

Suggestions on How to Change: A Traditional Church to a Contemporary Church

Traditional Service vs. Contemporary Service? Many pastors have wrestled with this question. *“Should I change our service format to more of a contemporary style of service in order to make our church more appealing to the younger generation and pave the way for the future church?”*

There is nothing wrong with either type of service. Usually when a pastor wrestles with this idea, they may be struggling with a couple of issues:

1. Due to a lack of visitors and church membership, they feel they need something fresh and new.
2. A pastor may feel pressured with their membership desiring newer songs and style of worship.
3. They may feel that traditional services are a thing of the past due to mega churches having success with contemporary style of worship.

Most churches across America are considered to be **traditional**. Their order of the service has remained the same for many years and is usually similar to other churches in their denomination. They usually follow a pattern of traditional songs or hymns, announcements, offering, and preaching. The musicians usually include a piano, organ, guitars or drums. Traditional style of worship is found in both large and small churches; however, many of our smaller churches usually prefer a traditional setting, especially to an aging population. Larger churches seem to be more progressive as a way to meet the needs of the population as a whole.

Mega churches have seemed to become more attractive to younger families due to their progressive style of music. Newly formed churches seem to try to emulate their style of worship as a way to attract younger members; however, they may not have the personnel to provide the style of worship that most contemporary churches follow.

Contemporary means different things to different people. Most new music at one time was considered contemporary in nature but over time may seem to lose its place in contemporary circles. At the same time, it is inherently difficult to write an old song, or a traditional song, for that matter. Again, everything was once considered to be contemporary. But, to understand the definition I am using here, contemporary has to do with three things.

1. Selection of songs, however, is not as big a factor as most people think. You could take a very traditional selection of songs, add the right instruments and the right feel and it

would sound reasonable contemporary. Drums and electric guitars are the biggest factor here. For the most part, contemporary is considered to be the latest or newer songs that are played on the radio or someone has recently written.

2. Lighting and Stage. Most contemporary services seem to follow the same trend, lights off in the main sanctuary, stage background lit up with special effects, props, or some type of computer generated or controlled lighting.
3. Sound is usually louder than a traditional service. Some compare the music to being similar to a rock concert with members of the band or praise team not as neatly dressed or formal as in traditional services.

Contemporary styles of worship usually do not include manual announcements, prayer requests, specials, etc. like traditional services usually have. They seem to prefer video clips and other technological advances that make their service look more professional. Pastors and musicians are dressed more casual than with traditional models.

A recent study by [Faith Communities](#) found that congregations that offer “innovative worship and contemporary worship styles are significantly more likely to have grown in the last five years,” according to the report.

There is really nothing wrong with either style of worship as long as the Word of God is not compromised. Many mega church ministers and televangelists seem to water down their message as a way to gain popularity. God is not concerned about the church becoming popular but is more concerned of maintaining a standard or light for the world to see.

The question that many pastors have asked us is, “Can a traditional church change to become more of a contemporary style church and what should we consider before making this change?”

Blending

There are some elements of contemporary worship that can be blended into a traditional service without too much hassle or incompatibility. Newer choruses can be blended in that give the service a fresh feel. They have a blending of old hymns and contemporary choruses. Blending is a good option to consider.

Considerations:

1. Getting use to newer music can be challenging for some. Many people resist change and seem to be “set in their ways” that every service must remain exactly the same.
2. The wording with newer songs may not be familiar with your membership. For most people, words are more important than the actual sound or beat, especially with middle aged or older people.

3. Try to integrate a new song and stay with it for awhile. Many churches make a mistake of playing different songs for each service without allowing members to become familiar to the newer songs.
4. Understand that all musicians may not be able to play all types of music.
5. Understand some music directors may not be able to lead all types of music.
6. Changing the lighting and design of the stage could be costly.
7. Lastly and probably most important is that not everyone will prefer a contemporary style, even younger couples. They are attending your church for a reason...it is what you have now! Changing without consideration of others may cause them to leave to another church. Blending offers the best of both worlds.

Other Key Points to Consider:

Relate to the diversity with a common purpose. The common purpose that both groups, whether traditional or contemporary tastes, share is that of reaching people for Christ. Both groups need to be reminded that it is the main purpose of the church, not the music.

Develop truths about the value and importance of either style. Often, we concentrate on image. The more important thing is reality and truth. Can we blend two styles of music and worship into one service or do we need to look at two different services? Can we believe that we can worship in unity and agreement? Can we believe that both formats are good and God wants both of them? If we really believe in either, it will be communicated. If things are not communicated in a truthful and objective manner, issues will be revealed later on, which may cause additional issues than before you started any change.

Leadership must be in agreement. A house divided will not stand for very long. It is important for which ever decision you make, that all leaders are in one accord, leading the way. The pastor is blamed for too many things as it is and if the leaders desire change, they need to be the ones in the forefront or at least along side of the pastor.

Take in consideration specials and events. Some churches have choirs, Easter and Christmas events that are usually better served in traditional or blended styles of churches. Contemporary services may honor a theme or video but may not be suited for cantatas, plays, revivals, etc.

Remember if you make a change and feel it is a mistake, admit it quickly and change back. Most congregations can understand trying something new to reach others but many will not remain when things do not work. Be quick to admit and change back, people will understand.

Finally, make this a matter of prayer. We often are led by our own carnal thinking or preferences. Allow God to lead you and others in ***being your church***, not clones of other churches. God has a work for you and your congregation, whether you may consider traditional or contemporary services, God's will is much better than satisfying man's.

We hope this article has been a benefit to you. If you have any further questions or wish to add something to this article, please contact us. Pastoral Care, Inc. is always here to serve you, create ideas and helps for our pastors, and of course, being a safe place to call if help is needed.

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