

Ten Worship Tips for Every Church from Church Planting

By Cathy Townley

The post-Christian culture is here, and it's affecting how we do, or think we should do, church. Evidence of the emerging culture especially plagues mainline leaders, who have been facing declining worship attendance, reduced giving, membership drops, and aging congregations for some time. Spending freezes are increasingly common in churches of all sizes; rumors of staff layoffs follow.

Worried leaders know change is necessary, and they usually begin by trying to mimic The Big Successful Church's worship. Soon, frantic conversation turns to the elusive young adult population, as though this group might initiate the reversal of trends.

I believe worship is central to the Christian life and an event to which believers must invite their irreligious friends. As such, teaching the local church about worship and cultural trends is important. The good news is that practical options exist to move congregations from discouragement to hope.

But there's no standardized formula to guarantee good worship, so obsessing over style and random demographics is misplaced energy. My experiences as a worship director and church planter have taught me the basic themes that wed the two disciplines, to address revitalization and church growth issues. None are radical; nonetheless, they may challenge you.

The heart of the matter—and of relevant worship—is: Do you believe God wants you to bear fruit in the Kingdom through worship and the local church? If not, then step one is to rekindle your relationship with Jesus to regain a sense of mission as a bearer of the gospel. If intimacy with Christ isn't the center of your personal life, worship leading is an empty shell.

If your answer is yes, then consider these suggestions.

1. *Understand the Post-Christian Culture*

Church planters study cultural trends so they can reach un-churched and de-churched populations. Established church leaders can learn from this practice.

You don't have to look far to notice that Christianity is no longer America's dominant faith. We are diverse religiously, dabble in edgy spirituality (watch *Medium* and *Ghost Whisperer*) and embrace worldly values (check out

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Grey's Anatomy). Many people live together before being married and some don't bother ever tying the knot. America's public doesn't know much about the church or Christianity. As bearers of the gospel, we are called to be counter cultural. For relevance in worship in an increasingly non-Christian world, this is a primary perspective.

Application: Assume guests are always present in worship who do not know the Gospel Basics. Go ahead and use classic liturgies, but explain why you do them. Even regular attendees may learn something. Teach Biblical values about worldly, and other-worldly, temptations. Use apologetics to consider objections to orthodox Christianity. Preach the gospel with grace. Read Rob Bell, Brian McClaren and Tim Keller for further insights.

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2. Grow a heart for your mission field

When coaching new start candidates, we focus on who God is calling them to reach. Developing a profile of your mission field is a complex process that we're not used to applying to traditional church leadership. However, if you do not have a sense of your primary affinity group, it can compromise the relevancy of worship.

Application: Walk the community with a team. Pray for households, shoppers, coffee drinkers, and gamblers. Implore the Holy Spirit to reveal their angst to you. Consider who you like working with and who is drawn to you, and with whom your ministry has borne the most visible fruit over the years. Touch your stethoscope to your own heart to know when it's beating faster. Get to know this cultural demographic.

3. Remember: your mission field drives worship and music style

. . . not the other way around.

Application: Center discussions on worship design around your mission field, their activities, movie and book choices, work life. Visit churches that appear to be reaching that group and bearing fruit. Consider what might work in your setting and give it a try. Explore various communication forms (art, music, poetry), which you can utilize to express the gospel to your own emerging congregation.

4. Identify a worship leader to draw people into the presence of God

Hiring a worship leader is a priority for new start pastors, frequently for what most would deem "contemporary worship." But a good worship leader is a role under utilized in other worship settings. They can help navigate the way through hymns, liturgies, congregational responses, cumbersome orders of worship, and even

silence to usher participants into a deeper experience of God.

Application: Discover a person in your midst with musical ability and an inviting personality who understands or represents your mission field, likes what you do, and is able to make a visible connection with God in worship. Take note of the transitions between segments of your service and mentor your leader to guide the congregation through the natural flow. Consider an experienced worship leader to coach your person—even from another worship style.

5. Expect mistakes

. . . you will make them. But new start pastors tend to adapt quickly and don't see mistakes as character flaws. Established church leaders must adopt that practice.

