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Multiple Worship Services and Church Growth

Charles Arn

Approximately half of the 355,000 Protestant churches in the U.S. and Canada should consider adding a new style worship service to their weekly schedule of activities, regardless of the number of services they present offer. Of the churches that do begin a new service, eight out of ten will experience a *measurable increase* in 1) total worship attendance, 2) total giving, and 3) number of Christian conversions.

My study on the dynamics of adding a new worship service, and its subsequent affect on church growth, grows from a five-year research project with Church Growth, Inc. (Monrovia, CA). During this time we 1) researched established churches that have successfully – and some unsuccessfully – attempted to add a new style service, 2) identified “common denominators” of the successful models, and 3) worked with several hundred volunteer churches of different sizes, locations, and denominations, to test the steps of adding a new service. The result of this research is a considerable body of evidence and experience on how churches can successfully begin a new style service, which will be published by Baker Books under the working title of *Seven Steps to a New Service*).

So, how can a church determine if it is one of the 177,000 churches that should be planning an additional service in the coming year?

Churches That Should Not Add A New Service

It is actually easier to tell whether a church is *not* one of those that should add a new service. Here are four situations

which describe approximately half of the churches in North America. If a church is in one of these situations, I believe it would do well to focus on other strategies of church growth rather than adding a new service . . .

Churches Should Not Add An Additional Worship Service If . . .

1. *“Community” is the highest priority of the church.* The most frequent comment a pastor will hear if the church currently has one worship service and begins planning a second is: “we won’t know each other” and/or “we will become two churches.”

Do you know what? They’re right!

Churches that add a new and different style service to their weekly program do find that attendees gravitate toward one group or the other, and infrequently interact with those in the other service. Churches that decide to move ahead with a new service must conclude that “becoming two churches” is not necessarily bad.

If church leaders and/or members, however, are first and foremost committed to preserving “one happy family,” an attempt to begin a new service will be frustrating and probably fail. The new service will be perceived as counter-productive to congregational unity and will be stone-walled by those who see it as a threat to community.

2. *Correct theology is the highest priority for the church.* Congregations and denominations that have split away from a more liberal church or denomination in the past 50 - 75 years often have greater difficulty adding a new style service. Even churches without such a background, but ones that emphasize correct doctrine and interpretation of Scripture as the distinctive of their existence, encounter difficulty adding a new style service. “Contemporary” is equivalent to compromise. “Contemporary Christian music” is an oxymoron. A “true church,” these folks believe, could not possibly look so much like the world.

If such an attitude permeates a church’s membership, a new service will cause a church split! Supporters of the “worldly” service will be seen as agents of disruption bringing the carnality of the world inside the walls of the church. Of course, those observations are accurate to a certain extent. A new service very well may bring the world inside the walls of the church. To some that is the greatest of success, for it is what Christ calls the church to do. But to others it is the greatest of sins.

3. *Survival is the highest priority for the church.* Every year 3,000 to 5,000 churches close their doors for the last time. Most of these churches spent great time and effort in the years preceding that final day trying to avoid such fate. Many other churches are in the final years of their life. Their attention, energy, pastoral focus, and member recruitment were intended to simply keep the doors open.

Preoccupation with avoiding death creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such churches invariably die, if not through formal dissolution, then through a degenerative slide into spiritual impotence. If a church is more concerned with avoiding death than pursuing life, adding a new service will fail.

4. *The senior pastor intends to leave in the coming year.* The pastor is one of the most important factors in adding a new service. We have found that, if all other things are equal, when the pastor is actively supporting a new service, the chances of success are approximately 80%. Without his/her support, the chances drop to under 20%. But when the pastor leaves in the midst of such planning, the likelihood of a successful new service being realized drops to under 5%. A pastor's exit in the midst of any major initiative, such as adding a new service, has the same effect as a general deserting his troops in the height battle. No pastor should leave such a situation with a clear conscience.

Based on my personal experience, research, and involvement in the church growth movement during the past 21 years, I believe it is a fair projection to suggest that approximately 50% of the congregations in North America fall into one of the above categories. (My assessment is that approximately 15% of churches fit in the first category, 10% fit into the second, 5% in the third, and 20% in the fourth.) If your church or a church you are consulting with is in one or more of these four categories, there are strategies and resources which will help. But starting a new service is probably not one of them.

However, the 50% of churches that do not fall into one of these categories have a great opportunity to broaden the scope and impact of their ministry—and the Kingdom of God—through the addition of a new style service!

Good Excuses ... But Not Good Reasons

Some churches will say, "Yes, but our situation is different. We can't start a new service because ..."

Indeed, they may have a legitimate reason for not planning a new style service in the coming year. But based on our research and experience, none of the following qualify as legitimate reasons . . .

1. *"We're not big enough to begin a new service."* We have found that the minimum number in an existing church service in order to successfully begin a new service, is approximately 40 people. If a church has had less than 40 in attendance for the past three years, and the vision for the church is greater than 40, they should start a new service but they should put their old service out of its misery! The church probably has inadequate resources to do both. If a church has more than 40 people in its present service, it has enough to begin a new service.

2. *"We're not growing."* The growth pattern of the existing service(s) is basically irrelevant to starting a new service. In fact, if there is any relationship at all, it is inverse: the more rapidly a church is declining, the more immediately it should move to begin a new service. Doing more of what it has been doing will simply get a church more of what it has been getting. The sooner a church begins planning a new service, the more likely it can expect things to turn around.

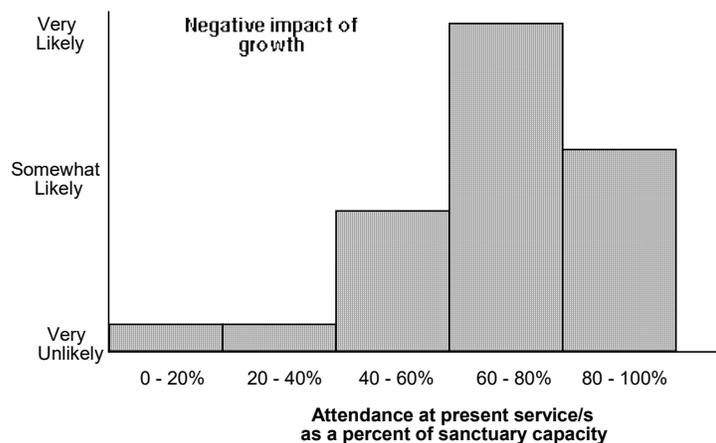
3. *"Our sanctuary isn't full in the present service(s)."* The thought process of some people goes something like this: "Our present service/s isn't full. If people wanted to come to our church, they could attend the one/s we have ... a new service will negatively impact our existing service." In fact, there is a relationship between a church's sanctuary capacity, its present attendance, and a new service. But it is not what most members think. The relationship looks like this:

- If attendance in the present service averages less than 20% of sanctuary capacity (and has for the past 2 or more years), the church needs a new service as soon as possible. The likelihood of the present service growing is minimal, and the new service is the church's primary hope for survival.
- If current attendance averages 20 - 40% of sanctuary capacity, a new service still has a better chance to grow than the existing service/s.
- If attendance averages 40 - 60% of sanctuary capacity, a new style service will not significantly reduce the

growth potential of the present service, but it will have some impact.

