

What Can We Do to Liven Up Our Worship Services?

We are seeing a lot of churches right now who are in the same boat. They aren't as large as they once were. Their members generally trend a little older. They want to appeal to a broader spectrum of people, but how do you do that without ruining it for the faithful members who are coming? And how do you do that with the resources and people you have available? There's no way to compete with Warehouse Community Church down the road. With your limited resources and talent, the service can seem to plod, discouragingly so. What are some things you could do?

Let's start by saying not everyone wants to attend a large church, even if the large church does have so many more resources. There are niche markets for small to medium size churches. (But you do still have to let people know you're there!) In fact, it's my observation that everything is moving toward one of two models:

The “You're Part of Something Bigger Than Yourself” Model:

This is what Warehouse Community Church offers. Their worship services offer the larger crowds. Their musicians can hit the notes we mere mortals cannot hit. They have the production quality we lack. It's big and it's exciting. And we are reminded that the Kingdom of God is big and victorious.

The 1 Corinthians 14:26 Model

“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

Now this is not to say that large churches are unbiblical. Not at all. But it is to say that small churches are in a unique position to do some biblical things. This model offers more congregational participation, concerns itself with substance (even if it cannot match the style of larger churches), and it helps avoid the temptation of watching other people worship, as a mere spectator. Notice that this model *also* features the presence and power of God. When people attend small to medium sized churches, these things are what those people are looking for.

Distinguishing Pre-Worship and Worship Times

I'm seeing a lot of young pastors trying to lead their churches to focus on the Lord and worshipping Him. However, many of them are extremely frustrated because their congregations are sentimentally attached to non-worship traditions being practiced in their worship services. Pastors can sometimes undermine their relationships by unilaterally cancelling such traditions. A possible solution is to label these parts of the service as the “Pre-Worship Gathering.” Go ahead, observe them, be folksy, have fun with it. But then, as you transition to worship, you can say something like, “As we begin the worship in our gathering today...” or you can do a verbal Call to Worship. Such a Call

to Worship might sound something like, *“We are gathered today to celebrate Jesus Christ exalted, raised to life by the Spirit, ascended into Heaven, enthroned with the Father, and coming back in glory!”*

As you begin the worship portion of your service, the pastor is key. He is often the only person possessing the verbal skills to raise the tone. Of course, this must begin early in the service, well before the sermon.

Leading Worship: A Definition

Leading worship involves helping our members get a fresh glimpse of God.

Then, providing members with opportunities to appropriately respond to God in obedience and surrender, adoration and praise.

Worship involves both joyful celebration and reverent contemplation.

We plan our services to give our members a fresh glimpse of:

- The sovereign Lord, that they might respond by bowing in submission.
- The holy God, that they might respond in contrition and confession.
- The merciful Lord, that they might respond in grateful adoration.
- The transcendent God, that might respond with wonder and marvel.
- The creator God, to whom they might respond in a deep sense of dependence.
- The conquering Lord, that they might celebrate the victory He won.

Start with a Familiar, Upbeat Song the Congregation Enjoys Singing

Psalm 100 says, “Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” Worship services generally move from this joyful celebration to a reverent contemplation, when we “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his” (Psalm 100:3). Though the Lord could make it flow the other direction, it rarely flows upstream. A solemn assembly would be an exception.

Another consideration in music: Are you singing the songs too high for the non-musical members to be able to hit the notes? More might participate if you sing in a lower key.

To liven up the service, you need congregational participation.

Transitions

In addition to a call to worship, good transitions are helpful. Transitions are short, simple sentences that help guide members through the parts of the service. A good transition connects the next part in the service to the part we just finished. Transitions explain the purpose of the parts and provide a sense of movement.

Scripture Readings

Many churches involve their members in the services by asking them to lead in Scripture readings. It gives them ownership in the worship. It is an expression of the doctrine of

the priesthood of all believers. If your members have short attention spans and do not yet respond to Scripture readings, then use Bible verses in the transitions between parts of the service. Like this:

First John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Join now please in singing, “Nothing But the Blood.”

