and performance.

Worship also consists of two elements: *content* and *style*. After twenty centuries, leaders seldom think of a new worship component. Thus, style—how the leader weaves together various worship components—is a more powerful determiner of worship effectiveness than are the worship components.

IV. Five Historic Worship Styles

Across the centuries, millions of people have spiritually connected with God, received Jesus Christ into their lives, and reported spiritual growth from each of these worship styles:

A. Liturgical Worship Style primarily focuses on praising God's greatness and power. Bowing before the transcendent glory of God dominates the content. This style predominates in Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran congregations. Some United Methodist and Presbyterian pastors, usually prompted by seminary professors caught up in the "worship renewal" movement of recent decades, try to emulate the liturgical style by using numerous responsive reading and printed prayers.

B. Traditional Worship Style focuses on thankfulness for God's goodness and hearing God speak through the Bible. Gratitude and preaching dominate the content. This style predominated in Protestant congregations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when worship was primarily pedagogical. People sang Psalms developed from Bible texts, listened to lengthy, Word-based sermons, and reflected on the Word's implications for their lives and society.

By the mid-twentieth century, an increasingly seminary-educated clergy began combining the evangelistic order of worship (noted below) with an ostensibly Word-centered but often philosophically-based sermon. The service begins meditatively and often follows a semi-liturgical format, moving from praise, to proclamation, to response.

Today, the largest numbers of traditional worship style congregations are in denominations such as United Methodist, Presbyterian, and American Baptist (formerly called Northern Baptist). Services continue the slow-paced, "meditative" feel that predominated during the 1940s and 1950s.

C. Revivalist Worship Style focuses on offering people a life-changing connection with Jesus Christ. Evangelistic outreach dominates the content. By the end of the nineteenth century, the evangelistic worship approach introduced by Charles Finney, with every component pointing toward its climactic altar call, became the predominant model in many Protestant denominations.

Today, virtually all denominations contain a few congregations in which this worship style predominates. Southern Baptist congregations more frequently exhibit this worship style than any other faith family.

D. Pentecostal Worship Style focuses on receiving communication from God's Holy Spirit through prayer and God's written Word: the Bible. Three elements dominate the worship content: (1) the Holy Spirit speaking to Christians and churches, (2) miraculous healing in the present day, not just in biblical times, and (3) the gifts of the Spirit that the Apostle Paul mentioned, especially the gift of healing and the gift of speaking in tongues—an unintelligible praise/prayer vocalization. This worship style emphasizes personal fellowship with God speaking to individuals through the Holy Spirit. Mainline church members sometimes pejoratively refer to people who use this worship style as "holy rollers." That extreme and relatively rare form of the Pentecostal worship style includes the snake-handling churches of the South.

For the past 2,000 years, Pentecostal theology (sometimes called Charismatic) has appeared about every seventy years. This happened in 1901, creating some new Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God, whose basic theological orientation is Charismatic. (About 88 percent of the Assembly of God pastors have the gift of speaking in tongues.)

E. Contemporary Worship Style focuses on praising God in a spirit of joyful adoration. Offering a sacrifice of praise dominates the content. The service begins with high energy and worshiper participation and flows from a series of praise songs, to prayer time, to a biblically based message. Sometimes termed “praise and worship” or “charismatic renewal worship,” this style sprouted in the 1960s.

Some mainline church members resist this style because they mistakenly believe “Charismatic theology” and “contemporary music” have identical meanings or classify the contemporary style as “holy roller.” Charismatic theology is a viewpoint articulated by most Assembly of God congregations but infrequently in mainline denominations. By contrast, “contemporary music” is popular among younger adults in congregations of every denomination, including Roman Catholic. Confusion of these two terms by mainline church members sometimes originated from a local conflict regarding Charismatic theology issues during the 1970s, often precipitated in the aftermath of a “Lay Witness Mission,” a weekend renewal emphasis popular in the 1970s.

There is no trend toward the expression of *Charismatic* theology and worship among mainline congregations. That wave crested during the 1970s in the mainline churches and has gradually receded since then. *Contemporary* worship style, on the other hand, continues to increase in mainline congregations across the United States.

Contrary to what many mainline members believe, raising the hands in worship is *not* the distinguishing characteristic of Pentecostals. Some conservative and evangelical United Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans praise God that way—just as many Methodists enthusiastically said “Amen!” in worship services during the early 1900s and many contemporary Lutherans, Presbyterians, and United Methodists enthusiastically clap their hands after an exceptional youth-choir or adult-choir special.

F. Seeker Worship Style focuses on non-Christians who are seeking God but have not yet made a personal commitment to Christ. Upbeat evangelistic intention that uses familiar elements from contemporary culture dominates the content. The service-flow varies among such churches but inevitably begins with high energy and is often journey-oriented around a common theme for that particular service, including much music and drama. The content may or may not be participatory; in some such congregations the worship content is quite spectator oriented. The famous Willow Creek Community Church in Northwest Chicago is the most prominent example of the seeker-style worship, which it uses on Sunday to connect with unchurched young adults but not on Wednesday night, which focuses on discipleship and nurture.

Warning: Clergy and laity often confuse “worship style” with “church type.” A few examples of church types:

A. Bible-Study Churches focus on transmitting an in-depth understanding of God’s Word. Sermon notes in the bulletin, electronic projection of sermon outlines, and frequent references to the original biblical languages dominate the content. We see a few such congregations in every denomination, but many that use this style are Wesleyan Methodist and Independent Bible Churches. Worship style in these congregations is often traditional.

B. Small-Group Churches focus on providing a weekly “celebration time” for people in congregations that, throughout the week, gather a large percentage of members in ten-to-fifteen-person groups devoted to Bible study, prayer, sharing, and outreach. Worship style in small-group churches is primarily contemporary. A famous example of this church type is New Hope Community Church on the east side of Portland, Oregon, which has published and distributed small-group methods among congregations of all denominations. Most such congregations reside on the theologically conservative and evangelical side of the spectrum.

C. Pastoral Care/Community Service/Social Action Churches focus on motivating people to “love your neighbor.” Community service and caring for other church members dominate the announcement, preaching, and liturgy content, since members of these congregations view the second half of Christ’s Great Commandment imperative, “love your neighbor as yourself,” as the highest form of spirituality. Three out of four members in such churches do not think they should have evangelistic outreach anywhere on their congregation’s agenda. Worship style in most of these congregations is traditional. We see the largest number of these congregations in mainline denominations.

D. Informal/Indigenous Churches focus on communicating loving, caring fellowship, usually in micro-membership congregations. Shepherding, nurturing, and teaching, usually by a lay pastor who has often arisen from among its members, dominates the worship content. Members in such churches feel that their authority for ministry comes from within their local group, rather than from their denominational headquarters. Worship style in most such congregations is usually traditional but in a few instances revivalist or contemporary.

So what? If you grew up in or previously belonged to a church whose worship style was other than the worship style of your present congregation, you are likely to do one or the other of the following:

1. Rejoice in how much better things are here.
2. Desire to change your present church to the worship style with which you are more comfortable.

Which of those two responses to your congregation’s present worship style most nearly fits your feelings?

If you feel comfortable doing so, share with other members of your group which of the five worship styles and four church types listed above comes closest to describing (1) the church in which you grew up or (2) the church with which you have been the most familiar.

The purpose of worship is God, not the particular style of worship by which people achieve a sense of God’s presence in worship. People experience God in churches that favor each of the five worship styles listed above.

Therefore, effective worship does not mean appropriating some other worship style. Rather, effective worship means meeting the spiritual needs of the maximum number of people in the community in which God has planted your congregation and called it to serve.

The big question: In our kind of community, and in our kind of culture, and in our era of history, which worship style helps the largest possible number of people from all three adult generations and a fourth, teenage, generation to experience God’s presence and the life-changing power of Jesus Christ?

V. Universally Important Worship Components

The following ingredients are present in all five worship styles listed above. As has been true for 2,000 years, however, changes in the way worshipers report that they best come into a sense of the presence of God in worship continue to modify the manner in which healthy, effective churches use each component.

A. Music. Music takes up one-third of the service time and helps to set the tone for everything else that happens. Singing is the voice of the human spirit at its deepest levels. Thus, the psalmist said, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing (Psalm 100:1-2).”

The “worship-music wars” are not new! Christians have repeatedly changed the way they make joyful noises in worship. A few examples:

- In 364 AD, the Council of Laodicea decreed that only the clergy could sing during the official worship liturgy. During the next 1,000 years, chanting clergy and tiny chancel choirs led worship while the lay people watched. This rule was rigidly enforced. In 1415, the Council of Constance ordered Bohemian reformer John Huss burned at the stake, saying, “If laymen are forbidden to preach and interpret Scripture, how much more are they forbidden to sing publicly in the church.” Yet the Bohemian Brethren (later called Moravians) persisted, publishing the earliest Protestant hymnal in 1501.
- In the early 1500s, Martin Luther fought to end the music monopoly by clergy and professional musicians. He wrote thirty-six hymns, many of them set to familiar German barroom tunes, and encouraged congregations to respond to God’s Word with song words. A Vatican authority said Luther’s songs had damned more souls than all his books and speeches.
- During that same period, John Calvin, who gave Presbyterians their start, promoted Psalm singing; Calvin viewed the Psalms as the Word of God and hymns as manmade. However, Calvin hired two secular songwriters to translate the Psalms’ theology into music notes. In 1562, Calvinists published *The Genevan Psalter*, which became the most famous book of praises in the church, with at least 1,000 editions translated into many languages. The Queen of England was so incensed by these “vulgar tunes” that she referred to them as “Calvin’s Geneva Jigs.”

The Protestant Reformation rose on the wings of a changed music style—hymns based on Scripture and faith, sung by worshipers who had been music spectators for more than 1,000 years.

Since the 1500s, music preferences shifted many times, often encouraged by young-adult worshipers. Isaac Watts (1674-1748), who wrote more than 600 hymns and made hymn-singing popular in England, said that Psalm-singing had grown dead and lifeless.

From 1738 through the 1780s, John and Charles Wesley composed numerous “contemporary” hymns that replaced the traditional hymns of their era. In 1780, the Wesleys published *Collection of Hymns* for use by “The People Called Methodists.”

A hundred years later, as the 1800s closed and the 1900s began, the new “gospel” hymns became popular (most of which were written between 1870 and 1935 and were especially liked by the young adults of those years).

During the 1930s, music preferences shifted back to the classic hymns such as “The Church’s One Foundation” and “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Mostly copyrighted between 1517 and 1870, hymns from those earlier centuries became popular during the Great Depression of the 1930s, World War II, and the 1950s.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the music preferences of young adults shifted again, to “contemporary” praise songs (“contemporary” means “written since 1960”).

What caused such a quick shift in hymn preferences during recent decades? Music's ubiquitous presence via inexpensive electronic mediums is surely part of the answer.

1. Gold records awarded for albums: 15 in 1961; 91 in 1971; and 217 in 1991. ("Database," *U.S. News & World Report*, February 17, 1992, p. 10)
2. To target both baby boomers and Gen Xers with its ground-breaking Windows 95 campaign, Microsoft used The Rolling Stones, a band that appealed to both generations, combining that sound with the quick-editing visuals that MTV gave Gen Xers since birth.
3. During 2002, the Cadillac Division of General Motors blared Led Zeppelin's "Rock and Roll" with great marketing success—connecting with baby boomers because members of that generation (1) never quite left the 1960s, (2) are very nostalgic about their music, and (3) like to be reminded of their youth.

From the earliest moments of life to the grave, we breathe almost as much music as air. That may help to explain why music type strongly influences these two major health factors in every church:

1. The congregation's ability to facilitate spiritual growth in members
2. The congregation's durability as a community institution

Sincere Christians differ regarding music and hymn preferences. A few causes of those differences:

- Individual personality type
- The congregation and denomination in which people grew up or first came to know Christ
- Which of the four types of spiritual experience people identify as their primary preference (See the Appendix for explanation of the four types: Thinking, Feeling, Meditative, or Action.)

Each generation's life-experience produces shifts in hymn-singing preferences. Examples from the last 100 years:

- The fear and anxiety of the Great Depression in the 1930s and the World War II years in the early 1940s moved Americans toward *meditative* preferences in worship and music (the Alpha brain waves produced by meditation reduce psychological anxiety).
- By contrast, the prevalence of psychological depression during and beyond the 1960s moved Americans toward *celebrative* worship and music (the Beta brain waves produced by fast-moving, joyful worship and music lift depressed spirits).