- If the sanctuary is at 60 - 80% capacity, it is at this point where the church faces the most challenging situation. Because, there is a better than even chance that the new service *will*, in fact, take enough people away from the present service and drop it into the 40 - 60% range— which is a capacity less conducive for growth than 60 - 80%. The key question in this case is whether attendance has been *growing* during the past two years. If attendance *has* been growing at 10+% per year or more, the church should set a date for a new service 1 - 1 1/2 years away, and allow the present growth pattern to continue. If attendance has been *plateaued* for the past 2+ years, the church should begin planning for a new service if it desires total attendance to grow beyond its present levels.
- If a church's present service regularly fills the sanctuary to 80+% of capacity the church's immediate step should be to add another *identical* service. The "saturation point" of most sanctuaries is reached when it averages 80 - 85% of total capacity for more than four months. If a sanctuary holds 300 people and it is averaging 250, that church is full ... and won't grow beyond its present size.

The following graph summarizes the likelihood of a new service *negatively* influencing the growth potential of an existing service/s, related to sanctuary capacity:



When you calculate sanctuary capacity, by the way, don't use figures from when the building was constructed. If a church has pews, its capacity has declined if the building was constructed over 20 years ago ... even if the number of pews has not changed! Architects and church planners used to calculate an 8' pew to seat five people. Today that same pew will comfortably seat three. A generation ago people were comfortable with 20" of space. Today the comfort zone is 30 - 36."

4. *"We don't have enough personnel."* A new service will indeed require more people. A contemporary service, for example, requires three to four times the amount of preparation as worship planners generally spend on a traditional service. But staffing a new service requires fewer human resources than one might imagine, and usually less than a traditional service when the choir is included. Carl George has written, "I propose that the missing ingredient in developing multiple worship services is ... the lack of vision in how to raise enough lay talent to staff the additional services." Rather than lack of people, I have found that lack of pastoral willingness to reallocate time, is a greater obstacle for a new service.

5. *"Our theology does not allow for a different style."* I was recently discouraged by a conversation with an Episcopalian priest on the topic of new style services. We were discussing the difference between "forms" of worship and "essence" of worship. He surprised me with a statement about many churches in his denomination by saying, "for us, our form is our essence." How sad.

It is critical for a church to struggle with the difference between its "forms" and its "essence" ... its styles and its substance ... its negotiables and its non-negotiables. One can observe religious groups in our own country's history who have allowed their forms to *become* their essence. The Shakers, for example, who are nearly extinct because of their uncompromising religious rituals; or the Amish, who survive only on limited biological growth.

6. *"Our church is in a bad location."* Research has shown that location is not a measurable predictor of church growth. A good location does not cause growth; a bad location seldom prohibits growth. Some of the most rapidly growing churches are in economically depressed areas, or locations that require an intentional search to find the building.

Certainly there are some churches that are in the wrong place. Approximately 10% of all congregations, according to Lyle Schaller, will not grow in their present location. In many such cases the makeup of the neighborhood changed while the congregation did not. But in actuality, it is these churches, more than most, that should begin immediate plans for a new service. A new style service, targeted for the people who now surround the church is far more likely to be successful than attempting to attract neighbors to the existing service.

Seven Reasons To Begin A New Service

I would like to share with you seven reasons why half of all churches in the country should add a new worship service in the next 12 - 24 months. Whether they have one service, two, three or more, the reasons for—and value of—adding a new service do not change. Some in the church may resonate to one of the following reasons. Others in the same church may find a different one more compelling. In reality, a shared congregational *motive* for beginning a new service is not important. What is important is a shared congregational *goal*—namely, to begin a new style service within the next two years.

When introducing the idea of a new service to members of a church, the more reasons you present the more likely members will hear at least one that convinces them to support the idea. Any *one* of these reasons is an adequate motive for a new service. In concert, I believe they form an absolute mandate.

Reason #1: *A new service will reach the unchurched.* Of all the reasons to begin a new service, this should be the most compelling. To reach non-Christians should be cause enough to start a new service for the 152,500 churches in America that did not add a single new convert last year. And to better reach non-Christians should be cause enough for the 260,000 churches currently plateaued or declining in worship attendance.

Christ's passion for reaching lost humanity is stated frequently and emphatically throughout Scripture:

"... I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." Lu. 4:43

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."
Lu. 19:10

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." Jn. 3:17

"... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mt. 20:28

"... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Jn. 10:10

The first reason for starting a new style service—and by far the most important—is that a new service will increase the number of people a church will reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why is this so?

A New Service Will Focus A Church's Attention on the Unchurched

Starting a new service has many similarities to starting a new church. Those who have been part of planting a new church know the strong sense of mission, group spirit, and excitement that is found in planning to reach new people with the Gospel. These dynamics also occur when a church becomes involved in starting a new service. Like a new church, a new service focuses on people not presently involved in a church. Members must ask *"who* the new service is for," *"why* are we starting a new service," and *"how* are these new people going to be reached." These questions—and answers—lead a church beyond its own walls to those not presently active.

A New Service Will Help A Church Repackage Its Message

Certain forms and liturgies become almost "sacred" to those who have grown up with them. For many sincere and well-meaning folks there is only one "right" way to worship ... one "right" music to sing and play ... one "right" time and "right" day to have church. Anything other than the familiar worship patterns will never seem "right."

Starting a new style service will force a church to ask an important question: "What are our *forms*, and what is our *essence*?" Many unchurched people who are put off simply by the *forms* of religion are otherwise receptive to the *essence* of Christ and the Gospel. Starting a new service allows a church to shed cultural or sociological forms which may be keeping it from effectively reaching a new group of people.

A New Service Will Allow Members to Invite Their Friends

Research shows that the primary way churches grow is through the invitation of members to their friends and relatives. However, most members of non-growing churches do not invite anyone. Why? Because they don't believe their friends or relatives would find the service interesting or relevant. When a church offers a new service that is relevant, appropriate, and well-presented, church members show a dramatic increase in the number of invitations they extend to others.

