

Starting A New Worship Service

There are several essentials to effectively starting an indigenous service.

1. Identify the key issues in the target audience. Do they see church as an option, when would they most likely attend, and why don't they attend now? Conducting a focus group with the appropriate age group can help you obtain this information. Design the service to address the needs of the target audience. Do not plan it with the preferences of the present church members in mind.
2. Gather a team together of young adults to lead this service. Optimally, you do not want anyone over 40 leading this service. The team needs to include the motivator, worship leader, sound person, person, singers, band, prayer person, and visual aids person.
3. Connect the service to the church's vision and mission. Agree on the purpose for starting this new service. Prepare a written statement to communicate to the congregation. This statement should be measurable, theological, and achievable. Take time to communicate the change to the congregation. It is not uncommon for the change to take six to twelve months. A written plan that is communicated to the leadership and congregation is always good.
4. Secure the emotional and financial support of the long timers. In most churches, their permission and support is essential to avoid serious conflict. Often, the main adult choir and choir director have to be brought on board. Without the support of the choir director, nothing but trouble awaits you.
5. Refer to this service as an addition, not a change. Most church people will not tolerate change. Introduce the service as an experiment that will be evaluated regularly. A good trial period is 18 months.
6. Determine the time and place for the service. The fastest growing time period in North America for worship is between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. during Sunday school. When you have multiple services, it is okay to have worship and Sunday school running at the same hour. It will not hurt Sunday school attendance. In fact, attendance will go up because of the increase in the children's classes. You will probably need to start a youth class at another hour because youth tend to want to leave their class to attend this service. Weekday or Saturday services are much harder to establish than on Sunday. However, they will reach a different audience. On Saturday, the best time is 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. but never use Saturday unless you have three services Sunday morning.
7. Spend at least six weeks communicating to your service area that you are starting this new service. This can be done through direct mail, announcements in the bulletin, website, billboards, newspaper (not the church page), TV (national cable not networks), radio, etc. It is a mistake to start an additional service without telling the community.
8. A good time to start such a service is the Fourth Sunday in January. Make a special invitation in the Christmas Eve services. Another good time is the second Sunday in September. In resort areas or cold country, summer is a good time to initiate a new service.

9. Make sure that you have adequate leadership for whatever style of worship you intend to start. Multiple services are very hard on musicians, especially if they are being asked to develop an alternate style of worship. In some cases, it is unfair to ask the current staff to provide a totally different service of worship. Classical musicians seldom can do this service. Additional part-time staff may be necessary.
10. If you don't have a paid worship leader, now is the time to hire one. Fulltime is best but if you can't afford that then get a half-time person. Make sure this person understands that he or she is also responsible for the spiritual well being of the musicians and that part of the job requires inviting their networks to worship. See the Job Description for Worship Leader.
11. Make sure support ministries are in place. You must provide either Bible study or small group experience at a time they can attend. If you do this service on Saturday, then you must provide an additional Sunday school and/or small group experience. If you do this service on Sunday during Sunday school, then you must provide another session of Sunday school or small group opportunities. Train a group of volunteers to follow up on the first time guests. Train a group of hosts/hostesses and ushers.
12. Do not start the service until you have provided excellent child care and nursery facilities. A paid nursery supervisor with trained volunteers is a must.
13. The quality of preaching and music must be as good or better than the existing service/s. If this service causes you to have three Sunday morning services and there are two ordained pastors who are good motivators, have two speakers each Sunday and rotate who preaches at the various services. In most cases, the senior pastor should preach most of the time in the new service for the first two years. This would not be true if one of the other pastors is much younger and is a good motivator. Then it is best if that person anchors this service. Young adults will respond best to a younger person.
14. Get a written commitment to attend for one year from whatever is considered a critical mass of people for your churches size. Do not just hope they will attend. Also, tell them about the differences between this service and the one they presently attend. No surprises.
15. Avoid trying to change your present traditional service into an indigenous service unless it is very lively and informal already. Changing worship styles is the best way to make people extremely mad.
16. Rehearse each service enough to ensure that there is continual flow with breaks and there is movement toward a commitment. Individuals and the band practice during the week. The entire team should meet on Saturday about two hours before the Saturday service for the final rehearsal of all the leaders and on Sunday morning an hour before the first service. Each Monday, the worship leader and the motivator should meet for three hours to plan three months ahead as well as to put the final touches on that week's service. An indigenous service takes about five hours of preparation for every one hour of preparation for a traditional service.