

“It’s the New That Does”

My own experience in the church corroborates the words of Andy Stanley, “Tweaking things very seldom grows a church, it’s the new that does.” The new not only gives a place for a church to grow, but it’s often a catalyst for change, turning a static or declining congregation toward a growth culture.

A new worship service done well or even one that becomes a new faith community is a practical, effective and cost-effective way to grow a church, especially one that has become static or is declining. It is also the way the early church grew, by beginning new services and faith communities built around the great good news of the resurrected Christ.

This kind of new energizes the leadership, empowers visionary people in the congregation and makes a place for new people to connect (5–7 times more than an existing church or service —Tim Keller).

New worship services and creating new faith communities help the church break the natural barriers of 100, 150, 200 and other attendance averages that are often difficult to get past and especially stay past. In my own ministry, I credit new worship services and faith communities in helping my church break those barriers. The first new worship service I began was in 1983 in a small church that was the second church in a county seat town. The church grew from 90 to 260 in those years. In my most recent pastoral appointment where I served 21 years, the church added almost 10 new services (only five survived; I learned as much from failure as success), helping the church grow from 383 average attendance to 2,650 today. The “new” was the key to both churches growing beyond the natural barriers that eventually lead to decline. I can’t overstate this. It can be very frustrating to work hard to grow a church by 10, 20 or 100 and then watch it fall back to where it was or even less because the existing culture wants to maintain the smaller number of people.

New services and faith communities can create momentum, new energy, a clearer focus. They allow leaders in a church to find a place to serve and makes room for the new and unchurched people in your community to find a place. If making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world is our goal, this “new” is a place that naturally creates a place for this to happen.

Tweaks that might be worth doing but will probably not create a growth culture or grow your church past the natural barrier (which is so hard to get past) can’t, but the “new” can . . . a great message series, a well-done website, moving the pulpit out and replacing it with a stand or adding screens to your worship space.

Rev. Mike Ramsdell

Executive Director

Smith Center for Evangelism & Church Growth