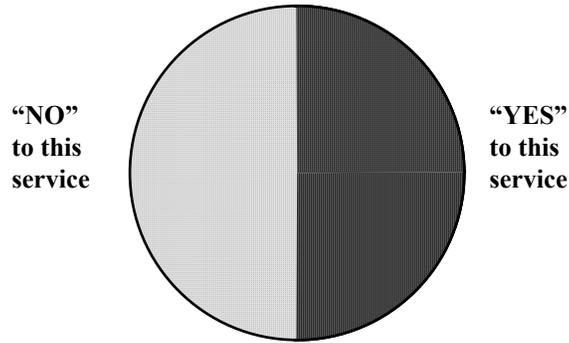
So, summarizing the first reason for starting a new style service: churches that do so will reach more unchurched people. Unfortunately, not all people in church find this to be a compelling reason. So, let's look at a second reason . . .

Reason #2: *A new service will minister to more Christians.* Lyle Schaller has observed that eighty percent of the congregations that move from one worship experience to two find their overall attendance jumps by at least 10%. Whether the new service is on Saturday for the 27% of working Americans who cannot attend every Sunday ... or Thursday evening for Baby Boomers taking weekend "mini-vacations" ... whether the new service is for those who prefer contemporary music ... or parents who want to worship with their children in a family service, the more options a church provides the more people it will reach.

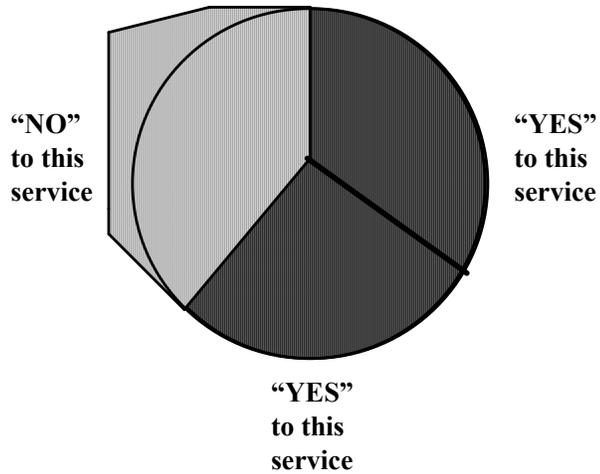
People today want choices; in their cars, their cereals, their detergents, their television programs. Coca Cola offers nine choices of coke. Ford offers seven lines of cars with a variety of color and interior options for each. The insight is crucial for churches in today's world of choices: offering only one service ... at one time of day ... on one day of the week ... with one style, says to the community: "this is your choice—take it or leave it." Guess which option most will choose?

But when the choice is no longer "take it" or "leave it," but "when" ... "what" ... "how" ... or "where," then a church greatly increases the choices people can make. And the more choices provided for attending a worship service, the more people will say "yes" to one of them.

The importance of providing worship service choices can be graphically illustrated through the following diagrams. When a church has only one service per week, the choice of responses it is giving to people is simple: "yes to this service" or "no to this service."

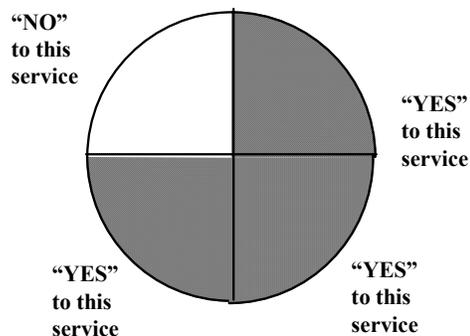


But when a church offers two services, it has *doubled* the number of opportunities people now have to say "YES," and increased the statistical likelihood of a positive response to one of your services from 50% to 66%.



Offer three services and a church triples the number of choices and increases the opportunities to say "YES" by 75%. This does not mean that 75% of those invited to a service will come. It means that when a church has three services it has a

75% better chance of seeing those who are invited actually attend. And the percentage increases with additional services beyond even three.



Reason #3: *A new service will reach new kinds of people.* A new style service will not only help a church reach more non-Christians (Reason #1), and help the church minister to more total numbers of people (Reason #2), it will help a church reach different *kinds* of people than are presently being reached.

Here's why ...

Today, the worship service is the primary "door of entrance" for people to become involved in congregational life. Visitors decide to become active in a church based primarily on their experience in and around the worship service. And, like it or not, a particular kind of service is attractive to some people, while not attractive to others. No single service can be all things to all people. Consequently, it is important for a church to ask the question: "who finds our present service attractive?"

Most church services in America are appealing to one (and generally only one) group of people. It is important for a church to consider the people to whom their existing service is most attractive; as well as the most likely target group on which to focus a new service.

Recall that one of the most important reasons for beginning a new service is to allow a church to reach a new group of people in its community. In evaluating a church's present and potential target groups, it is helpful to use three different criteria—**GENERATIONAL** Group, **SPIRITUAL** Condition, **CULTURAL**

Identity. Let's briefly consider each:

Generational Group

Sociologists and demographers tell us that the American population is comprised of three distinct generational groups, each with their own unique identity, behavior, and predictable characteristics: "Baby Busters," "Baby Boomers," and "Seniors."

While certainly every person is unique in his/her own respect, there is adequate research to support the thesis that persons in each of these three categories share an extraordinary number of attitudes and behavior patterns with others in that same group, which are distinctly different from those in either of the two other age cohorts.

Spiritual Condition

The vast majority of church services in America today are focused on Christians. While an increasing number of churches are trying to be "seeker friendly," and some churches still include invitations to accept Christ, in reality pastors and service planners assume a predominantly Christian audience. And their assumptions are correct.

The term "Seeker Service" has entered the vocabulary of an increasing number of pastors and church growth students. Many confuse the terms "seeker-sensitive service" with "seeker-targeted service." The first term describes a service where the assumption is that most attendees are Christians and there for the purpose of worshipping God. The second term describes a service where the assumption is that most attendees are non-Christians and there for the purpose of evaluating God as an option.

Considering the spiritual condition of your target audience—specifically, their relationship to Christ—is an important step in defining a new service. A clear understanding of this issue, and the assumptions about your audience will be necessary before a church can identify themes and topics which will make the service relevant and successful.