The object of worship is God—not the music—but the music helps or hinders us in making that connection. Despite all the evidence, however, complaints about ineffective worship music consistently rank number one on congregational opinion polls that ask for "ways to improve our church."

Why can church leaders not hear insights regarding the kinds of music that help young adults make a spiritual connection with God? Music is more feeling than thinking, more emotional than rational. People who discuss their music preferences look through a feeling-level lens not easily changed. That is why the music department is sometimes called the "war department" of the church.

B. Preaching. Most worship attendees agree that high quality sermons tell people what the Bible says about how to live a meaningful life. A challenging aspect of preaching to a congregation that contains (or should contain) all three adult generations plus a fourth teenage generation is strong, opposite opinions about how to achieve that goal. Some individuals like considerable biblical content and explanation of that content. Other people prefer that considerable storytelling accompany and illustrate life principles from the text.

Action Possibility: Obtain helpful feedback to strengthen the impact of preaching by distributing the following survey sheet on Sunday morning:

Opinion Survey

1. What do you usually remember about my sermons (check only one)?
___ central theme ___ major points ___ illustrations ___ biblical references
 2. What emotions do my sermon *most often* evoke in you?
___ thankfulness ___ indifference ___ hope ___ anger ___ love
 3. In what way does my sermons *most often* come across to you (check only one)?
___ a logical discourse ___ a conversation ___ a passionate appeal ___ a story ___
a gloomy assessment of reality ___ a spiritual pep talk ___ a rambling discourse
 4. Do I preach too long?
___ yes ___ no
 5. Do my sermons help you?
___ never ___ sometimes ___ often ___ always
 6. How can I do a better job of preaching?
-

Ask people not to sign their names, as this tends to distort their information in a rose-colored way. Use the questionnaire on Sunday morning and collect the sheets immediately after giving people five minutes to complete them.

Warning: Do not send the Opinion Survey home with people and ask them to bring it back next week. Only a handful of people return the sheets. For the same reason, putting the survey in the church newsletter or distributing it by mail radically distorts the feedback because so few people return them; generally only (1) older people who have time to fill out forms, (2) people who really like the pastor's preaching, or (3) people who strongly dislike the pastor's sermon style.

Action Possibility: A one-half-sheet bulletin insert lists the two, three, or four points of the sermon outline, with two sub-points under each one and a blank space for notes. Each of the major points usually has a biblical text quotation that either illustrates that point or from which the point is derived. This "miniature flip chart" helps worshipers more clearly see and retain the sermon's major thesis, while communicating the biblical foundation and leaving space for real-life illustrations of the life principles that emerge from the text.

Action Possibility: Many clergy and lay speakers find helpful ideas in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets 20, Speaker Skills: How Not to Sweat It!* The resource includes sections such as development of (1) a sharp focus for each sermon and (2) how to prepare what homiletics professor Clyde Fant calls an "oral manuscript" that many pastors find simultaneously reduces preparation time and improves delivery. (Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for information about this and all thirty-four *Nuggets Volumes*.) Joseph M. Webb's book, *Preaching without Notes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press) also provides valuable ideas that support the "oral manuscript" concept, especially helpful in communicating with worshipers who grew up watching well-trained TV professionals deliver information with the aid of a teleprompter.

Action Possibility: An excellent, inexpensive source of several homiletics tools is available through a subscription to *Preaching Today*; visit www.preachingtoday.com to learn more about this set of tools.

C. Symbols. The basic story line of Scripture is Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Redemption, Consummation. Symbols, the language of the unconscious, also convey that story. Symbols help people see and experience hidden meaning.

In the early 1500s, Protestant reformers frowned on the symbolic arts, in favor of honoring God's Word in printed form. Why did this paradigm shift happen now, instead of during earlier centuries? One part of the answer is new technology: inexpensive printing via the recently invented printing press and increased worshiper literacy rates made this new viewpoint possible.

Protestant reformers such as Luther felt that the ritual of honoring saints, one for each day of the year, overshadowed the work of Christ. Thus, when Protestants removed the saints from worship and church buildings, they also removed much of the visual symbolism. The New England Puritans took this austerity to extremes. Some of their successor denominations, such as the Quakers and various Baptist groups, relaxed that austerity a bit. But their worship spaces contain few visual adornments, compared to more symbol-oriented faith groups such as Catholics.

D. Worship Leader Behaviors. Worship is a drama in which Christ is the play re-presented. Worship-leader behaviors influence whether the service is effective or ineffective drama.

Historic examples: For Old Testament worshipers, burnt offerings spoke as powerfully as words. To New Testament worshipers, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Christ, our Passover Lamb" and urged people to "keep the festival," associating Easter with the Jewish Passover celebration (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Today, the *Sacraments* mean "sign-acts."

The worship drama has four acts:

1. Assembling the people
2. Scripture reading and preaching
3. Breaking bread, pouring wine, and the prayers of thanksgiving
4. Sending the people forth

Consider the following examples of how worship-leader behaviors influence worship drama.

Pulpit Personality Warmth: A denominational executive says he attended a worship service where neither of the pastors smiled during the entire service. In another church he attended, the pastor not only did not smile; he exhibited a countenance and voice of sternness throughout the service. Church people quickly take on the attitudes of their quarterback.

Action Possibility: A video of our service can reveal unintentional quirks.

Starting Gate Clue: Congregations that want a joyful, celebrative service do not ask a low-energy worship leader to give the words of welcome and greeting. When that happens, many worshipers get a depressive, downer feeling and carry it throughout the rest of the service.

Announcements: Inform people about church activities, but more than five minutes of oral announcements is irritating to members and irrelevant to visitors (making them feel like outsiders at a family reunion). Lengthy announcements also drain away spiritual energy that should characterize the beginning of every worship service.

Action Possibility: The pastor and/or worship leader, not other persons, should make all announcements. These should happen *only* before or early in the service. Keep announcements short. Be enthusiastic. Make no more than three per service.

Effective worship uses appropriate communication style and methods. Effective worship has a 2000s feeling, not a 1950s feeling. Some people ask, "Why does worship have to change? If it was good enough for our grandparents, why isn't it good enough for us?"

The answer: worship does not have to change—unless you want people to attend.

In 1610, the colonial legislature in Virginia adopted a three-level series of penalties for failure to attend Sunday morning worship. One absence was punished with forfeiture of one week's provisions. People who skipped church twice got a whipping. The punishment for three

unexcused absences was death, a law that took seriously Moses' rule in the Old Testament book of Exodus. (Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend* [Viking Press], p. 74)

Can you get your state to pass such a law? Probably not! Therefore, construct your worship communication style and methods along post-2000 lines.

If we visit the mission field in a distant land, we learn that communicating Christ's message in that culture requires a different style than in our hometown. Likewise, contemporary American culture is a mission field that requires something other than a 1955 style.

Effective worship uses appropriate "pace." The demand for a faster pace applies to everything in the worship service—music, prayers, liturgy, announcements, and preaching. The term "pace" does not imply "rushed." It describes the speed of movement within and between the parts of the service.

Nothing that people look at happens slowly anymore:

- American TV producers hold each frame an average of two seconds.
- A childhood development expert says that you can tell the pace-difference between two generations by comparing the much slower pace of Mr. Rogers to the faster pace of Sesame Street.
- In 1968, the average length of a network-news "sound byte" from a presidential candidate was 42.3 seconds; in 1988 it was 9.8 seconds. In 1996 it was 7 seconds. (*U.S. News & World Report*, April 8, 1996, "Campaign '96: rating the media," p. 29)
- Major network news stories seldom exceed three minutes.

In this kind of communication culture, watching a pastor move slowly to the pulpit or watching a soloist stroll solemnly toward the microphone can cause worshipers to lose their attention focus. Watching a choir director go through the elaborate motions of getting a choir up and singing or watching ushers amble down the aisle inclines people to change mental channels.

Several factors affect the worshipper's sense of pace. Worship leaders are one of those strong influences. Their level of enthusiasm, transmitted in facial expression, tone of voice, and speed of delivery, makes a big difference. So does what they say. Hearing a worship leader announce a hymn three times, or make exciting comments such as "now, let's all sing together," signals people that the worship traffic is creeping rather than flowing.

Action Possibility: One way to accelerate the pace is to shorten some of the elements. Most people grow weary with five or six stanzas of a hymn. Older adults often complain about singing praise choruses over and over. Thus, singing an additional praise song or two, as part of a medley of praise songs, is better than singing the same one three or four times.

Action Possibility: Several short prayers are superior to one marathon. The Lord's Prayer is only thirty seconds, which surely means that verbosity is not a requirement for getting God's ear.

Action Possibility: Pace deficits become especially obvious at transition points. One pastor says they timed their dead space with a stopwatch. Twelve minutes of every service were blank spots, comprised of silent actions such as the pastor sitting down and the choir director standing up and moving into position. People who grew up with TV have trouble keeping their attention focused in this kind of setting. Time-tightening at all transition points increases worship quality.

Effective worship balances continuity and variation. All human beings need a balance between secure sameness and stimulating change. What do we say when we leave on vacation? "It sure is good to get away!" What do we say when we return from a vacation? "It sure is good to be home!" These twin needs are present in people as they worship. They need the security of the familiar. But they also need the stimulation of change.

Without variation each week, worship's traditional elements become like the familiar pictures hanging on the walls of our homes and offices: they lose the power to move us, because we no longer see them. Effective worship keeps the old and the new in creative tension, preventing the

familiar from becoming deadening dull and preventing the new from destroying the healing qualities of religious rituals.

Action Possibility: Keep the skeleton (the order of worship elements) the same, but give variety to the muscles each week (lead calls to worship, prayers, etc., in a variety of ways). This prevents the worship drama from unfolding with a sameness that has all the excitement of repeating the multiplication tables.

Action Possibility: In some congregations, the pastor and staff meet each Tuesday morning with members of the worship committee and the choir director to (1) do an evaluative post-mortem on last Sunday's service, (2) finalize plans for next Sunday, and (3) brainstorm ideas for the next four Sundays.

Effective worship uses formal drama in appropriate ways. During 2000 years of Christian history, the various formal types of worship drama have on-again, off-again careers.

Medieval-era congregations used dramatic skits to symbolically communicate stories of their faith and to educate. In marketplace settings, "Miracle Plays" and "Morality Plays" emerged as useful tools. Eventually, however, skits drifted toward bawdy and secular content, so Pope Innocent III (Papal Reign: 1198-1216) expelled formal drama from church buildings. By the 1960s, drama began reappearing in worship. Currently, many congregations have drama groups and occasionally schedule five-minute skits immediately prior to and as the theme of the sermon.

Christian dance symbolically proclaims, enacts, remembers, and celebrates the biblical story of salvation. As noted above, dance is rooted in Old Testament festivals (2 Chronicles 29:27; 2 Samuel 6:14; Psalms 149:3, 150:4). Continuing that tradition, second-century congregations felt that dance symbolized the dance of heaven. But soon after Christianity penetrated and converted the pagan culture, lewd and sexually suggestive pagan dance crept into the Christian festivals; so congregations eliminated dance from worship services. By the 1970s, contemporary dance reappeared in worship, met with a mixture of anxiety and affirmation by congregants. Currently, dance enjoys a mixed reputation in many congregations: Some people think dance is beneficial to the worship experience. Others feel annoyed. Still others see dance as an old-hat, outdated, 1970s worship element.

E. Worshipers. People connect with God through a variety of worship experiences.

Sensory (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste): Insufficient sensory components derived from the five senses leave us with insufficient attention-focus to fully engage our communication-reception faculties.

Emotional (symbolism and feeling): Insufficient emotional components leave us with only cerebral input. An Anglican vicar looked over the pulpit one Sunday morning and said, "I don't know who it was who interrupted our Sunday worship last week with the words 'Praise the Lord,' but in the future will he kindly remember that this is the house of God." That pastor was reminding people of the worship tradition of his congregation and denomination. However, he was also illustrating that the expression of emotion is not seen as a valid way to worship God in that church. The problem with that philosophy: people rarely make decisions, or even accept new information, on a purely rational basis. The intellect can only absorb what the emotions allow into the mind.

