



The People Spot Missile: Starting a New Service

Our church really doesn't need a new service does it? I have heard that question phrased in a variety of ways and in many different settings. It is a simple fact, starting new churches is the most effective method of evangelism in the world. For a local church, starting new services and new small groups for adults are significant evangelistic strategies.

Starting a new worship service takes a lot of energy and the introduction of change into the church. Energy and change are two reasons starting new services is difficult to sell to a local church.

Nearly every church I know that has added a new service has grown. Everyone that I know that reduced a service has declined. I am Associate Conference Minister for the Eastern Conference of the Churches of God. The churches that existed in 1977 corporately had more people in attendance in 2003 than they did 1977. That is an unusual development. There are a variety of reasons: one of them is that we now have 36 churches with two services compared with 1 in 1977.

Multiple services make worship available to more people. In our complex society, if your only service starts at 10:30 and John has to go to work at 10:00, he is eliminated from the possibility of attending. In today's climate, it takes between 2.5 and 3 people to average 1 for a year. This is true in most settings except for small churches averaging less than 35. Have you ever been tempted to say, "We'd have a great crowd if everybody showed up at once." That sounds really nice. But your church averages 100 in a sanctuary that comfortably seats 140. What would you do if all 250 of your attendees showed up at once? They know better than that. They know there is no room in the inn. So a lack of space encourages people to be irregular in attendance.

Usually there is a meaningful difference in the two services. Sometimes it is by design. Other times it just happens because the people mix is different. Sometimes there is a different approach to music. The different services will be appealing to different people.

A church ought to be thinking seriously about a new service by the time the church's annual average attendance reaches 65% of the comfortable seating capacity of the sanctuary. What is a comfortable seat? I measure pew space based on 25 inches. A new service doubles the sanctuary space without spending money.

The beginning of a new service will make the most impact if it is coupled with a comprehensive implementation strategy. Such a plan will include looking at parking, small group involvement, and an intensive strategy of outreach designed to encourage new people to walk through the door.

Though your new service will help you keep some people you would have lost, and to reclaim some others who had become inactive, the primary reason for the new service is to attract and hold new people. In spite of the Biblical admonitions for evangelism, it is difficult for many people currently in church to see that the long-term future of their church is not with the people who are attending but with those who have yet to attend.

“...The genius of Christianity is always expansive. A living organism must either grow or die. A denomination (or local church) that can boast of no ever-expanding frontier is already bitten by the germ of inertia and decay... The church that stands still and sings *Hold the Fort* will very soon find that it has no fort to hold...” (The Appeal of Home Missions. The Church Advocate, November 18, 1936 p. 14)

So the ultimate goal of a new service is the walking of new people through the door. That takes a very intentional strategy using several methods designed to reach out to new people.

Mountain View Church was averaging 120 in a 170 seat sanctuary. They spent 18 months preparing the church for the new service. They spent twelve weeks preparing for the new service. A core of 30 people committed to the new service. Current participants supplied 167 names of prospective families. Another 42 families were added who were either very marginal or recent drop-outs. Those families received mailings four consecutive weeks. Postcards were sent twice to the 5,000 homes closest to the building. Immediately the attendance jumped from 120 to 165. Amazing what can happen.