Cultural Identity

Approximately half of all Americans consider themselves ethnic. Each year approximately 250,000 people become naturalized American citizens and thousands more enter the country

undocumented. Distinct people groups can be found in every town and country side. Today America is far less a “melting pot,” as the historic stereotype would put it, than it is a “stew pot.” The fact is that individuals tend to resist the outreach efforts of congregations that represent a different ethnic, racial, language, socio-economic, or generational group from theirs. Until churches—and worship services—are available in a language and location that provides a comfortable ethnic culture, there will be many people in America who never attend church or find faith in God.

It may be helpful to look at the three variables together in a graphic summary:

GENERATIONAL	Senior	Baby Boomer	Baby Buster
SPIRITUAL	Believer-Focused		Seeker-Focused
CULTURAL	Identi-Cultural	Multi-Cultural	Cross-Cultural

Approximately 96% of all existing church services today are designed for Seniors or Boomers, they are believer-focused, and they are comprised of people from a similar cultural background. However, based on the these three variables (“Generational Group,” “Spiritual Condition,” and “Cultural Identity”) there are theoretically 18 unique kinds of services your church could offer!

Here are some guidelines for helping a church select a target audience for its new service:

First, locate their *present* service on each of the three variables: *GENERATIONAL*, *SPIRITUAL*, and *CULTURAL*. To do this, identify the predominant group from which most new attenders are coming.

Then, to identify a target audience for the new service, move *one* of the groups in *one* of the variables.

For example, suppose the present service is:

- GENERATIONAL: *Senior* (born prior to 1940)
- SPIRITUAL: *Believer-Focused* (those professing Christian faith)
- CULTURAL: *Identi-Cultural* (group shares a common cultural affinity)

Visually, the present service would look like this:

GENERATIONAL	Senior	Baby Boomer	Baby Buster
SPIRITUAL	Believer-Focused		Seeker-Focused
CULTURAL	Identi-Cultural	Multi-Cultural	Cross-Cultural

For a legitimate new service to a distinct new target population, only *one* of the variables need be changed. Assuming a church's present service is represented by the above scenario, its new service options would change one of these three variables, with the choices looking like this:

New Service Option #1

- GENERATIONAL: ***Baby Boomer*** (born between 1946 - 1964)
- SPIRITUAL: *Believer* (professing Christians)
- CULTURAL: *Identi-Cultural* (similar cultural identity)

GENERATIONAL SPIRITUAL CULTURAL	Senior	Baby Boomer	Baby Buster
	Believer-Focused		Seeker-Focused
	Identi-Cultural	Multi-Cultural	Cross-Cultural

New Service Option #2

GENERATIONAL: *Senior* (born prior to 1940)
 SPIRITUAL: *Seeker-Focused* (those persons considering Christianity)
 CULTURAL: *Identi-Cultural* (similar cultural identity)

GENERATIONAL SPIRITUAL CULTURAL	Senior	Baby Boomer	Baby Buster
	Believer-Focused		Seeker-Focused
	Identi-Cultural	Multi-Cultural	Cross-Cultural

New Service Option #3

GENERATIONAL: *Senior* (born prior to 1940)
 SPIRITUAL: *Believer* (professing Christians)
 CULTURAL: *Multi-Cultural* (a variety of cultural backgrounds)

GENERATIONAL	Senior	Baby Boomer	Baby Buster
	Believer-Focused		Seeker-Focused
	Identi-Cultural	Multi-Cultural	Cross-Cultural

Based on my research of churches that have successfully added a new service, we are advising churches to limit their new service target audience to only one move on just one of the variables. For example, if a congregation believes that their best ministry is to "Seniors" but they already have one senior-oriented service, the new service could change the spiritual variable and be a "Senior Seeker" service.

Or, if the church were in an area where the cultural context was changing, it may decide to retain the "Senior" and "Believer-Focused" variables, but start a new "Multi-Cultural" service.

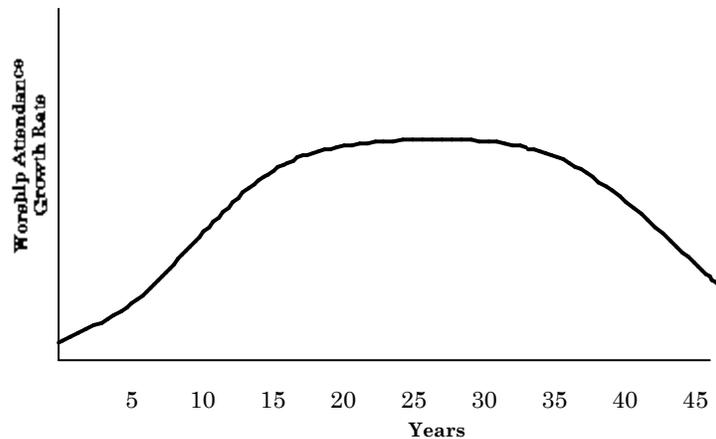
One change in one variable will be a significant enough change to attract an entirely new group of people. Changing more than one variable will make the process of researching and planning the new service not just twice as complicated, but four times so. Changing all three variables to define a new service will require a Herculean effort and reduce the chances of success dramatically.

Here's another suggestion, based on my research. If a church decides to change either the generational or the cultural variable for its new service, the move should be limited to the adjacent group on any one variable. Don't jump over a group with a new service. That is, move from "Senior" to "Boomer," not "Senior" to "Buster;" or "Identi-Cultural" to "Multi-Cultural" not "Identi-Cultural" to "Cross-Cultural." To jump over a group will make the task of planning and incorporating a new service into a present ministry considerably more challenging because of the dramatic difference between the new group and the church's present membership.

A mistake some churches make, in an effort to broaden the generational and/or spiritual range of people attracted to their existing service, is to *diversify* the music or liturgical style. In so doing, however, most churches actually *diminish* the effectiveness of their present service among *every* people group, including their predominant one.

Reason #4: *A new service will help a church break out of its normal lifecycle.* The lifecycle of a church is both normal and predictable. Like gravity, it is a law that simply exists. And, like it or not, all churches are subject to it. The lifecycle describes a local church's infancy, maturity, and death. The sobering fact is that at least 80% of the churches in America today are on the flat or back side of their lifecycles.

Graphically, a typical church lifecycle looks like this . . .



In the early stages of a church's life there is a high sense of mission among all involved. The church is purpose-driven. Charter members, and often even the pastor, volunteer their time to help the church reach people and grow. Buildings are less important; structure is less important. Their motivation is outreach. And the result is growth.