Rational (memory and logic): Insufficient rational components leave us with only emotion. This seldom happens in mainline churches. However, the worshipers often suffer from toxic overdoes of the rational and verbal, sending people home informed, but uninspired to act on what they heard.

Spiritual (mystery and imagination): Insufficient spiritual components leave us with too much of an intellectual, self-help orientation. People seek the transcendent in worship. Otherwise, they would have stayed home and read a psychology book or the morning paper. Without the use of spiritual mystery and imagination, Christ's presence is seldom attainable. Effective worship has a

spiritual action that includes but exceeds the elements of rational, emotional, physical, and sensory input.

Action (speech and movement): Insufficient action components leave us too passive to feel engaged in the process of connecting with God. When Protestants stopped asking people to kneel at the pews for prayer, they lost a major element of worship effectiveness.

Discussion Possibility: Without discussing them with other members of your group, think about last Sunday's worship and rank each of the five components listed above on a continuum of one to ten, with one being "not enough" and ten being "too much." Go around the circle in your group, and ask everyone to report their opinion. In what ways does the tabulation of those opinions instruct us about strengths and weaknesses in our services?

Reflection Possibility: Think about last Sunday's worship. What would you include in a list of powerful sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste experiences? At what point in the service were your emotions most touched? What part(s) of the service communicated easily understood rational truth(s)? What point(s) in the service spiritually connected you with God? What physical action(s) in the service helped you keep focused on God?

Effective worship is not a spectator sport. The difference between "performance worship" and "participant worship" approximates the difference between a restaurant that allows you to watch someone eat an excellent steak and a restaurant that allows you to eat the steak. The percentage of enthusiastic, repeat customers at the first kind of restaurant and "performance worship" is approximately the same.

How many times do your worshipers actually participate during the service in concrete ways? In most churches, increasing the number of participation opportunities increases the value of the service for the worshiper, especially in congregations with a high percentage of adult worshipers born between 1955 and 1990.

Action Possibility: In one church, as the children come forward in preparation for the children's sermon, the congregation sings "Jesus Loves the Little Children."

Action Possibility: In another congregation, as the children leave for "children's church" about one-third of the way through the service, the people sing "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart." For some, this joy may have a double meaning. But the participation adds a warm feeling to what, in most churches, is a dead spot during which people wait for the next part of the worship to begin.

F. Atmosphere. People who come to worship God also expect to feel positive about the social atmosphere of the service. When that fails to happen, their worship experience seems seriously compromised. Thus, the time-worn comment that expresses one of the greatest condemnations of a worship service: "Not a soul spoke to me!" Contemporary people seek churches that are caring places, not merely preaching spaces.

Several factors increase the caring qualities in a worship service. Which of the following ten examples are important in our congregation?

1. *Greeters are first-impression makers.* Seventy percent of visitors are socially ill at ease when they enter a church for the first time. One pastor says that greeters either warm the people's minds and hearts with the sense that someone is glad they came—or the greeters chill them, and the pastor has to defrost them before God can do anything with them. Schedule a training session that provides special information, such as peculiarities of your building configuration that often confuse visitors, and teaches how and how not to greet people. Use resources such as *The First 30 Seconds: Guide to Hospitality for Greeters and Ushers* by Joan Hershey (Fort Wayne, Indiana: New Life Ministries) [www.newlifeministries-nlm.org] or *Serving as a Church Greeter* by Leslie Parrott (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House).

Station two greeters at each entry door before Sunday school and before worship. Urge greeters to (a) arrive 15 minutes before start time, (b) be gregarious, and (c) introduce new attendees to other church members. Do not ask one of the existing groups or classes to assume this responsibility. Nor should you invite members to serve as greeters on an alphabetical-rotation basis. Ask for volunteers who feel called to this ministry, and select people who possess the following competencies: relational skill, the gift of hospitality or encouragement, outgoing personality, and smiling face. Some of the newest members make excellent greeters, since they are well aware of how people feel who visit the first time.

Many congregations with large buildings develop a building-map folder that entry-door greeters can hand to new people. The map directs newcomers to the nursery and various classrooms. The other side of the folder lists adult classes, their content focus, and their locations.

2. *Develop a skilled usher team.* Conduct training sessions each year, using books such as *The First 30 Seconds: Guide to Hospitality for Greeters and Ushers* by Joan Hershey (Fort Wayne, Indiana: New Life Ministries [www.newlifeministries-nlm.org]) or *A Guide to Church Ushering* by Homer Elford, (Nashville: Abingdon Press).

3. *Some midsize and large churches develop a “Secret Welcoming Team.”* These informal greeters mingle and chat with newcomers in the entry area before the worship service (also afterward if a coffee fellowship follows the service). Always watching for newcomers, Secret Welcoming Team members get acquainted with and help visitors feel at home. Members of these Secret Welcoming Teams neither wear greeter nametags nor verbally identify themselves to worshipers as hospitality workers. Churches with multiple services develop a four-to-six-person Secret Welcoming Team for each service, comprised of long-term attendees of that service.

4. *Many small and midsize churches use a pew-host system.* Ask all governing board members, committee members, and active participants in other groups to assume responsibility for greeting newcomers seated on their pew and the two pews immediately in front of them, noting and covering any blank spots where no active governing board, committee, or other group member sits. That prevents church visitors from getting in and out of worship without a warm greeting from members.

Do NOT publish this procedure on paper anywhere, ever, or advocate it from the pulpit; that makes the procedure seem impersonal and institutional rather than genuine friendliness. Discuss the idea and ask for commitment to it during a governing board meeting and in committee and other group meetings.

Many larger churches encourage a “one-minute ministry” after the benediction. Ask regular attendees to talk with someone they do not know *before* they talk with someone they know.

5. *Some small churches establish a “Nobody Sits Alone” team.* Five or six members of different ages agree to seek out and introduce themselves to newcomers and sit beside them in worship. This is done informally, with no name badges.

6. *Avoid publicly introducing visitors.* Newcomers expect the other worship-service attendees to be friendly but prefer to remain anonymous in the total crowd. Completing a line of information in the Ritual of Friendship Pad is fine with most of them, but public introductions are not.

Some smaller churches, especially those in small towns, arrive at a compromise by asking “whether anyone has worship guests this morning that they would like to introduce.” This allows members who wish to introduce visitors such as children, grandchildren, or friends from out of town to do so; but the procedure does not make local visitors feel uncomfortable by asking them to introduce themselves.

7. *Develop a “visitor friendly” worship bulletin.* Gather a group of new members and ask them what they found hard to understand in the worship bulletin. Ask them to rewrite that item so that it communicates clearly. If you sing the “Doxology” and the “Gloria Patria,” list the hymnal numbers. If you use the Lord’s Prayer, indicate whether you use debts and debtors, sins and sinners, or trespasses and those who trespass against us. In Communion service instructions, print whether you invite worship guests to partake *above the line* that announces the pastor giving the Words of Institution and Invitation.

Why should Lutheran and Episcopal congregations print the complete liturgy in worship bulletins every week? Many first-time worship visitors have no background in liturgical worship. Without a printed liturgy, guests’ frustration in trying to follow the flow of hymns and responsive readings distracts them from experiencing a sense of God’s presence in worship.

8. *Accept and encourage casual attire.* In Exodus, Moses gave careful prescriptions regarding what priests must wear, warning that God would strike them dead without the proper uniform. We have no evidence that this has happened in recent years but plenty of proof that younger adults intend to worship in casual clothing. That is a sharp shift for many older adults. To help with this transition, some churches designate each August “Camp Meeting Month” and encourage informal dress during that time. Other churches designate the entire summer as casual-attire months. This helps everyone remember that the first goal of worship, according to Jesus, is to do it “in Spirit and in truth” rather than in a particular style of clothing. In other churches, the younger adults, who usually feel more comfortable with informal dress, decide to “model” that attire so other young adults who visit worship will feel more comfortable. Remember that a substantial number of young adult men in our culture do not own a suit and feel excluded in a congregation whose unwritten rules require that “uniform” for worshipers.

9. *Keep the service length visitor-friendly.* The average morning worshipers in mainline congregations (particularly males, fringe-area members, nonmembers, and males who are attending reluctantly to placate their wives) carry a contract in their head that says church services should be sixty minutes long. When church services go beyond an hour and ten minutes, they start feeling irritated. Beyond an hour and fifteen minutes, they often leave the building feeling that someone in leadership has broken the contract. (This principle does not apply to Charismatic-theology congregations, Hispanic congregations, African-American congregations, and Independent Bible Churches where sermons often run forty minutes; but it applies to most mainline Anglo churches, whose worship guests would be attending another kind of congregation if they were comfortable with a super-lengthy service.) Therefore, when adding additional features to the worship service on a “special Sunday,” delete or shorten other standard features, thereby keeping the service in the neighborhood of one hour.

10. *Avoid the erroneous assumption that scheduling one Sunday morning service rather than two services increases congregational friendliness.* Ninety-five percent of churches that have had two services and shift back to one service experience a decrease in average attendance of 15 percent or more and a similar reduction in offerings. Some people prefer the earlier hour. They stop attending or attend elsewhere if leaders discontinue “my service.” Friendliness, quality worship, and congregational unity do not result from having everyone in the same room at the same time once a week. Unity comes from wholeheartedly working together to achieve worthy goals. Many of America’s strongest and friendliest congregations have three or four or five worship services per weekend. Yes, many strong Southern Baptist congregations have only one service. However, that practice derives primarily from their strong tradition of insisting that 100 percent of adult worship attendees also attend a Sunday school class.

Action Possibility: Use the following statistics to inform and motivate people:

- Ninety-six percent of visitors who do not think we are friendly will not complain to anyone in our church.
- Ninety percent will not return to our church.
- Each of those visitors will tell nine other people.
- Thirteen percent of those visitors will tell twenty other people.

Action Possibility: Ask these five questions to surface other friendliness-atmosphere factors:

1. Does our church have ample parking spaces?
2. Do we have parking spaces designated for visitors?
3. Do we have greeters in the parking lot?
4. Do we have adequate signs directing visitors to parking, rest rooms, nursery, sanctuary, and Sunday school rooms?
5. Do our greeters help people find the nursery?

Action Possibility: Conduct individual telephone interviews with all of the adults who have joined our church during the last two years. Ask two questions:

1. "The first two times you visited our worship service, which of the following best described the atmosphere?"
 - Extremely warm and friendly
 - Friendly
 - Pleasant but somewhat distant
 - Cold and aloof
2. "The first few times you visited our fellowship dinners or other meetings, which of the following best describes what happened?"
 - You found yourself standing or sitting alone while other members talked with each other.
 - A few people spoke in a courteous way but left you to break into circles of conversation on your own initiative.
 - One or two people went out of their way to include you, but the others acted as if you were not there.
 - Everyone included you in conversational circles as if you had been a member forever.

G. Space. No building or architectural style guarantees a meeting with God. Nevertheless, while God is everywhere, people more frequently find God in some places than in others.

Questions to ask about worship space:

- Is the sanctuary lighting adequate?
- Is the sound system of good quality?
- Is the sanctuary decorated in a way that joyfully points toward God? Or does it have the décor of an airplane hanger? Even in the first unit of a new congregation, colorful, changeable banners can brighten sanctuary personality.

How full are the pews or chairs?

- Less than 50 percent full seems uncomfortably empty to newcomers: some of them may wonder what the people who are not here know that they do not know. Churches that were formerly much larger in membership sometimes deal with this dilemma by removing several back pews and creating an after-worship fellowship area in the freed-up space. (If you remove back pews, tell people, “We are going to remove several front pews and slide all the others forward.” The thought of giving up back pews traumatizes many church people.) Other churches move the pews several inches further apart or remove some front pews.
- A worship space that is more than 80 percent full feels uncomfortably full to newcomers. That means the church needs an additional service, an enlarged sanctuary, or relocation to a different site.

Does the building welcome disability-challenged worshippers? Eventually, public opinion will force local communities to require that churches abide by disabilities-act laws that apply to all public buildings. Much higher motives should also encourage congregations’ leaders to move in that direction.

