

LEAD IN PROVIDING UPLIFTING WORSHIP SERVICES

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There are several key words that we need to remember as we seek to lead in providing uplifting worship services.

EMPHASIS

The first of these key words is "emphasis." In recent years, the literature in the field of church growth studies has had very little emphasis on the worship assembly. The emphasis has been on things in addition to the worship assembly that are needed



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to produce church growth. But what is often ignored is that virtually all who call themselves "Christian" belong to a church—regardless of denominational or non-denominational background—that provides at least one worship assembly each week, typically on the Lord's Day—the first day of the week. The assembly was important in the early church (Acts 2:42,46,47; 5:42; 11:26; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1,2; Heb. 10:23-25; Rev. 1:10). Christendom is divided over many issues, but one thing virtually all believers have in common is an understanding that the Christians are supposed to assemble for worship each Lord's Day.

Studies of non-members in the United States have found that if they visit a church service it is most likely to be the Sunday morning worship assembly.¹ Much of the literature in the field of church growth studies stresses the importance of a personal invitation in persuading the first time visitor to attend.² The quality of the preaching, singing, or the worship service in general does not appear to be a very important factor in the decision of the first time visitor to attend. The quality of the worship service, however, is very important in their decision about whether or not to return.³ The worship assembly is still the first point of contact for a majority of those who eventually become church members.⁴ Churches of Christ in the United States typically find that the Sunday

¹ George Barna, *What Americans Believe* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1991), pp. 61-65.

² Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982), pp. 97-101.

³ Flavil Yeakley, Jr., *Why Churches Grow* (Nashville: Christian Communications, 1986), pp. 45-49.

⁴ Barna, pp. 234-245.

morning worship assembly is the *only* contact they have with one-fourth to one-third of the members. That worship service, therefore, is very important.

Congregations are not likely to have uplifting worship services unless the leaders recognize the importance of such assemblies and therefore give them the proper emphasis.

VARIETY

A second key word that is very important in providing uplifting worship services is the word “variety.” What is uplifting to one person may not be at all uplifting to another. There are many different forms or expressions of spirituality that reflect personality differences. In the consulting work that I have done with congregations over the past two decades, I have often used a personality inventory called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to identify the corporate personality of the church.¹ Studies with the MBTI indicate that Extraverts and Introverts prefer different prayer styles and different expressions of reverence. Extraverts prefer group prayer. Introverts prefer private prayer and in the corporate worship assembly they prefer periods of silent prayer. My MBTI results indicate a preference for Introversion and when I was doing full-time local church work, I used to tell the congregations where I preached that they should “Enter in silence; wait in prayer; and worship in reverence” (and for me, “reverence” required silence). As I matured, I was amazed to learn that others prefer to express that same reverence by “making a joyful noise unto the Lord.” But that is only one way in which personality differences are reflected in worship styles.

Those who prefer thinking judgment like teaching sermons. They like to leave a service saying “The preacher really gave me something to think about today.” They are uplifted most by what they learn. But on the other hand, those who prefer feeling judgment are much more likely to be inspired by a motivational sermon—a sermon with less teaching, argument, and reasoning, but more emotional appeal. Those who have the greatest trust in perception through the use of intuition prefer a contemplative devotional style. They worship best when they can focus most on the nature of God, the meaning of what God has done for us, and relationships among various Christian concepts. But on the other hand, those who prefer sensing perception are helped most by the practical “how to” kind of sermon. They want to leave a service with an orderly list of three or four things that they can *do* as they put their faith into practice. Carl Jung suggested that Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling are like four different languages.² All mature people use all four of these languages—but not with equal skill or comfort. An uplifting worship service

¹ Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and MBTI are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, California.

² Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (London: Keegan Paul, 1923), pp. 244-253.

will have enough variety in forms of activity so that everyone present can be uplifted by something—regardless of the many personality differences represented in the assembly.

Christians also differ greatly in musical tastes. Some prefer classical/traditional Christian hymns. Others prefer the kind of contemporary Christian music the young people often use in their devotionals. Still others prefer Gospel music in a country and western style. In terms of quality, there is both good and bad music in each of these styles. Having some songs in each of the styles the congregation prefers is usually a good idea. Such variety helps provide the different kinds of music that different people find uplifting. Variety in preaching style, prayer style, and the kinds of activities employed can be equally important.

BALANCE

An even more important concept in providing an uplifting worship service is the idea of “balance.” Studies of the relation between psychological type and spirituality have found that variety must be limited by balance. A very abstract lecture on some esoteric point of theology might be very uplifting to those who prefer introversion and intuition, but it would likely turn off the rest of the congregation. Personally, I prefer long periods of silence while observing the Lord’s Supper, but my preferences have to be balanced by the need to serve some people who are distracted by anything more than ten seconds of silence.

Personality differences are reflected in attitudes toward change. There are four different expressions about change that reflect the attitudes of four groups of MBTI types.

- IS “Keep it.”
- ES “Do it.”
- EN “Change it.”
- IN “Think about it in a different way.”

In most of the congregations that I have tested, most of the elders prefer Introversion and Sensing and, by nature, tend to have a negative attitude toward change. But most of the preachers prefer Extraversion and Intuition and, by nature, favor change just for the sake of being different.

The church is like a body and all of its members are important (Eph. 4:15,16; 1 Cor. 12:4-27; Rm. 6:4-8). A healthy church will have members whose personalities reflect many different preferences.¹ The right kind of

¹ Gary Harbaugh, *God’s Gifted People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter Myers, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1980), Christopher Bryant, *Jung and the Christian Way* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1983); W. Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, and Thomas E. Clarke, *From Image to Likeness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Normsey, *Prayer and Temperament* (Charlottesville: The Open Door, 1984).

balance is needed in order to provide enough variety so that each type will be uplifted—without going so far as to lose the rest of the congregation.

FOCUS

Church leaders need to focus very carefully on the kind of members they are serving—as well as the kind of people they are trying to reach. I believe, for example, that a predominately white, middle and upper-middle class, well educated congregation with a preference for classical/traditional Christian hymns should welcome into its fellowship anyone who wants to be a part of that congregation—regardless of racial/ethnic background, social class, educational level, or anything of that nature. But I do not believe that it would be wise for that church, in an effort to attract more black members, to stop singing those classical/traditional Christian hymns and start using nothing but soul music. I do not think that the preacher for such a congregation should try to imitate the preaching style characteristic of black churches. For one thing, white people do not usually do a very good imitation of black culture and so they would be more likely to offend than to attract more black members. For another thing, such a strategy would likely encourage many of the members of that congregation to leave. They would be looking for a congregation where they can worship in the style that is most uplifting to them.

Let me make it clear that I am not at all in favor of racial/ethnic segregation. But assimilationism can be just as bigoted as segregation ever was. What gives me the right to tell Hispanic people that they must pray to God in English? What gives me the right to tell Black people who do not want to assimilate into mainstream culture churches that they must do so and that their Black churches have no right to exist? One of the most important lessons that Donald McGavran taught us was that people prefer to become Christians without having to cross any language or cultural barriers.¹

Church leaders should have a clear understanding of the personality differences and cultural diversity within their congregations—and within the target population they are seeking to reach. When a church tries to be all things to all people all at the same time, it is most likely to reach few people at all. Instead of being uplifting, its worship services will probably be about like the bland leading the bland.

CONCLUSION

Emphasis, variety, balance, and focus are not the only things that are needed in order to provide uplifting worship services. These are, however, among the more important concepts that leaders should remember, understand, and apply.

¹ Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970)