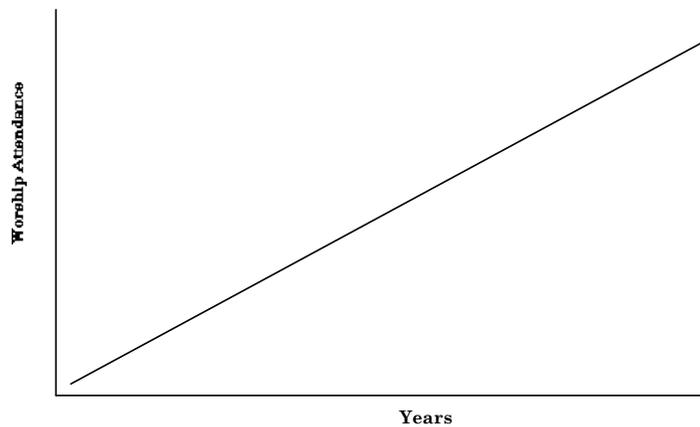
As the formative years give way to time, the church reaches a comfortable size and generally stops growing. If growth does continue, the percentage of *transfer* growth increases, and the percentage of *conversion* growth declines. An emerging pattern of institutionalization is reflected in the increasing number of com-

mittees, and the decreasing degree of accomplishment.

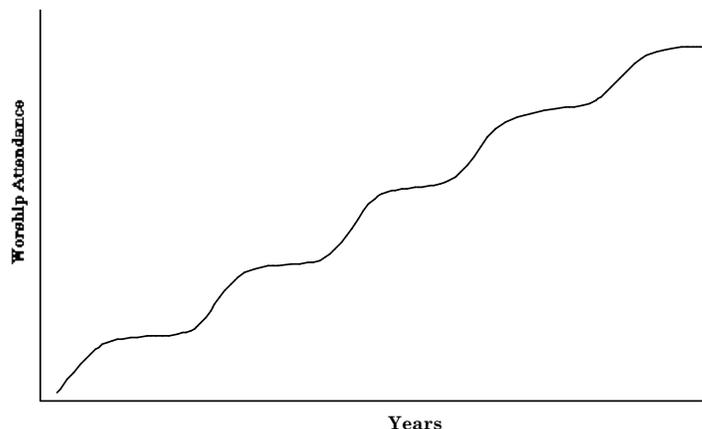
The final stage of the lifecycle—decline—often begins around a church's 40th - 50th birthday. Few, if any, members reflect the passion of the founders. The community has usually changed but the church has not. Decline in worship attendance during this stage of the lifecycle may be gradual or abrupt. Few in the church, including the staff, believe the church's best days are still ahead.

But what about those churches that rise above this predictable lifecycle pattern and experience growth beyond the first 20 - 30 years. How do they do it?

As we have studied and charted the growth of churches that "don't fit the mold" of a normal lifecycle, a fascinating pattern emerges. Rather than a constant or linear pattern of growth which one might expect to occur in larger churches . . .



growing churches that have broken out of their predictable lifecycle reflect a "stair step" pattern of growth . . .



Here’s a key insight: Most churches that are growing—at a time when they should be plateaued or declining—*have begun new lifecycles!* Something has interrupted the church’s normal pattern—I call it an “intervention event”—and a new lifecycle has begun before the old lifecycle has pulled them into decline or death.

Here is a list of common intervention events that have been the cause of a new lifecycle in many churches. As you can see, most of these are “controllable,” some simply happen.

1. Change of pastors
2. A crisis
3. Plant a church
4. Close then re-open a church
5. Renewal of pastor
6. Renewal of laity
7. Denominational involvement
8. Outside consultant
9. Relocation
10. Begin a new service

Of all the controllable intervention events that can help a church begin a new lifecycle, the establishment of a new worship service is the most likely to do so. Or, more directly: *The best way to begin a new lifecycle is to begin a new service.*

Reason #5: *A new service will allow for change while retaining the familiar.* If a church wishes to reach out to and attract new groups of people, it has essentially three options. Each option

results in a fairly predictable outcome:

Option #1: *Completely redesign the present service.*

Outcome: This approach will indeed reach new people, and can potentially be the beginning of a new lifecycle in a church. The cost, however, may be a considerable loss of present members who become unhappy and leave. (Not all of whom, by the way, will leave peacefully or quietly.)

Option #2: *Incorporate more variety into the existing service.*

Outcome: The goal of this strategy is to provide a service where a broader range of people can experience something which they like. A few old hymns mixed with contemporary praise songs with perhaps some 1960s choruses. But in an effort to provide a service where everyone finds something they like, the church will more likely discover they have created a service where everyone finds something they *don't* like. And people tend to remember what they didn't like in a service much longer than what they did. In this option, as with #1, you *will* reach new people; namely, those who like a potpourri of experiences. But that number is a minority and probably fewer than the number you are reaching now. And it will be at the price of losing some (perhaps many) present attendees.

With both options #1 and #2, incidentally, the financial implications should not go overlooked. Those members who leave because of the change in worship style are often larger givers than the new people who are attracted. One recent study in Florida, for example, found that seven new baby boomer members were required to financially replace every senior adult member who left.

Option #3: *Add an additional service that offers a clear choice of styles.*

Outcome: With this option, a church doubles its outreach and ministry potential, provides opportunities for more members to have a role or task in ministry, and sees new "kinds" of people begin attending. Members will be far more likely to tolerate change around them if their own comfortable world is not disturbed.

This third option builds on an important principle of innovation which every church leader does well to memorize: Change

through *addition*, will be more successful than change through *substitution*.

If church members feel they are losing something of value (i.e. "their" service), even though it may be for a seemingly worthwhile cause, many will resist it, believing that the benefit is not worth the cost. Through *adding* a new style service, without deleting the existing one, a church doubles its outreach and ministry potential while allowing those members who prefer the present service to continue receiving their spiritual nourishment. My vote, in the vast majority of cases, is for option #3!

Reason #6: *A new service will activate inactive members* In studying churches that have added a new style service, I have frequently observed a serendipitous benefit—the percentage of inactive members decreases. In the typical American church approximately 40% of the church's membership attend on any given Sunday. Reasons for inactivity vary. But regardless of the cause, the people who stay away are non-verbally saying: the cost of attending is not worth the benefit. It is not uncommon, however, to see a new style service boost the member attendance percentages from the 40% range to 60+%. In other words, some of the most likely people to begin attending your new service will be your inactive members.

Earlier we suggested that one reason for adding a new service is to reach a larger number of people. Some of those people will be returning inactives.

Reason #7 *A new service will help your denomination grow.* Denominational church families that desire to be effective and vital in the 21st century must see a large percentage of their churches participating in one of two growth strategies: 1) the active establishing of new churches, and/or 2) the intentional starting of new services.