Action Possibilities: Obtain a copy of *That All May Worship—An Interfaith Welcome to People With Disabilities* or other recommended material for churches from the National Organization on Disability (www.nod.org), 910 16th Street, NW Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006. See *Dimensions of Faith and Congregational Ministries with persons with developmental disabilities and their families* for a wealth of resources, available from the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, NJ at its www.rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter Web site.

H. Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers. Young parents who shop for churches often evaluate the nursery as carefully as the worship service. They look elsewhere for a church home if the nursery fails to meet their expectations.

Young adults appreciate a church nursery in which two of the attendants are present every week. For that reason, *paid nursery attendants seldom cost anything*. Churches recover their salary or salaries in contributions from young adults who become regular attendees instead of continuing to shop for a church that meets their nursery-attendant standards. Ninety-five percent of congregations with a totally-volunteer nursery-attendant system throw away more money than they save. In the 5 percent of congregations that succeed with a volunteer system, one person acts as an unpaid volunteer who is present every Sunday.

Due to the danger of child abuse and law suites, two attendants must be present in every child-care room. Wise congregations run background checks on all volunteers and paid staff who related to children and youth, *including church members*. To obtain professional assistance, consult your denomination’s regional or district office (some of denominational offices have contracts with companies that do background checks for all of their congregations) or consult with a local law enforcement agency that may be able to recommend a company.

Churches with fewer than 300 in average worship attendance find it beneficial to employ Sunday morning nursery staff from outside the congregation. This policy makes it easier to maintain high standards of performance and reduces the possibility of church conflict if the personnel committee finds it necessary to dismiss an employee.

To assist the paid nursery staff, some churches establish a Nursery Ministry Team in which people of every age range, if they feel called to that ministry, can participate.

Avoid using a rotation system of young-parent volunteers to assist the paid nursery staff. That (1) keeps young parents out of worship, (2) reduces the number of parents willing to leave their children in the nursery, and (3) encourages some young parents to shop elsewhere for a church home.

Most young adults prefer mature-in-years nursery attendants. While high school students may be equally capable, young parents who do not know these youth have no way to be aware of that.

To address nursery décor, furnishings, toys, and staffing issues, ask the governing board to appoint a three-person taskforce comprised of young mothers with infants and toddlers. Ask them to visit and interview the nursery supervisor in three other congregations that have a high-quality nursery. As part of their study, they may wish to obtain a copy of *Nursery Smart Pages* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light), [www.gospellight.com]. The taskforce recommends improvements to appropriate governance groups, such as the trustees and the personnel committee.

I. Children. Make sure that the worship service genuinely includes children, rather than merely tolerates the presence of children. To accomplish that goal with maximum effectiveness, congregations recognize the two very different viewpoints among today's parents:

- Research indicates that about 50 percent of parents want their young children in worship with them, feeling that the “modeling” of worship by parents develops a child's appreciation for worship, even when he or she does not understand many of the words or worship rituals.
- The other 50 percent of parents (1) have difficulty experiencing worship with their children present and/or (2) feel that their children learn to dislike worship if it bores them, and/or (3) believe that children benefit more from age-graded worship or other activities styled for their developmental stage.

Whichever of those two parental viewpoints our congregation's leaders believe is best, and/or believes that all parents should believe is best, worship visitors should feel that our congregation welcomes and provides meaningful experiences for children. Three examples seen in small, midsize, and large congregations across the United States:

- A gifted layperson or three-person team that provides children's moments each Sunday
- A special worship bulletin, designed for children and available from church supply companies
- A “kid's kit” containing crayons and items for small children, which families return to the foyer after worship

After recognizing the two very different parental opinions cited above, many midsize and large congregations program to address both preferences—either with multiple Sunday school hours or a “Children's Church” simultaneous with one or more of the worship services. That kind of programming is usually impractical in smaller churches, but is especially valuable among midsize and large congregations that wish to attract and minister to unchurched young-adult families. For information on how to conduct a children's church, obtain books such as *Godly Play—A Way of Religious Education* by Jerome W. Berryman (Nashville: Abingdon Press).

Many large congregations schedule double Sunday school sessions—at approximately 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.—to more efficiently utilize available space. Most such churches use one of the following options:

- “Children's Church” simultaneous with each worship service
- “Children's Moments,” following which the children leave for Children's Church or Sunday school in another part of the building
- “Children's Activities Time” in another part of the building that is *not* a children's worship service
- Different curriculum with each of the two Sunday school hours

Large churches that shift to year-around triple worship services with double Sunday schools at the second and third hours should consider using one of those four options. Otherwise, the congregation cannot provide an opportunity for the approximately 50 percent of parents who prefer that their children not be in worship with them to attend an adult Sunday school class.

Study-Discussion Session #2—How Can We Evaluate Our Worship Service?

We increase the likelihood that our worship services spiritually enrich all four generations in our community's culture by asking questions that help us to evaluate in more objective ways.

I. Asking the Right Questions?

Asking appropriate analytical questions does not guarantee that we will obtain accurate answers but it greatly increases the likelihood.

A. Does our worship connect with God? The root of the English word worship is “worthship.” Christian worship declares the worthship of the God who revealed His nature and message in Jesus Christ. Other kinds of worship declare the worthship of other gods. Without consciously intending to, we can make fatal substitutions in designing a worship service.

Examples:

- We can substitute the worthship of *tradition* for the worship of God (bringing the ashes of the last campfire instead of the fire).
- We can substitute the worthship of *psychology* (bringing a discussion about human behavior instead of what God tells us about human behavior).

No matter how well-intentioned its leaders, worship that does not begin and continue with the God revealed in Christ as its central focus becomes something other than Christian worship.

Worship is not education. Worship is not music performance. Worship is not singing hymns. Worship is not fellowship. Worship *includes* those components, but *worship is primarily prayer*—a highly organized form of prayer. Does prayer play a prominent role in our service?

Action Possibility: Audibly expressing prayer concerns is practical only in churches whose worship attendance averages fewer than 100. To avoid excluding timid people and newcomers, larger churches must use a different method. Example: Print the following at the top of each worship bulletin. “Our church believes in prayer. You will find prayer-request cards in the pew racks. Please write special prayer requests on the cards. Ushers will collect the cards early in the service. The pastor includes them in the pastoral prayer and places them on the altar. Our prayer ministry team picks them up following the service and prays for those needs this week.”

Action Possibility: Print in the worship bulletin each week under the “Prayers” section the joys, concerns, and names of people for whom we want to pray. List the names in categories such as Prayer Concerns & Joys.....In Care Centers.....In College.....In the Military Service.....etc. Add to and subtract individuals from these prayer categories each week.

B. Does our worship connect with people? Worship can focus on the God revealed in Christ; yet fail to connect with people in this particular community's culture, at this time in history. A news report from Alabama said that dull worship services have led to an exodus of African-American members from Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregations. “German music is just not attuned to what many of us are accustomed to and grew up with,” said Ulmer Marshall, pastor of an African-American congregation in Mobile, Alabama. (“Dull Worship Loses Blacks,” *The National Christian Reporter*, July 26, 1991, p. 1)

European-Americans in every denomination can see that loss of “people connection,” but may experience greater difficulty in seeing that it happens in their own congregations. *We often replace worship with traditions about how to worship.* This is like trying to start a campfire with ashes from campfires that burned brightly in previous centuries. Examples:

- Until the 1960s, Catholic Churches celebrated the Mass in a dead language. Why did Catholics change to English? Latin was corroding the people-connection of their worship services.

- Likewise, when Protestant worship leaders substitute a worship format that spoke to people two centuries ago on another continent—or a format that spoke to young adults in the 1950s on this continent—they corrode their people connection.

Failing to accommodate our worship style to the present community, the present cultural expressions, and the present generation of people who live nearby means we fail at the essential definition of the word “priest”—bridge builder. Effective bridges connect with both sides of the creek. Effective worship connects the Christian God and the people in this particular culture. If our worship is not people-oriented, the bridge does not get built. Many people leave the service with that empty feeling you get when you agree to meet someone for lunch and he or she never arrives.

An African-American pastor frequently uses the following oral worship liturgy, asking worshippers to repeat the following phrases after him, one phrase at a time. (Do not print the words in the worship bulletin; that destroys much of an oral liturgy’s power.)

I am God’s child.
 I am God’s child.
 I may be rich.
 I may be poor.
 I may be exciting.
 I may be a bore.
 But I’m still God’s child.
 I may be black.
 I may be white.
 I may be free.
 I might be uptight.
 But I’m still God’s child.
 I may be yellow.
 I might be brown.
 Once was lost,
 But now I’m found.
 Mistreated,
 Unseated,
 But never defeated;
 Because I am
 God’s child;
 I am
 God’s child.

(T. Garrott Benjamin, Jr., Light of the World Christian Church, Indianapolis)

That pastor knows how to build a bridge to the real needs of real people.

His oral liturgy may not have quite the same power with an Anglo-American congregation, but worship leaders can apply the principle it illustrates: namely; connecting God’s Word with the people in a particular community in today’s world, not people in a previous decade, century, or continent.

Someone asked, “Should we give people what they *want* in worship, or should we give people what we feel they *should have* in worship?”

The answer is, “Neither one!”

We should give people what best communicates the message of Jesus Christ to them and helps them connect with God.

We are not owners of the worship service. We are stewards of the mysteries of God. Our job is to be faithful to the transmission process. A prominent world mission consultant says that nearly half of new missionaries drop out by the end of their first four-year term and that the most important quality a missionary must have is adaptability.

Every congregation is in a mission field, and *adaptability* is one of the keys to building bridges between people in a pagan American culture and the God revealed in Christ. When we substitute cherished traditions for helping people connect with God, we conduct memorial services to a fire gone out.

C. Is our worship real-life oriented? Many pastors remember what happened when they began a new pastorate. Unpacking ate several days of their time. They wanted to make a good first impression. So they dug out of their sermon barrel several messages that people in the previous parish said were wonderful. Some of those reruns were well received in the new congregation. In other cases, halfway through the sermon, a stark realization gripped the preacher: “This dog don’t hunt!” Later that week, the pastor realized that the reread sermon made a real-life connection with people in the former church but not here. (Later, as a pastor becomes acquainted with people in the new congregation, conversational interactions create knowledge of how to make real-life connections *here*.) The same principle applies to the other worship components—prayers, hymns, liturgies, etc. Worship that is God-connected and culture-connected must also connect with real-life.

Action Possibility: Many pastors like to meet each week with a sermon-planning team that gives them “feed-forward” as they develop sermons for coming weeks.

Action Possibility: Twice a year, include a 3x5 inch card in each worship bulletin that reads, “Without signing your name, please list two or three issues that you struggle with in trying to apply the Christian faith in your life. The ushers will collect these in a few minutes. We will use your responses in planning worship and sermons during the next few months.”

D. Does our worship content recognize that people differ from one another? Gordon McDonald identifies six kinds of “leading instincts of the soul.”

“Majesty: The Aesthetic Instinct. The aesthetic seeks to be overwhelmed and impressed by the majesty and infinitude of God. He is most alive within himself when worship, both personal and corporate, is accomplished in an environment of beauty, order, tradition, and artistic integrity....

“Joy: The Experiential Instinct. An experientialist wants to ‘feel’ the presence of God and to respond with the full range of emotions and even physical expression—clapping ... singing and praying with unbridled enthusiasm

“Achievement: The Activist Instinct. The activist sees all of Christ-following as service. He wants to worship by communicating with God about good things that need to get done. He is driven by compassion for the disadvantaged, or by prophetic anger against oppression, or by a strong sense of urgency that many people in this world have yet to discover Christ’s invitation to follow Him

“Listening: The Contemplative Instinct. The contemplative’s instinct is to meet God in the quiet of his inner life. He is greatly concerned that many people have all but fenced off vast areas of the soul by not paying attention to the spiritual disciplines

“Truth: The Student Instinct. Truth is the student’s great quest. He believes that God is most profoundly discovered in Bible study. And that means, he says, that the Christ-follower ought to be a constant searcher of the Scripture

“Love: The Relational Instinct. The relationalist is convinced that God is most present and intimate when people experience an unusual bonding together for fellowship or worship or mutual support” (*Discipleship Journal*, Issue Seventy 1992)

Action Possibility: Identify your personal “leading instinct.” Go around the group and ask everyone to name their “leading instinct.” Is your group a fairly reliable sample of the kinds of people in your entire congregation? Should your content speak to all six kinds of Christians? If so, where is your worship already strong? Where do you want to make it stronger?

