



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

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MULTIPLE WORSHIP SERVICES AND CHURCH GROWTH

Of all the characteristics of the emerging 21st century church, the most public is worship. The past 25 years have seen the introduction of new forms of worship and in many congregations the worship service is the most visible and tangible sign of a changing church. Discussions about styles of music, the use of drama, new approaches to preaching, and adding new services also make worship the "flash point" of change in many churches.

Two weeks ago, the American Society of Church Growth (ASCG) held its annual meeting on the theme of "Worship and Church Growth" and among the presentations was one by Charles Arn on the results of a five year study on the dynamics of adding a new worship service and its subsequent affect on church growth. The study (1) researched churches that successfully and unsuccessfully attempted to add a new style service; (2) identified "common denominators" of the successful models; and (3) worked with several hundred churches of different sizes, locations, and denominations to test the process of adding a new service. For more information on the study, contact Charles Arn at Church Growth, Inc. (818) 305-1280. The following are highlights of Arn's presentation.

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

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

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

Pastor's risk of success and failure. It is likely that attendance in the new service may not only grow, but surpass that of the established service. In churches that have had only one service or style for ten years or more, the success of the new service may cause greater consternation among many members than would its failure. If the service is successful, the pastor's risk is the reaction from those who have sanctified the status quo. The concern over a new service does not subside after it has a critical mass and is building momentum. Should attendance at the new service eventually surpass that of the established service, the risk, in fact, does not fully subside until eight to twelve months later.

Audio tapes of the entire ASCG 1996 annual meeting, "Worship and Church Growth," are available by calling Christy Burns at (219) 281-2541.

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