There is little question among church growth scholars that starting new churches is the single most important activity for assuring the future of a denomination. But it is not as commonly known that the wide spread creation of new style services among existing churches the *second* most important strategy. When a large number of churches in a denomination are starting a new service to reach a new target audience, they are, in effect, accomplishing many of the goals and realizing many of the benefits inherent in planting a new church.

What Is the Cost?

There are numerous benefits to beginning a new style worship service. But those benefits do not come without a price. Before committing to the pursuit of adding a new service, it is worthwhile for pastors and church consultants to understand the costs.

Fear

The Church of the Nazarene conducted a study of their churches that had added a new style service. The greatest obstacle that pastors faced in deciding whether or not to move forward was fear. Fear of what? Here is the list which the study identified as the most common fears of pastors contemplating a new service:

- Fear of lack of cooperation from people
- Fear of a small crowd
- Fear of losing the dynamics of one large service
- Fear of physical demands
- Fear of a psychological let down of going from a crowded sanctuary to half full
- Fear of separate congregations
- Fear of low morale
- Fear of conflict with people resisting change

The same survey found that fear was not limited to the clergy and staff. Church boards also experienced fear in contemplating a new service. Uppermost on their list of fears were:

- Fear of physical toll on the pastor
- Fear of loss of unity
- Fear of two separate congregations; and not knowing everyone
- Fear of the effect of lower attendance in the worship service
- Fear of the new and different
- Fear of a drop in attendance

Yet, among those churches that are now offering a new service, the study found that 100% of the respondents indicated that their congregations now felt positive toward the new service, and that it was worth the time, money, and risk involved.

The Risk of Failure

Here is a principle of pastoral survival they didn't teach in seminary: *pastors do not risk their careers by tending to business as usual*. Activities such as calling on hospitalized members, preparing and preaching respectable sermons, avoiding or resolving conflicts, and attending church meetings keep most pastors in their present position for as long as they feel called to stay.

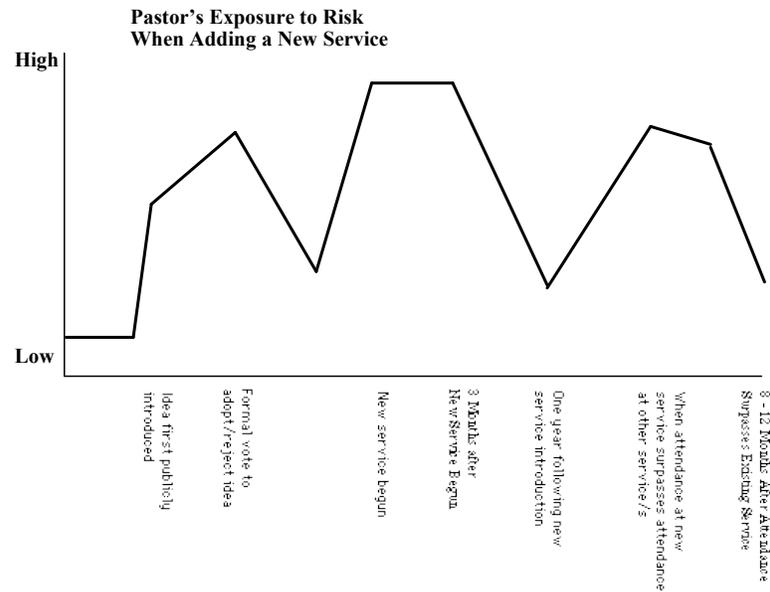
But leading a church into change is risky business. And, for most churches, adding a new style service is both considerable change and considerable risk. The pastor places him or herself in the position of supporting what may be a highly visible failure. If the new service is a bust and is unceremoniously terminated, the pastor can become a "lame duck" facing increased difficulty generating support for future ideas. Elmer Towns has observed that: "The primary barrier to starting another service is fear of failure.

The Risk of Success

Of course a new service that does become a grand success is not risk-free. If the church has designed and promoted a service which is meeting needs and attracting people, it is quite likely that attendance at the new service will not only grow, but surpass the attendance 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 in the reaction from those who have sanctified the status quo.

The battle is not won a few months after the new service has established a critical mass and seems to be building momentum. The risk of a successful service, in fact, does not fully subside until eight to twelve months after attendance in the new service surpasses attendance in the established service.

The following graph visualizes the pastor's exposure to risk, and even job security related to the new service. This risk begins with the initial public introduction of the idea of a new service. The level of risk varies throughout the process until one year after attendance at the new service surpasses the original service.



Any pastor considering the addition of a new style service does well to take a personal inventory of his or her willingness to put their reputation and leadership on the line in the pursuit of a new service. Introducing and championing a new service is one of the best ways to increase a pastor's "leadership stock." But it is no small risk and no small decision.

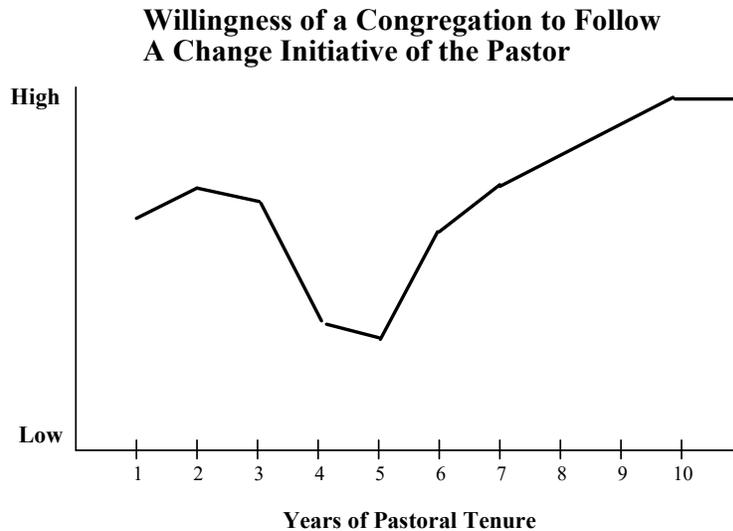
Resistance to Change

Adding a new style service and focusing on a new target audience disrupts the equilibrium and status quo of a church. By definition, it is change. And human nature resists change, particularly in the church.

Yet, without change the church becomes outdated, and in only a few short generations, irrelevant. Already 66% of Americans believe the traditional church is irrelevant. If members of a local congregation believe their church's purpose is to reach unchurched people and bringing them into the community of faith, then the pastor must convince them that the question is not "whether to change," but simply, "what to change."