II. Does Our Worship Style Connect with All Five Generations?

Older adults quite naturally think that younger adults will have a meaningful worship experience under the same circumstances they did when they were that age. During centuries when the medium for transmitting information from mind to mind remained static, that was probably true. During centuries when information-transmission modes radically shift, as they have during the years since 1950, nothing could be more inaccurate.

Worship authorities spell out the differences in how older adults and younger adults define spiritually meaningful worship in many ways. Looking at several sets of those disparities gives a better picture than looking at only one of them:

1. Meditation versus Celebration. Generally speaking, people born before 1946 (fewer than 16 percent of Americans) define spiritually meaningful worship with the word *meditation*. Generally speaking, people born after 1945 (more than 84 percent of Americans) define spiritually meaningful worship with the word *celebration*. Therefore, many adults born since 1945 who attend a meditation-focused worship service say that the music tempo feels like a funeral service and decide to attend church elsewhere. But to many older adults, a celebration style feels like a football game. They complain about it not containing enough of the traditional liturgies and creeds that were popular in the more meditation-focused era of their young adulthood.

2. Traditional versus Contemporary. Other worship authorities use these two words to illustrate the differences in how those two age groups define spiritually meaningful worship. While an accurate distinction, *traditional* and *contemporary* confuse the issue, making each generation feel superior to the other. The older adults feel righteously “grounded on the rock.” The younger adults feel intelligently focused on present-day reality, proud of having escaped the muddy ruts of yesterday’s outdated customs.

3. Ceremony versus Enthusiasm. Other scholars contrast the worship styles typically preferred by younger and older generations this way: congregations with more young adults exhibit more *enthusiasm* elements in worship and fewer *ceremony* elements. For example, young adults say that when they applaud a children’s choir performance they are “participating with the children in worship.” Older adults may feel quite different about such public displays of enthusiasm in worship. Another example: in the American worship services that feature an electric guitar, and/or drums, and/or visual projection equipment, the worship attendees’ median ages are considerably younger. (Mark Chaves, *How Do We Worship?* [Bethesda, Maryland: The Alban Institute])

Whichever terms we prefer for picturing the differences in how older and younger generations define spiritually meaningful worship, the contrasting definitions were caused less by changes inside the churches during the last fifty years than by changes in the way information transmission occurs in our culture:

From 4000 BC to 1500 AD, information transmission was primarily oral. Thus, Jesus used parables to talk about God (stories for the ear and mind’s eye). After Emperor Constantine gave the Christian Church the seal of approval in 312 AD and congregations moved beyond the “house church” stage, the oral-information transmission mode continued to dominate worship. Few people could read and write. They memorized the hymns and creeds.

From 1500 AD to 1950 AD, information transmission shifted from oral and visual to print. Sixty years after Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1452 AD, Luther’s German Bible, which sold thousands of copies at unbelievably low prices, ushered in Protestantism with its focus on the written word. Hymns were printed on paper, along with responsive readings and the

creeds. Most information and learning was transmitted by “reading and reciting” rather than through memorization and symbols. Effective worship, especially for Protestants, became less like a ceremony and more like a meeting centered on singing “classic” hymns, obtaining doctrinal truth from the Bible, and preaching the message of Jesus Christ.

From 1950 AD to 2000 AD, information transmission shifted from print to broadcast. People who grew up watching television screens found it more natural to receive information visually than by reading and reciting. This broadcast era, now becoming even more firmly established by the ubiquitous computer screen as “the way to transmit information,” will likely continue for several hundred years. In the print era, conceptual language communicated truth through reading, logic, explanation of ideas, and detailed analysis. In the broadcast era, symbolic language communicates truth through participation, images, experiences, music, sound effects, voice vibration, intuition, and imagination. (Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication* [Minneapolis: Fortress])

In the broadcast era, effective worship is less a ceremony or a meeting and more a celebration of the mysteries of the faith “once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)” and now offered to us. In the broadcast era, music, motivational preaching, personal testimony, and drama drive home the relevance of the biblical message for everyday life.

Aided by amplification technology and numerous electronic instruments, music takes on a much larger role than in previous decades. Music artists influence the transmission of the faith as much as the pastor’s preaching because the music “gathers” people. In the absence of “our kind of music,” young adults look for a church where worship leaders understand that truth is transmitted to their generation through a broadcast mode; not just through oral, visual, or print modes. Worship experiences that some older adults pejoratively call “entertainment,” young adults call meaningful communication with God.

Churches that plan to communicate biblical and spiritual truth to both older and younger generations have two options. They offer separate worship services to meet both preferences, or they offer one worship service that “blends” the format, style, and pace in ways that meet the needs of both birth-date groups. Both options require the pre-1946 birth-date leaders to (a) recognize this need and (b) decide to make the sacrifice of going beyond their personal preferences in order to transmit the Christian faith to future generations.

III. Does Our Music Connect with All Four Generations?

How does our church answer the following questions about its worship music? Churches that answer all of these questions in the affirmative connect with all four generations. Churches that answer one or more of these questions in the negative may not be alive two decades from now.

A. Is our hymn-singing tempo appropriate? One of the most commonly heard complaints in declining-membership churches: “Why does the music drag? Can’t we pick it up a little?” If the hymn singing feels like a funeral, it probably is a funeral—a gradual funeral of this congregation.

Action Possibility: Conduct a one-minute survey during morning worship. On a half-sheet that you insert in the worship bulletin, say the following:

“Our worship leaders want to provide the best possible spiritual atmosphere in worship. Please do not sign your name. We will collect these sheets during morning worship.

1. Please check your age: age 10-19 ____, age 20-44 ____, age 45-65 ____, age 65 plus ____.
2. Please check your opinion: Our hymn singing tempo frequently feels too fast ____, seems about right ____, seems a bit slow ____, or tends to drag ____.”

Warning: To avoid distorting the results, do *not* administer the survey at any other time than during a worship service. To avoid having today's hymn-singing distort the opinions, set aside a specific one-minute time slot *early in the service*. Ask *all* adults and teenagers to complete the survey, even if they have no strong opinions on this matter. Tabulate the sheets by stacking the four age-group sheets together to see if worshiper age produces a discernable opinion pattern.

Action Possibility: Ask the choir director, organist, and pianist to select a six-person monitoring team, with equal representation from ages twenty to eighty. About once a month for the next six months, those three music leaders huddle with that six-person monitoring team for five minutes immediately after morning worship to raise the question, "How is the tempo?" Do not select the six people from the choir, since choir members often have difficulty perceiving how the tempo comes across to the congregation.

B. Do we use familiar hymns? In some congregations, many worshipers complain, "Why don't we ever sing any hymns that I know?" Four factors increase the frequency of that irritation:

1. Worshipers and the people who pick the hymns approach this issue from opposite directions. Musicians and staff members pick hymns that seem to compliment their theme for the day and their concept of good worship music. Pew sitters, by contrast, want to sing familiar hymns that allow them to *participate* in worship.
2. One-half of the worshipers who sing do not think they do it well.
3. Almost one-half of the worshipers cannot read music. (Linda J. Clark, "The Music in Churches Project: The Views from the Pews," *Action Information*, July/August 1992)
4. On average, 61 percent of the people who join every congregation in the United States each year come from some other denominational family. Because of this "denomination-switching ecumenism," church leaders cannot expect the same familiarity with hymns as they enjoyed three decades ago.

Action Possibility: Appoint a taskforce of sixteen people, evenly distributed across the age range of twenty through eighty. Ask this group to meet once or twice and go through the hymnbook, aided by a pianist. With each hymn, ask the group, "Do you know this hymn?" If twelve out of the sixteen people know the hymn, the congregation probably does. If fewer than twelve know the hymn, many worshipers have a tough time singing it. From this procedure, compile a list that you might call "the hit tunes" or "The Hymns Our Congregation Knows." The choir director and pastor use those hymns, occasionally teaching new hymns (perhaps a "hymn of the month") to enlarge the congregational repertoire. Accidentally exposing people to unknown hymns usually means that they do not learn them and feel bored in worship.

C. Are our hymns easy to sing? Sing-able hymns also influence the quality of a congregation's worship experience. Only 49 percent of American worshipers read music. Then, too, a significant percentage of them grew up in other denominations and do not know our denomination's hymns. If the hymn is hard to sing and/or if the praise team and choir seem to feel unsure of how to sing it, worshipers' minds become more focused on the complexity of the music than on God.

Warning: Whether worshipers know the hymns and find them easy to sing is far more important than whether the hymns fit with the theme for that particular day's service. Without the qualities of familiarity and sing-ability, many worshipers feel excluded from their only personal opportunity to participate in the worship service—the congregational singing.

Yes, selecting hymns to fit the sermon and worship-theme for a particular Sunday has value. Yet if pastors and musicians conduct an exit poll as worshipers leave the sanctuary, an amazing number of people could not identify the "theme" of today's service. The worshipers would, however, know whether the hymn-singing edified them or wearied them. Remember: Worship is not about the music; worship is about God. When hymns fail to help people connect with God, the hymns' correlation with today's worship theme is irrelevant.

D. Do most of our worshipers actively participate in the hymn singing? Why do music leaders of a few congregations classify their worshipers as “passive” in hymn-singing habits? (Passive means that a sizeable percentage of worshipers do not sing at all, staring at the back of the pew in front of them until the hymn ends.) This kind of passivity habit usually derives from several years of selecting slow-paced, unfamiliar, difficult-to-sing hymns. Leaders find this pattern, once it has become habitual behavior by 30 percent to 40 percent of attendees, highly resistant to change.

Action Possibility: To protect worshipers from feeling that they are singing solos (especially in churches with sparsely populated pews), make sure you set the choir-microphone volume loud enough to carry the choir’s hymn-singing leadership throughout the sanctuary. Ask worshipers whether a too-high organ volume overshadows the choir and congregation’s singing, since that also discourages worshipers from singing. Frequent use of children’s choirs in which the children involve the congregation in hymn-singing can have value. Non-singing adults often follow children to places they will not follow music leaders and pastors.

Action Possibility: The “Digital Hymnal” is a valuable tool for (1) small congregations that cannot always secure a pianist or organist and (2) churches that want instrumental accompaniment for nursing-home worship, retreats, weddings, or other special occasions but do not always have a musician or equipment available. Its electronic brain contains twelve major hymnals from several denominations, plus many contemporary praise songs and other special-occasion selections. For information, contact denominational publishing houses, local music stores, or Synthia, Suncoast Systems, Inc. at the www.suncoastsys.com/synthia.htm Web site.

E. Does our congregational singing include all five hymn and praise song types EVERY week? Every congregation, unless it is dying or located in a restricted-property-purchase retirement community, contains four kinds of people who have four different music preferences:

☉ A high percentage of people born before 1927 and about 25 percent of people born 1927-1945 prefer the old gospel hymns (most of which were written between 1870 and 1935). A few examples: His Eye Is on the Sparrow, Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine! The Church in the Wildwood, In the Garden, and What a Friend We Have in Jesus. Why does that age group prefer those types of hymns? Research indicates that people “bond” to music, both sacred and secular, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. Many pastors complain about the poor theology in such hymns, but such criticisms miss the point. When people of that generation sing the old gospel hymns, they experience a sense of the presence of God that otherwise does not happen.

☉ At least three-fourths of people born 1927 through 1945 prefer the older, classic hymns (written between 1520 and 1870). A few examples: The Church’s One Foundation; Holy, Holy, Holy, copyright 1826; A Mighty Fortress, copyright 1528; O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing, written in the 1700s; and the Wesley hymns from the 1700s. When sixteen million people took off their uniforms after World War II, they filled sanctuaries that featured those hymns, accompanied by organ music and great choirs. That generation’s “bond” to those hymns will never come undone.

☉ Approximately three out of four people born from 1946 through 1964 prefer contemporary hymns and praise songs composed between 1960 and 1978 or set to a different tune during that period. A few examples: They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love, This Is the Day that the Lord Has Made, Father, I Adore You, and He Has Made Me Glad. These adults also enjoy contemporary choral responses, as contrasted with centuries-old choral responses.

☺ A large percentage of post-1964-birth-date adults and teenagers prefer songs from one of the two newer waves of praise songs composed between 1978 and yesterday.