Use Testimonies

Testimonies are very powerful. People expect the pastor and other worship leaders to articulate matters of the faith. However, when they hear fellow laypersons speaking of God’s work in their lives, it communicates, “This is for me, too.” It’s like that thing in First Corinthians 14 when a visitor attends and hears the members all prophesying – “... He will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (1 Corinthians 14:25). You could ask members to give one-sentence testimonies. You could control length by using videos of their testimonies. With smart phone capabilities now, it doesn’t take a techno nerd to do this anymore. Ask members to give one testimony at a time, not their entire autobiography. That way, on one occasion a member can share her salvation testimony and, on another, one of God’s sustaining grace through a severe trial and, on another, occasion her tithing testimony.

Use Videos

What we cannot provide with our limited resources can be imported with short “sermon starter” videos and with missions videos. It brings action and color into the room. It adds a level of production quality we can’t match. And though you want to use brief videos, that brief experience adds to the service. Additionally, even a small church can match a large church when they loop announcement slides or show the main points of the pastor’s sermon.

Borrow Soloists

There are many large churches with so many talented soloists that they have some five-star players sitting on the bench for weeks at a time. They want to sing. And many churches now are finding great fulfillment in partnering with sister churches. Talk to your Director of Missions about which of the larger churches in your Association have that mind-set. Then, invite soloists from those sister churches to come and sing a song or two. People go on mission trips to other states and other countries all the time. They won’t mind driving down the road a few miles. However, these partnerships should be part of an overall partnership with member churches of your Association, where you pray for sister churches in your prayer meeting and members of your church participate in ministries of your Association like Disaster Relief Teams and Benevolence Ministries.

Prayer

When it comes to prayer in our worship services, a lot of the time our attitude is to have a quick word of prayer, get it over with, and get to the “good stuff.” Someone usually prays a string of well-known sentences we have all heard others pray many times (“Now lead, guide, and direct us...”) It’s like watching ME-TV; you know what’s coming next. Instead of having people pray boring, unprepared, thoughtless re-run prayers, try some of these ideas:

- Make it a point to pray specifically for a specific prayer focus each week.
- Sometimes, the pastor might lead in a guided prayer time.
- Sometimes, you could lead in a specific prayer and invite the congregation, “Please help me pray, as I lead us in prayer for...”
- You can have a prayer time for matters of concern in the church or community. Members will think it’s important to pray about those things; so and be engaged.
- You can pray for specific missionaries, specific countries which persecute Christians, etc.
- Over time, train your leaders how to lead in public prayer, explaining the purpose of each prayer in the different parts of the worship service: invocation, offertory, benediction.

Coach Up Your Members

Every church member brings into the service so many cubic feet of spiritual atmosphere. By their very presence, each person raises or lowers the spiritual dynamic in the room. Imagine a worship center filled with people who have been born again, each one is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, each one has been praying during the week, and they enter the room with an expectancy of meeting with God. Now imagine, a room of people who don’t know the Lord, who have no interest in the things of God, who in fact, may be hostile to God’s Word and ways. Imagine them hearing the same sermon from the same powerful preacher and the same songs sung by the same Spirit-filled musicians. With which group would you rather worship? A worship service is not just what the worship leaders make it; it’s also what the worshippers make it. Our members need to be encouraged to assume their share of responsibility for the tone of the worship service.

Pay the Rent

More members will buy into changes in the worship service and join you in the journey when they know their pastor loves them and cares about them during the week. Providing them with a certain number of successful events throughout the year helps them feel good about what is happening on Sunday morning. These two things “pay the rent” so you can lead in the directions you want to go.

Rousing Sermons

I mention preaching so late in this article because sermons come as almost the last item in the worship service. However, the sermon is the longest single part.

Make sure enough of your sermons, over the course of each year, are rousing and uplifting. Some pastors are of an intellectual, contemplative nature. They are good at explaining the text and at application. However, sometimes, it is important to celebrate the victory God has won for us in Christ. Sometimes, your members simply need to hear you “ring the bell.” Variation is also important for the extroverted preacher with a fiery delivery. Sometimes, their congregations need them to slow down and bring a more studied, thought-provoking message.

The tone of our sermon should match the tone of our text. Preachers shouldn't hit the same key on the keyboard every over and over. Over the course of the year, as we prayerfully select our texts, we can vary the tone.

Pray! Specifically Trust the Holy Spirit to Arouse His People to Praise

Ask God to stir in the spirits of his people through the indwelling Holy Spirit and to put a heart of worship in His people.

Find more free resources on this topic here:

<http://smalltownbaptist.net/worship.htm>