In studying the likelihood of church members' willingness to follow a pastor's change initiative, we discovered a relationship between the length of time the pastor has been in his or her pre-

sent position, and the willingness of the congregation to follow the pastor's leadership into the battle called "change." It looks like this:



If a pastor have been in the church for less than two years, he or she has a reasonably good chance that the church will support the initiative of a new service. The "honeymoon" is still fresh in the minds of members. They have little desire to rub their new pastor the wrong way on his/her first major initiative for growth in the church, particularly if the agony of the pastoral calling process is still fresh in their minds.

But the confidence of members in the "staying power" of their pastor begins to wane around the third year. The average tenure of American pastors is 3.7 years. The unspoken fear of some in the church is that if they embark on a risky venture into the unknown, the pastor may find that things are too tough to keep going, and leave. The church is then burdened with a vision initiated by a person who is no longer there.

This graph does not mean that pastors who have been in their present church for 3 to 5 years should not initiate a new service. It does mean that it is particularly important for these pastors to solicit extraordinary support among established lay leaders, and assure them of his or her commitment to stay

through and beyond the time required to get the service up and running. It is at this point that the pastor needs a good number of “allies” to go into the battle with him or her; allies who are respected lay leaders.

Once pastors have been in their church for over six years members’ fears of losing their pastor begin to diminish. Particularly if the pastor plans to stay for a long time—and has told the church so—members’ confidence that their pastor will stick with a risky initiative causes them to be more inclined to follow that pastor into this new venture of faith. As a rule, the longer a pastor has been in the church after the 5th - 6th year, the more likely the members are to endorse his/her leadership initiatives.

More Time, More Work

I recall being with a group of Presbyterian pastors in Memphis a few years ago who had agreed to participate in one of our pilot projects to start a new service. We were in the first of three meetings for this year-long project. After presenting what I felt was a reasonable case for the value and benefits of a new service, a pastor in the back row asked, “What about all the extra time and work this will take?” I responded that indeed it would take additional effort by the pastor, but that hopefully he felt the benefit of growth and extended ministry was worth it. I could tell by his body language that he wasn’t convinced. A year later he still wasn’t. The church had not even attempted to begin a new service because (in my estimation) the pastor had decided it wasn’t worth the effort.

The fact is that a new service is going to take more work and more time than most pastors are currently devote to the worship portion of their ministry. The time required to plan and prepare for an effective new service is approximately four times what most pastors take to plan and prepare for their present service. This does not mean that the pastor should bear the sole burden for planning the service. But the pastor is a part of that worship team, and it will indeed take time. Ed Dobson, pastor of Calvary Church (Grand Rapids, MI), found that their contemporary “seeker service” takes more time to plan than their other four traditional services, combined.

The additional time required by the pastor once the new service is up and running is primarily in attendance at worship planning meetings for the new service, not in sermon prepara-

tion. One recent survey found that when churches offered 2 or more different service styles, 94% of the time the sermons were identical.

Less Control

For some pastors the one hour of worship is a prized possession. He/she determines the sermon, selects the songs, approves the announcements, voices the prayer. It is a center-stage experience. But with a new style service, particularly a more contemporary style, control must be shared in two key areas ...

1. *Service Planning.* The selection of service themes is best accomplished through a team of people familiar with the make-up of the target group, not just the pastor.

2. *Platform Visibility.* The trend in many churches adding a new service is using a "worship leader." This person "emceeds" the service, calls the congregation to worship, provides "bridges" between segments, reads Scripture. And the pastor is primarily responsible for bringing the sermon. While this generally has more pluses than minuses, the consequence of this approach, however, is that the pastor is less the center of attention. For some, that is not a desirable situation.

More Stretch

If a pastor has grown up with and known only one style and structure of worship, there is a good chance he or she will initially be uncomfortable participating in whatever new style of service is defined. Whether the new service is for a different generation, a different culture, or people at a different point in their spiritual pilgrimage, it will be a style with which the pastor is probably unfamiliar. The pastor's greatest discomfort is generally with the music. But the issues and themes of the service, the dress, the day of the week, or the location will also likely be new ... and uncomfortable.

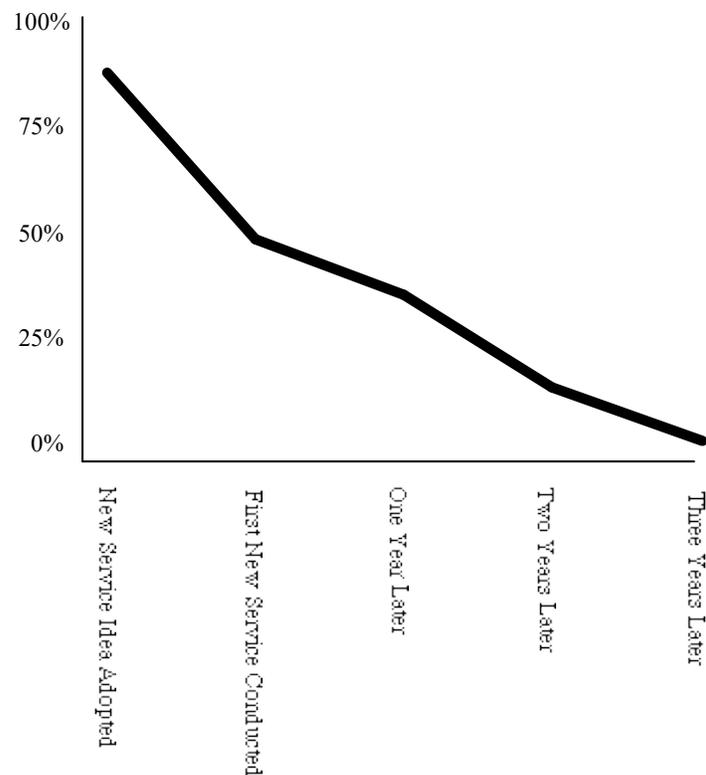
Commitment for Two Years

It takes approximately two years for a new style service to become permanently established as an accepted and normal part of a church's ministry. Prior to this point members still perceive the new service to be in a test period, and that it may be discontinued if there are greater problems than benefits. Consequently, the new service requires regular and visible support by its

champions (specifically the pastor) for the first two years.

If a pastor leaves before this “incubation period” for the new service, the chances are high that the service will be discontinued. Here is a visual illustration of the probability of the new service being discontinued based on if and when a pastor leaves the church.