To avoid one of the following negative outcomes, (1) alienating the older adults or (2) gradually shrinking in membership over the next decade, congregational hymn-singing must connect with the spiritual preferences of all four adult generations. How can congregations avoid one or both of those negative outcomes?

- About 50 percent of healthy, effective churches across the United States offer two kinds of worship services on Sunday morning: a traditional service at 8:00 a.m. or 8:30 a.m. that uses only gospel and traditional hymns and an 11:00 a.m. contemporary service that uses one or both types of contemporary praise songs noted above. Many large churches that schedule a contemporary service at the Sunday school hour report significant numbers of unchurched young adults with small children attending at that time.
- The other 50 percent of healthy, effective churches across the United States offers one type of Sunday morning service—repeated one, two, or three times—that “blends” traditional hymns, praise songs, and styles in ways that address both preferences.

Both options, two styles of worship or one kind of blended service, require all four adult generations to (1) recognize this need and (2) decide to make the sacrifice of going beyond their personal preferences in order to build a strong church for future generations.

Warning: The crucial factor in worship music (why people flock to some churches and boycott others) is not the choir or special music presentations; rather, *it is the congregational hymn singing*. For example, in some small-town congregations across the southern part of the United States, a “special music” presentation style called “Country Gospel” is popular. While this style is often appreciated in presentations by musical groups in small-town southern churches, do not confuse this style in special music with the necessity of scheduling contemporary praise songs in congregational singing, as outlined above. Then, too, the use of Country Gospel as worship hymns that the congregation sings decreases worship attendance in the same way that *exclusive use* of the old gospel hymns and traditional hymns decrease worship attendance among age-eighteen-to forty-four young adults.

Warning: A huge number of variables determine which of the two options listed above a specific congregation should choose. Do not rush to judgment on this crucial decision!

Study-Discussion Session #3 below addresses many of the variables our congregation’s leaders should consider as we seek the best possible answer to the question, “Should we (1) offer a ‘blended’ service(s), or (2) a separate, ‘contemporary’ service?”

Musician Hannibal Peterson, author of *African Portraits*, says, “The purpose of music is to heal people—to heal them of their fear, their hopelessness, and their darkness.” Music can transform the human spirit from a negative focus to a positive focus. (That power is quite apparent with African-American “spirituals” during and following the slavery years.)

What mainline, Anglo church leaders do not fully understand: If the hymns fit the culture and age range of church attendees, congregational singing has the power to heal people.

What many mainline, Anglo church leaders understand even less: If the hymns and music are *not* indigenous to the generation and culture of people who attend, the music bores instead of heals. Many bored worshipers shop elsewhere—looking for congregations in which the music *does heal* their broken and misdirected spirits.

Songwriter Bob Dylan was speaking for many young adults when he said, “I’ve learned more from the songs than I’ve learned from rabbis, preachers, and evangelists. I believe the songs.” (*Newsweek*, October 6, 1997) In the 1950s, young adults believed God’s Word in preachers’ sermons. Now, if young adults believe God’s Word in songs, they show up to hear the sermons.

F. Do we use a variety of musical instruments? The Edict of Milan (313 AD) banned instrumental music, “because pagan influences might infiltrate sacred worship.” That prohibition did not permanently stick. In approximately 730 AD, the first organ was used in a worship service, and the instrument became increasingly popular.

At different times in Christian history, other instruments have been popular. For example, in the late 1800s and early 1900s many large congregations had an orchestra; some buildings of that era still have orchestra pits in front of the pulpit. By 1950, church orchestras were out of style; most congregations seemed to feel that the organ pipe was the only instrument the Holy Spirit can use to help people make a spiritual connection with God. Today, many congregations are going back to the “old days” of 100 years ago by using a wider variety of instruments. Examples: keyboards, synthesizers, brass ensembles, woodwinds, guitars, and drums.

Musical instruments add spiritual energy to worship services, especially for young adults who define meaningful worship as “celebration.” Using a variety of musical instruments is not as essential to worship as is using all five generations of hymns and praise songs, but the multiple-instrument approach has spiritual value for most young adults. Prophecy: Musicians fixated on organ music will feel increasingly lonely in worship during the next decade. Many of their congregations’ young adults are out-migrating to more contemporary worship climates.

Some people put down musical instruments in worship by saying, “We should not be trying to entertain people.”

A tongue-in-cheek observer of many mainline worship services responded, “Don’t worry; there is little danger of anyone feeling entertained in our congregation.”

So what if they are entertained! The dictionary defines entertainment as “capturing and holding attention.” Will worship communicate Christ’s message without getting and holding people’s attention? Probably not!

G. Do we have the largest possible number of youth choirs, children’s choirs, and hand-bell choirs? Multiple choirs increase worship attendance, worship quality, evangelistic effectiveness, and congregational participation.

Then, too, hundreds of research studies indicate the positive effect of musical activity on children. Music engages both brain hemispheres simultaneously. In children, musical activity improves reading performance, comprehension, and vocabulary. Music increases analogical reasoning, essential to the acquisition of math skills. Music decreases anxiety and even improves performance in hyperactive children. Music improves assertiveness and anger management as well as increasing empathy. Rehearsing music improves memory. In church choirs, rehearsing music also develops an understanding of the Bible, church doctrine, and worship. (Shera J. Atkinson)

Action Possibility: Generally speaking, churches should organize two musical groups for each 100 people in average worship attendance. A church averaging an attendance of 200, for example, should have four musical groups—an adult choir, a children’s choir, a youth choir, and perhaps a hand-bell choir.

Action Possibility: Look for the following qualities in paid full-time and part-time music leaders: (1) ability and flexibility in using a variety of hymn types and worship music, (2) theological viewpoints compatible with our congregation, (3) dependability in carrying out responsibilities, and (4) positive interpersonal relationship skills with members and staff. The appendix of *The Church Music Handbook for Pastors and Musicians* by N. Lee Orr (Nashville: Abingdon Press) contains job descriptions for music staff.

Lyle E. Schaller, on pages 106-107 of *The Seven-Day-a-Week Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press) outlines an excellent set of goals and responsibilities for part-time or full-time music leaders in small, midsize, large, and mega congregations. Reviewing those pages can help church leaders think through appropriate responsibilities for paid and volunteer music leaders and/or develop job descriptions.

Action Possibility: Adult choirs that grow and remain large are social institutions, not just singing organizations. They have occasional social events, much like those held by large adult Sunday school classes. The year usually begins with a social event to which choir members invite potential new members. Choir leaders do not try to make church members feel guilty because they do not sing in the choir; rather, they emphasize the enjoyment of choir participation. For elaboration on ten practical suggestions for how to strengthen adult choirs, see *Dynamic Worship* by Kennon L. Callahan (HarperSanFrancisco).

Some churches increase the number of choir members by producing a special Easter or Christmas musical that requires recruiting several people from the congregation to enlarge the choir three months in advance. Begin weekly rehearsals approximately eight weeks before the program. After making that short-term commitment, some people find that they enjoy participating and become full-time choir members.

Most authorities say that adult choir size typically does not exceed 10 percent of a congregation's average worship attendance. Many small-church choir members needlessly beat up on themselves; their choir size is normal for a congregation of their size.

IV. Is Our Style Traditional, Contemporary, Blended, or Seeker?

The following paragraphs list the typical components in four worship styles. For more detailed descriptions, see *Searching for Seekers* by Mary J. Scifres (Nashville: Abingdon Press).

Traditional worship is rooted in historic creeds, hymns, patterns, and liturgies of the church, and worshiper participation is somewhat passive. Traditional believers connect with God through singing, reading Scripture, and Holy Communion.

Contemporary worship is oriented to the sound and experience of contemporary Christian music and songs. The music is the liturgy, and the worshipers participate more actively.

Blended worship combines traditional elements and contemporary music, especially with regard to tempo and variety of hymn type (singing congregational hymns from all five of the copyright eras noted above).

Seeker worship starts with the culture and uses secular songs, video and movie clips, multimedia, dramas, and Bible-based teaching as elements of the worship service. The whole service is the message, not just the sermon. Seekers connect with their need for God through familiar secular metaphors and communication mediums, which spotlight life issues central to their personal experience. "Presentation," not participation, is the primary communication method.

V. Should We Schedule Multiple Services?

Congregations added worship services for different reasons in different decades. Examples:

1950s—space needs

1960s—time preferences

1970s—traditional and nontraditional services

1980s—different kinds of music

1990s—preaching organized around a TV-type service rather than a radio-type service

In congregations where the sanctuary is more than 80 percent filled on a regular basis, establishing an additional service usually increases attendance 15 percent or more. Increased attendance at a second service comes from three sources—a few inactive members who start

attending again, members who begin attending more frequently, and non-members who start attending because the time is more convenient. Generally speaking, unless sanctuary seating space is full (as sometimes happens in a new congregation with a small worship space), establish an additional service *only* when average attendance exceeds 150-200. Smaller congregations that add a service often experience a “revolt.” Long-term members feel depressed because the service they have attended for years “feels so empty now.”

Warning: Avoid the assumption that Sunday night is a good time to schedule an evening contemporary worship. Few young-adult parents, and very few older adults, attend worship services on Sunday night anywhere in America. Many lay leaders who are considering the addition of a contemporary service suggest Sunday evening because their memories tell them that most churches once had Sunday evening worship. The fact that leaders will vote to schedule Sunday evening worship does not mean they will attend it!

For a different reason—unrelated to connecting with young-adult families or addressing sanctuary space issues—some midsize and large churches retain a traditional Sunday night service by conducting a thirty-minute vespers service at 5:00 p.m. That format creates a fellowship opportunity for widows and older adults who wish to go out and eat together afterward.

Warning: Unless your congregation already has a “blended” or a “contemporary” service at 9:00 a.m. or later on Sunday morning, DO NOT consider adding an evening worship service “for the people who like praise songs.” Why not? See Section VI. below for the answer.

What if we already have a “blended” or a “contemporary” service at 9:00 a.m. or later on Sunday morning and wish to expand our ministry by adding a contemporary evening service?

Two options are available, depending on congregational size and available space:

(1) *Saturday at 5:30 p.m. is the best time to schedule it, for numerous reasons:* (a) Total weekend worship attendance increases 5 percent to 15 percent, a much better increase than we could attain on any other evening of the week. (b) Parking pressure reduces slightly. (c) Sunday workers can attend. (d) The building multiplies its ministry impact with little increased financial outlay. (e) Financial stewardship increases 5 percent to 10 percent. (f) Christian conversions increase. To successfully launch such a service, recruit fifty people who commit themselves to attending for one year. Involve them in a planning process that lasts at least four months. Hold the first Saturday evening service the first Sunday after Labor Day or about four weeks before Easter.

(2) *A few extremely large churches (exceeding 1,000 in worship attendance) conduct two contemporary services on Sunday morning—one at 9:15 a.m. and the other at 10:30 a.m. in a location different from the church’s sanctuary service.*

VI. “Blended” Service(s) or “Contemporary” Service(s)?

A high percentage of congregations make tactical errors in answering that question. Most congregations make these mistakes because they lack awareness of the numerous variables that determine the most productive answer to the question.

Community size makes a difference in how churches answer that question: In large cities and metropolitan areas, only one or two mainline congregations can offer only a traditional worship service with nothing but gospel and traditional hymns—without gradually declining in membership. These one or two congregations thrive by meeting the worship preferences of that tiny percentage of age-eighteen-to-forty-four young adults who like exactly the same kind of meditative worship style and hymns as young adults liked during the 1940s and 1950s.

However, mainline congregations in small towns gradually shrink in membership if their worship services offer only gospel and traditional hymns, due to the tiny percentage of adults in the general population with that preference.

Congregational size makes a difference in how churches answer that question: Churches that average fewer than 150 in worship attendance almost never succeed in establishing a separate “contemporary” worship service on Sunday morning. Why not?

- A. Few young adults with small children will attend a contemporary worship service that begins earlier than 9:00 a.m.
- B. Scheduling a separate contemporary service at 8:15 a.m. or 8:30 a.m. reduces the number of attendees at the regular worship service time to a depressing level that usually creates irritation and conflict among long-term members.
- C. Scheduling a separate contemporary service during the Sunday school hour means that the youth, who especially appreciate contemporary hymns, cannot attend Sunday school and the young children cannot attend worship.
- D. Scheduling a separate contemporary service at the regular worship service time and asking members who prefer the traditional worship style to attend at 8:15 a.m. or 8:30 a.m. usually creates irritation and conflict among long-term members.
- E. Scheduling a separate contemporary service on a weeknight or Sunday evening fails to achieve its primary goal 98 percent of the time because it does not provide Sunday school for small children, which limits its appeal to most of the busy parents with young children.