Application: Simplify your worship order by organizing it into key segments. Read Robert Webber for ideas. Implement new offerings one at a time over time. Discern the pace of your congregation and move only as fast as participants will allow without stopping forward motion. Don't fret over occasional clumsiness, but strive for being more than just good enough.

6. Encourage a culture of invitation

We remind new start pastors that "attraction" is an old wineskin. To consistently reach beyond your church's walls, regular attendees must invite their friends. Relevance is tied to invitation because there must be something to which to invite!

Application: Teach evangelism from the pulpit so Christians can learn to share their faith and guests can observe Christian life. Model evangelism to your congregation in relating to people outside your church who do not know Christ. Lead your people to pray by name for friends who struggle. Sponsor an "invite a friend Sunday" periodically. Offer a teaching series on issues facing your

mission field. If you use the lectionary, prepare your congregation for the interruption well ahead, or offer the series at another time. Don't disregard adult Sunday School. It's still an effective outreach tool. Consider the Alpha Course. Don't forget to invite participants to worship!

7. Morph the role of "usher" into "connector"

We also teach that ushering is an old wineskin in most settings (who needs help finding a place to sit?). If you want a guest to return, they will need at least seven touch points during their worship visit from people who are glad to see them.

Application: Identify current ushers with a hospitality gift and place them strategically in various locations from the parking lot to the front door to the entrance of the worship center. Without changing the terminology (yet), begin redefining ushers' roles.

8. Establish and fine tune essential ministries

In the early days of a church, only a few ministries can be reasonably supported, so we teach leaders to focus on "essential ministries." Established churches would do well to revisit what they are doing outside of worship.

Application: Know your mission field to effectively discern the most important ministries you offer; apply valuable people and financial resources primarily to these. Be sure some form of discipleship is on your VIM (Very

Important Ministry) list.

9. Evaluate your progress

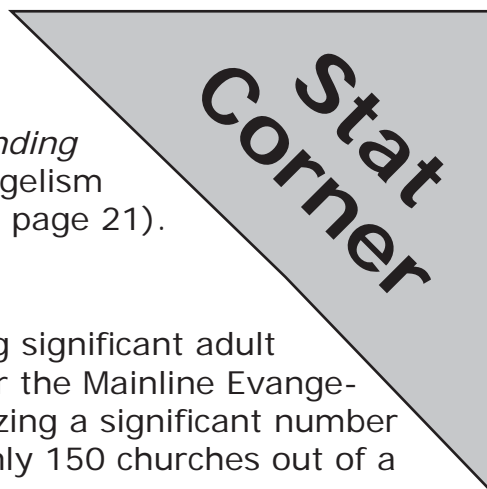
Supervisors of new start projects monitor forward motion by utilizing concrete data to justify continued funding. This practice is also important when instituting new strategies to make changes in established churches.

Application: Establish a baseline of worship attendance and expect an increase, especially from those living in your intended mission field; look for increases in baptisms and renewal of baptisms; be clear about your discipleship system and expect increased participation. Allow hard evidence to determine next steps; celebrate your successes!

10. Familiarize yourself with Biblical church growth principles

Acts 2 reveals that the early church grew by addition; Acts 13 pinpoints the beginning of multiplication. At the right time you may wish to consider additional services in alternative locations to reach new mission fields.

Application: Read Acts 13:1-2 to understand the Antioch church. Explore concepts like "critical mass," "extension campus," "campus pastor," "venue pastor," and "partnerships." Participate in a church planter's discernment seminar or boot camp to recognize readiness and roles in taking next steps.



Martha "Gay" Reese recently published her book *Unbinding the Gospel* based on the results of the Mainline Evangelism Project (see the book review in the "Essential Library" on page 21).

The following statistics come from that study.

.005% The percentage of Mainline Churches doing significant adult conversions. Of the 30,000 churches that qualified for the Mainline Evangelism Project, only 1/2 of 1 percent (.005%) are baptizing a significant number of adults (conversion baptisms). That translates to only 150 churches out of a qualifying Mainline pool of over 30,000 churches.

89 The average age of congregations who are bringing about significant adult conversions. The average age of the 150 evangelistic churches was 89 years-old.

In other words, it's not just new church plants who are "good" at evangelism!