Probability Of The New Service Being Discontinued If The Pastor Leaves The Church



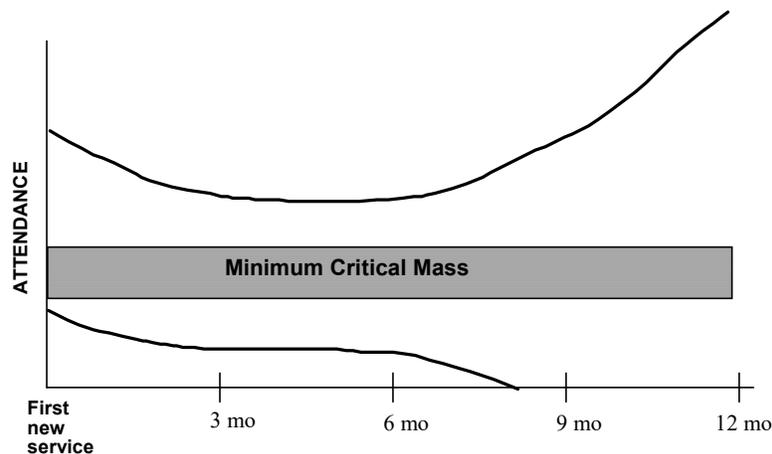
What is The Starting Size?

Here’s an axiom that explains much of the growth of today’s mega-churches. It affects the success of a new service, as well: *Crowds attract crowds.*

Don’t plan for a new service to start small and get bigger.

Plan to start big and get bigger. While every church isn't necessarily trying to start a mega-service, it is trying to start a service that will be around for a while. And that requires beginning with a "critical mass."

The critical mass for a new service is the number of people necessary to grow beyond the first six months. It is comparable to a rocket ship having enough fuel to launch it out of earth's gravity into outer space. A critical mass in a service is necessary for survival because there is a predictable attendance pattern which will be encountered. It looks something like this:



The top line illustrates attendance at a new service that began above its critical mass and did not descend below it during the first six months. The lower line illustrates attendance at the new service that started below, and never reached its critical mass. It is also possible, of course, that a new service could start above and descend below, or start below and ascend above, its critical mass.

What to Expect in the First Six Months

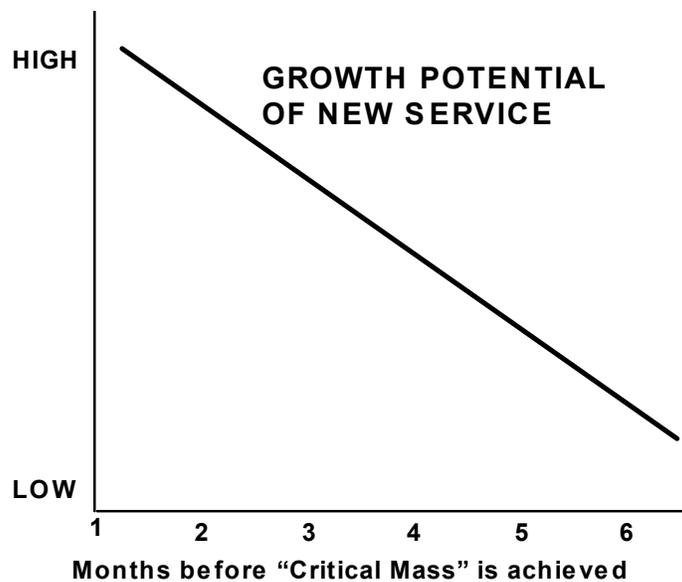
Most new services experience an initial decline in attendance (often up to 50%) during the first several months, after which they often plateau for several months. If the new service begins at or above its critical mass—and stays there for the first six months—the church has weathered the most perilous time in the life of its new service. If, on the other hand, the service begins

below, or drops below, the critical mass in the first six months, there is often insufficient energy to begin growing again, and the service will probably die.

Among the churches we studied that began a new service and canceled it within the first year, almost 85% began below or descended below their critical mass in the first six months.

Two other important observations about critical mass: 1) the sooner a service reaches its critical mass, the more rapid will be its subsequent growth; and 2) the longer it takes to reach it, the lower will be the attendance when the service eventually plateaus. (And, as we have observed about lifecycles, all services eventually plateau.)

The long-term 2 - 3 year growth potential of a new service is strongly affected by the length of time it takes to reach its critical mass. An illustration of the relationship is visualized below:



What Is A Service's Critical Mass?

"So," you are probably wondering, "what is the critical mass needed for a new service?" Unfortunately it is not one simple number that applies to all services. The critical mass is actually a factor of two numbers: 1) the attendance of the present larg-

est service, 2) the meeting room size.

Based on our studies of successful and unsuccessful new services, there are certain goals which a church should set for its new service in order to be assured of reaching its critical mass. If the new service reaches them within six months, it will be at or above the critical mass necessary to weather the 20 - 50% decline in the first three months, and still have an adequate nucleus for eventual growth.

Attendance Goal #1: *At least 50 people or 35% of the largest present service (which ever is greater) in attendance.* Fifty seems to be a minimum number for insuring a successful new service. To put it simply, most new services that begin with less than 50 don't survive the first year. Most new services that begin with more than 50 do survive.

Attendance Goal #2: *At least 35% of those in attendance should be unchurched.* In most cases this will be easy. Churches generally find that if their new service is focused on a new target group, and adequate promotion to the target audience has occurred, then 65% or more of those in attendance will be unchurched or inactive. A minimum goal of 35% also prevents a "musical chairs" process of simply moving your present congregation from one service to another.

Room Capacity Goal: *The meeting room should be filled to at least 50% capacity.* It is far better to bring in more chairs and squeeze into a small room than have many empty chairs/pews and get lost in a big one. This is one reason, as we will talk about later, that it may be better to meet in a facility other than the sanctuary.

Here is a table which translates these goals into specific numbers related to the size of a church's largest service and the ideal room capacity:

Attendance at your present largest service	Attendance goal for new service within 6 weeks	Unchurched or inactive goal for new service	Ideal meeting room seating capacity
less than 50	50	17	66 - 77
50 - 100	50	17	66 - 77
100 - 150	52	17	69 - 80
150 - 200	70	24	93 - 108
200 - 250	87	30	116 - 134

250 - 300	105	37	140 - 161
300 - 400	140	49	187 - 215
400 - 500	175	61	233 - 269
500 - 750+	262	92	349 - 403

Conclusion

Around nearly every church, at this very moment, are treasures hidden to most of the church's leaders. They are treasures of people who represent great value to God. They are needy. They are receptive. They are waiting to be found. While the church's present worship may not be the tool to mine these treasures, a new service designed to reach them with God's love could help these churches experience wonderful new discoveries of ministry and growth. What is now an unseen enigma to growth could hold riches in ministry beyond their greatest imagination!

As influential leaders in Christ's Church, I ask for God's blessing on each of you as you help those churches discover the exciting new opportunities available to them.

Writer

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