Churches with fewer than 150 in average worship attendance can, however, build a positive future by meeting the spiritual needs of all four adult generations and the teenagers in one “blended” service whose hymns address the preferences of all five birth-date groups.

Larger congregations that average 200 or more in morning worship attendance can build a positive future by meeting the spiritual needs of all five worshiping generations with (a) two, identical, “blended” services on Sunday morning whose hymns address the preferences of all five generations, or (b) an 8:30 a.m. traditional service and an 11:00 a.m. contemporary service.

What is “blended” worship and how is it done? A blended service is built on the principle of using worship hymns and worship style *every* Sunday that show equal respect for the spiritual preferences of all three adult generations and the fourth, teenage generation.

Robert Webber, noted authority on worship renewal, says that “blended” worship is a solution for leaders caught between people who say, “I own the church” and younger adults who say, “Change, or I’m out of here.” (Robert Webber, *Newscope*, August 1, 1997, p. 2, ‘Blended’ Worship Provides Solution for Worship Leaders Caught Between ‘Boomers’ and ‘Busters’)

Two kinds of congregation should provide a blended service(s).

- A. All congregations with fewer than 150-200 people in average worship attendance increase the likelihood of experiencing a positive future by providing a “blended” worship style, format, and hymn selection.
- B. About 50 percent of large (300-1,000 or more average attendance) congregations use a blended style in two, three, and sometimes four Sunday morning services.

Warning: If you decide on a blended format, use it *every* Sunday. First-time worship visitors judge a church’s hymns and worship service quality by one visit. Thus, scheduling a contemporary or blended service one Sunday morning a month has no value. First-time worship visitors on the other three Sunday mornings “bounce off” and shop elsewhere for a church home.

Results of blended worship: A larger percentage of church attendees experience a sense of coming into the presence of God in worship each week. At least 70 percent of church members with birth dates after 1945 (and many older adult members) find this style of worship more spiritually meaningful. Total worship attendance increases, the number of Christian conversions increase, and offerings increase. By focusing on transmitting the Christian faith to the next generation of adults (rather than clinging solely to worship forms of the print era of Christian history that meet the needs of fewer than 25 percent of worshipers), a congregation is far more likely to be healthy and strong in 2025 AD.

However, more than 50 percent of mainline congregations still use nothing but traditional hymns, which is one of the primary reasons for their membership decline. During the years prior to 1965, mainlines had a monopoly on where young adults attended worship when they left home. “My mother would kill me!” prevented defection to another denomination. Now, however, that monopoly is gone. Young adults can attend worship in whatever denomination they wish. “I’m just glad they go to church anyplace!” their mothers exclaim. So young adults attend worship where the music feeds their spirits.

Many congregations use a blended service format that unfolds in the following way:

☉ Begin the service with an eight-to-ten-minute medley of three or four “praise songs,” taking care to use praise songs from all three waves of praise songs: the first wave (copyright 1960-1980), the second wave (copyright 1980s), and the third wave (copyright 1990s to yesterday) *every Sunday*. These praise songs promote spiritual focus and God-centered worship. They meet the spiritual needs of younger adults in the same way that the “old gospel songs” did for young adults between 1870 and 1935. In many congregations, a praise team of four-to-six youth or adults, in some instances using musical instruments, leads this opening section of worship.

☉ Follow those praise songs with three-to-five minutes of informal announcements and include a brief time in which worshipers greet one another (more than 85 percent of United States congregations now incorporate this friendliness ritual in their worship services).

☉ The remaining forty-five minutes of the worship service use the traditional style, and may include traditional elements such as the Apostles Creed. In this part of the service, *every Sunday* use one “old gospel hymn” (composed 1870 to 1935) and one great traditional hymn (composed 1517 to 1870), such as “The Church’s One Foundation” or “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

To summarize this “blended” format, the service flows from ten minutes of *celebration* using contemporary praise songs, to five *informal* minutes that include announcements, to the more formal *meditative* time that includes hymns from the gospel and traditional eras style during the remainder of the service, with hymns led by the chancel choir and music director. In other words, the overall “flow” of the service is from *contemporary* to *informal* to *traditional*. The parts of the service should unfold in the same progressive order each week, but the manner in which each part of the service is accomplished can differ. That variety increases inspiration and maintains attention-focus while reducing the possibility of boredom.

As you shift to the systematic use of all five types of hymns and songs every Sunday, suggested above, print something like the following in the morning worship bulletin *every Sunday for at least six months*: “Every Sunday, our congregation strives to show equal respect for the spiritual preferences in worship hymns of all five worshiping generations. Therefore, each week we select worship hymns and praise songs that speak to each of those five generations. A practical way to identify those five types of hymns and songs is their copyright dates: Traditional: 1520-1870. Gospel: 1871-1935. First wave praise songs: 1960 to 1979. Second wave praise songs: 1978-1995; Third wave of praise songs 1995-present.” See the in-depth discussion and list of 116 praise songs from the three types of “contemporary praise songs” in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 32, We Are Singing the Right Hymns in Worship...Aren’t We?* Download free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

As you use the three or four contemporary praise songs, avoid singing a chorus over more than once. Older adults find repetitive choruses boring because people of their age draw primary meaning from the *content of the words*, whereas younger adults draw primary meaning from the *feeling of the music* and thus do not find repetitive singing of the choruses boring.

As part of its contract with user congregations, CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc.) does quarterly sampling and, as a result, knows what songs are used during that time period. CCLI is so widely used by congregations that its count is probably an accurate representation of what songs people are actually singing in worship. To obtain CCLI's *current* list of the most popular contemporary songs used in churches across the United States—updated every six months—go to www.ccli.com/WorshipResources/Top25.cfm Web site.

By 2015, most congregations in the United States will have installed an electronic projection screen in their sanctuary. We are living in the last few years of hymnbook publishing, except for use by musicians and choirs. Instead, publishing companies will provide electronic software from which worship leaders select hymns to project on large screens and print on worship bulletin inserts.

However, the presence or absence of a projection screen is not the crucial ingredient in defining a “blended” worship service. An excellent blended service is possible by printing the hymn words on a worship bulletin insert. The *crucial issue* is whether worship service(s) allows congregants to sing all five hymn and praise-song types *every Sunday morning*.

Action Possibility: Appointing a five-person transition team (representative of the four adult and teenage generations) is helpful when congregations shift from a traditional to a blended worship style. The transition team meets with the pastor and music leaders for one hour each week for the first four months to (a) critique last week's worship, (b) finalize the format of next Sunday's service, including hymn selection, and (c) brainstorm music possibilities for future Sundays.

What is “contemporary” worship and how is it done? Like the traditional service (common in mainline denominations since the 1950s), there is no one standard formula for contemporary worship services. Different congregations use different elements. However, contemporary services often feature several of the following components.

Format:

- The service begins with high-energy participation of worshipers, rather than quiet, meditative involvement.
- The service usually unfolds in the same progressive order each week, but the manner in which each part is accomplished differs (calls to worship, prayers, and Bible readings, for example, can be done in several ways, and that variety increases inspiration while reducing boredom).
- The pace of the service is faster than in traditional worship.
- The atmosphere is celebrative rather than contemplative (meditative).
- Worship teams of several people often develop the content of and lead the service, rather than an individual clergyperson.
- Much planning goes into each service, and in large churches the service is sometimes rehearsed prior to Sunday morning.
- The experience is more visual, as compared with the more audio orientation of traditional services.
- Video clips, movie clips, and other screen-projected visuals are often used. Contact www.churchmedia.net to obtain customizable resources for innovate worship. Video

clips, movie clips, multimedia teaching tools and other screen-projected visuals are also available at a variety of other sources, such as the www.barnafilms.com Web site. Churches cannot legally show commercial videos or film clips in worship or other church gatherings without obtaining copyright permission. Through copyright licenses similar to those available for song lyrics, obtaining permission is becoming simpler. Obtain an “umbrella license” from CVLI at www.cvli.org for an annual fee that is based on church size. Another option is sending worship leaders to one of the workshops offered by Ginghamburg United Methodist Church, Tipp City, Ohio (near Dayton); for workshop dates, visit the www.inghamburg.org Web site. Other helpful resources are available at the www.cokesbury.com Web site.

Informality:

- The printed format usually communicates greater simplicity (sometimes seven-to-twelve lines instead of twenty or thirty).
- Avoidance of traditional religious nomenclature, such as “bulletin,” and much use of secular terms such “program” instead of “worship bulletin.”
- Fewer printed prayers, responsive readings, and traditional elements such as creeds, prayers of confession, “Doxology,” and “Gloria Patria” provide a more informal flow and feel.
- Greater emphasis on warm relationships among worshipers communicates a stronger sense of community and intimacy.
- Worship leaders exhibit greater spontaneity and warmth.
- Worship leaders seldom wear robes or other liturgical vestments.
- Casual attire is accepted and encouraged among worshipers.

Participation:

- The worshipers sing a larger percentage of the time.
- Laypersons participate more actively.
- Prayer is emphasized. In some contemporary services, the congregation divides into prayer circles of three or four people who pray for one another’s needs.
- In some instances, one layperson per week gives a “witness minute” from the pulpit. Sometimes that “witness” expresses God’s reality in his or her life. Other weeks that “witness minute” describes a community or denominational ministry the congregation supports financially.
- The Scripture reading is sometimes printed in the bulletin and the congregation stands and reads it in unison (or reads it responsively, alternating verses with the worship leader).

Music:

- The hymn-singing tempo is faster than was typical during the 1950s.
- Familiarity and sing-ability of hymns is emphasized.
- Contemporary Christian music (contemporary means “written since 1960”) and praise choruses with modern lyrics are a larger percentage of the hymn-singing. For contemporary hymns and praise songs, (a) visit the worship music resources section at www.cokesbury.com and (b) contact three full-time music directors in three congregations of your denomination that conduct effective contemporary or blended worship services. Ask those three music directors to give you a list of music publishing companies from which they frequently purchase resources.
- Worship leaders emphasize easy-to-sing hymns, recognizing that only 49 percent of worshipers read music and more than one-half of worshippers either (a) have never

attended church or (b) grew up in other denominations; thus, do not know this denomination's hymns.

- The words for hymns and praise songs are often electronically projected on a screen by using the inexpensive copyright license from Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc., Portland, Oregon (www.ccli.com). Another organization that provides music copyright licensing is Logos Productions, Inc. (www.licensingonline.org). This service connects with lectionary preaching, although it provides fewer hymns than CCLI.
- The "choir" consists mainly of the people in the pews. Therefore, a praise team of four-to-six people usually leads the congregational singing, not a traditional choir.
- Instruments other than an organ are typically used, such as keyboards, brass ensembles, woodwinds, guitars, and drums.

Sermons:

- Their strong biblical base both teaches Bible content and illustrates its application.
- They often focus on practical, daily issues and frequently take a how-to-do-it approach to life experiences and events.
- They are often called a message rather than a sermon.
- They sound less academic and scholarly than during the 1950s.
- The preacher often speaks from the center of the chancel area, rather than from behind a pulpit. For most post-1955-birth-date adults, this strengthens the communication impact. Because they grew up watching television, *seeing* the pastor and choir is important. People who grew up listening to radio feel that *hearing* the pastor and choir is sufficient.

Action Possibility: To successfully launch an additional worship service with a contemporary style, recruit forty-to-fifty adults that become the planning team and commit themselves to attending it for one year. The team should meet, strategize, and plan for a minimum of four months prior to the first worship service. The two best times to begin a contemporary worship service are the first Sunday after Labor Day in the fall and three weeks before Easter Sunday in the spring.

Ask members of the contemporary-service planning team to visit three-to-six congregations in your area (both within and outside your denomination) that are attracting growing numbers of young adults to their contemporary service(s). If possible, obtain videos of those services to share with the entire team. Select components that you want to import and/or modify: collect, select, and perfect in developing your own worship model.

Part of the contemporary-service planning team's agenda is developing music leadership different from leadership in the traditional service. Finding the instrumentalists is a challenge in some congregations. Randy Rowland suggests that the church advertise for talent in church bulletins, local music magazines, or newspapers. Here is a typical ad: *Innovative Protestant Church forming a worship team; must read charts; need guitar, bass, keys, drums, and vocals. Experience is good; passion and willingness to be a team player is better. Call Randy @_____.*

Congregations across the country confirm Rowland's suggestion about a four-to-six-person band. You need at least one member with church experience and three who are committed Christians. You should consider the others as relational-evangelism opportunities.

Rowland says, "We organize our band so that there is an overall *band leader* who coordinates everything. A *musical director* calls the shots on musical technicalities. An *administrator* makes tapes, charts, selects each week's worship songs, and keeps records. The *worship leader* actually leads the congregation in worship." In some congregations these musicians are paid; in other congregations they are unpaid. Congregations sometimes begin with unpaid musicians and evolve to a time when musicians are paid, as the attendance grows larger. (Randy Rowland, "Leader of The Band," *Leadership*, Spring 1999, pp. 47-49)

Study-Discussion Session #3—How Can We Get There from Here?

Peggy Noonan, famous speechwriter for President Reagan, said that most people who can write have been at it a long time. Since they learned how in grade school, they usually think they can write pretty well. When an expert tries to help them improve their writing, they are suspicious of the advice and often do not take it well. (Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution* [New York: Random House, 1990], pp. 63-65) People who tell congregations how to improve their worship service face a similar risk.

I. How Can We Make Changes without Creating Conflict?

How can we get our church members to accept the changes we know we should make? The answer is two words: slowly, carefully. The following six-month-planning strategy is one way to put those two words into action.

A. A special taskforce such as the Worship Enrichment Team is essential to this process. Do not appoint the worship committee to this role, since standing committees are more likely to reproduce the status quo than to consider significant changes.

B. Listen to worshippers' opinions. Do not publicize the following process in advance, as that cuts attendance and thus distorts your data. Insert in your morning worship bulletin a sheet containing these questions, and ask *everyone* to complete it:

1. What parts of our worship service are the most important to you personally?
2. What parts of our worship service are not very meaningful to you?
3. What would make our worship service more meaningful to you personally?
4. What else have you wanted to tell someone about our worship service?

Provide a set of blanks to check, whereby people indicate the decade in which they were born. Tell them the ushers will collect the forms later in the service. Ask them *not* to sign their names. Do *not* send the form out in the mail, which distorts its accuracy. Using it on Sunday morning is the *only way* to approximate a random sample of opinions.

Collate the above survey sheets by stacking them according to age groups. Later that week, the Worship Enrichment Team meets, sits in a circle, and reads the answers by passing the sheets around the circle until everyone has read every sheet. This gets the taskforce members in touch with the emotional feelings of the congregation's rank-and-file members. Taskforce members may disagree with some of the opinions, and there is some risk of hurt feelings on the part of staff members and/or individual worship or music leaders. However, church leaders can be more effective when they know what the members think than when they are unaware of those opinions.

C. Mail first-time visitors a "Visitor Evaluation" sheet. People who visit once and do not return have opinions that we need but seldom get. The system also provides an evangelism benefit because it signals visitors that the church strives for excellence.

The pastor writes a note on church stationery that says, "Will you help us improve the quality of the worship experience by completing the enclosed sheet and returning it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope?"

Print the questions on the next page on the Visitor Evaluation sheet. Leave space between questions so people can write their answers.

Please help us as a church by evaluating the following areas:

1. Were you warmly greeted as you entered our facility?
2. Were you able to find your way easily around our facility?
3. How would you rate the following (on a scale of Poor, Fair, Good, and Outstanding)?
_____Greeters, _____Ushers, _____Music, _____Worship, _____Sermon.
Comments:
4. Any distractions?
5. Did you find our people to be friendly and accommodating?
6. How did you find out about our church?
7. Any comments or suggestions?
8. Will you come back? Why? Why not?
9. Signature (optional): _____
10. Date: _____

(Adapted from *Strategic Planning* by Aubrey Malphurs [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books], p. 270)

D. Visit six growing congregations of various denominations that are within driving distance of your church. Look for (a) first impressions when entering the parking lot; (b) first impressions when entering the building/sanctuary; (c) what happens to visitors upon entering, during the service, after the service; (d) what things in the service were positive and negative; and (e) concepts that might be transferable to your congregation.

E. Make one or two changes at a time. Give advance, clear, and complete explanations to members of the congregation. Assure people that the Worship Enrichment Team will review their feedback during and after an experimental period of several weeks.

F. Let the children lead whenever possible. For example, ask the children's choir to sing a new praise song that you plan to introduce to the congregation the following week. Grandparents will follow grandchildren to places they will not follow pastors or music leaders.

G. Encourage everyone to cultivate a spirit of tolerance that assumes no one can expect every action to suit him or her. Remind people that our goal is to respect the spiritual preferences of all four adult age groups plus the children/youth generation.

H. Whenever applicable, tell people that you are reclaiming an ancient worship tradition of the church. American people love to go forward by going back to the past.

I. Accept the fact that not everyone will like every change. People are different from each other. Love them anyway.

II. The Bottom Line

A stone building at 220 East Main Street in Olney, Texas, carries in large letters cut into the stone across the second story: ENERGY BUILDING. In congregations with effective worship services, those words fit on the church sanctuary.

Worship is where we get much of our spiritual energy and enthusiasm to follow Christ in daily discipleship. Effective worship energizes both the vitality of our church and the spiritual lives of our people.

Would that sign describe what happens in our sanctuary?

Appendix

What Type of Spiritual Food Does Our Church Serve?

People are different from one another!

Most church leaders know that is true. Yet, many congregations plan and program as if everyone were spiritually identical.

Research has identified four types of authentic spiritual experience. Most people say that their most significant spiritual-growth experiences have come through *one* of those four types. (Urban Holmes III, *A History of Christian Spirituality* [Minneapolis: Seabury, 1980], pp. 3-7) Note: *This is NOT the well-known Myers-Briggs concept; it is a totally different paradigm.*

Since most churches are led by people prejudiced in favor of their own personal type of spiritual experience, most congregations tend to provide one rather than all four types of spiritual food. Churchgoers therefore tend to select and attend a specific church because it serves the kind of spiritual food that feeds their appetite.

Thus, congregations tend to attract “our kind of people” and repel other kinds of people. This spiritual exclusivity happens with about equal frequency in theologically conservative congregations and theologically moderate and liberal churches.

Which Spiritual Type Are You?

Four different kinds of people define as *meaningful* four different kinds of spiritual experience. When people say they did not find a church or a particular religious experience within that congregation meaningful, they mean that the type of spiritual food it provided lacked the power to touch their wills and influence their life directions.

Closer examination often reveals that the spiritual food served in that congregation was for one or more of the other three kinds of people. It met someone’s needs, but not theirs. (The four spiritual types are described in greater detail in *Discover Your Spiritual Type* by Corinne Ware [Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute].)

The Thinking Type. This kind of person reports that his or her will is best stimulated by spiritual *thinking* (these people think in order to feel). Such individuals find spiritual guidance in the words of Scripture, sermons, and position papers on ethical issues. “Thought content” is crucial for them. They are likely, for instance, to examine the words of hymns “to see if we are singing what we believe.”

If taken to extremes, this Thinking Type of spiritual experience becomes “head-trip rationalism,” in which people (without knowing it) substitute thinking and discussing for actual change in life direction. Their “thinking in order to feel” *replaces* feeling! Such persons can become highly judgmental and critical of people who don’t operate from their “thinking” perspective.

The Action Type. This kind of person reports that his or her will is best stimulated by involvement in spiritual *actions* (these people take action in order to think and feel). Such individuals find spiritual enrichment in service and idealistic crusading designed to transform society. For them, action is authentic theology and prayer! This definition causes many such individuals to find little spiritual nurture in organized religions, which they may accuse of “talking the talk but not walking the walk.”

If taken to extremes, the Action Type of spiritual experience becomes unrelenting tunnel-vision, in which people (without knowing it) substitute frenetic doing for actual change in life direction. Their “acting to think and feel” *replaces* thinking and feeling. Such persons can become highly judgmental and critical of people who don’t see things their way.

The Feeling Type. This type of person reports that his or her will is best stimulated by spiritual *feelings* (these people feel in order to think). Such individuals find spiritual enrichment in music, heart-felt testimonials by persons whose lives God has touched, and engagement in personal evangelism efforts. “Emotional content” is crucial for these people. For example, they are likely to judge hymns by how the style and tempo make them feel rather than by word content and definition.

If taken to extremes, the Feeling Type of spiritual experience becomes an “exclusive pietism,” in which people (without knowing it) substitute a desired emotional state for actual change in life direction. Their “feeling in order to think” *replaces* thinking. Such persons can become highly judgmental and critical of people who don’t see things their way.

The Meditative Type. This kind of person reports that his or her will is best stimulated by spiritual *meditation* (these intuitive persons focus inward in order to think and feel). Such individuals find spiritual enrichment in contemplation and introspection. Sometimes called mystics, their prayer is largely an experience of hearing God speak to them rather than vice-versa. Many such persons publish inspirational and instructional material. They often find scant spiritual nurture in Western Protestantism, which may seem to them more like a social club than a God-focused group.

If taken to extremes, the Meditative Type of spiritual experience becomes “quietism,” an extreme retreat from interaction with the world in which people (without knowing it) substitute prayerful solitude for actual change in life direction. Their “focusing inward in order to think and feel” *replaces* thinking and feeling. Such persons can become highly judgmental and critical of people who don’t see things their way.

What is your *secondary* spiritual type? None of us draws spiritual enrichment *exclusively* from one of the four experiences. The Thinking Type may occasionally find spiritual benefit from involvement in an actional crusade. Ditto for the other three spiritual types.

However, each of us tends to feel more at home in a congregation that nurtures our *primary* spiritual type.

History Reshuffles Our Preferences

The Action Type of spirituality was prominent during the Christian crusades to free the Holy Land from pagan control (1096-1270 A.D.) and the 1960s social-action efforts.

The Meditative Type of spirituality saw its greatest popularity in the fourteenth century. The Quaker’s spiritual ancestors (the Friends of God) appeared then.

By far the largest percentage of today’s Christians fall into the Thinking Type and Feeling Type categories. From which of these two kinds of experience people obtain spiritual benefit depends to a great extent on the societal context in which they were immersed as youth and young adults.

Many people find greater benefit in a Thinking Type of spirituality during historical periods marked by relative political stability, a dependable social order, and a strong sense of individual worth. Examples include (a) the twelfth century in Western Europe, during which the university system developed and society applauded learning and enlightenment, (b) the sixteenth-century flowering of humanism as a theological explanation of life, and (c) the post-World War II period in America, when people placed great confidence in science and psychology to evolve a better and better “by our own bootstraps” life for everyone.

Many people find greater benefit in a Feeling Type of spirituality during historical periods when the culture is unstable, the political order is crumbling, personal roles are poorly defined, and people feel a low sense of personal power to affect their future. Examples include (a) the fourth and fifth centuries, in which the Roman Empire's stabilizing influence collapsed, (b) the fourteenth century, during which the Black Death killed one-third of Europe's population, and (c) the post-1965 period, a time of deteriorating confidence in science and rational thinking to solve personal and societal problems.

Does this historical ebb and flow help to explain the mainline congregations' membership declines and the evangelical churches' membership growth since 1965? Probably so! Once again, a large percentage of young adults find spiritual nurture in Feeling Type spiritual experiences. This did not happen because their denominations changed, but because their denominations stayed the same while historical developments thrust young adults into new kinds of life experiences.

Will this new era last 40 years or 200 years? Nobody knows. However, one thing is clear: spiritual preferences among parishioners are more determined by personal experiences and societal change than by the instructions church leaders give regarding "the right way" to experience God.

The Big Questions

At a regular meeting of your church's governing board, read the introduction to and descriptions of the four spiritual types. Ask and discuss these questions:

1. What is your primary spiritual type?
2. Which spiritual food does our church emphasize?
3. Should we consider adding other entrees, in order to meet the spiritual needs of more people?

Herb Miller, *The Parish Paper*, August 2005