

2. Get permission to try changes for a season or two – stress that new changes aren't eternal, and that you'll be inviting everyone to evaluate and discuss how they've gone.
3. Think about adding a new service instead of changing an existing one – people may be willing to let a new group of leaders do something different if it doesn't change the experience of the current congregation.
4. Regularly and honestly evaluate how worship is working – church leaders will often discover the need for change after asking questions about the fruitfulness of worship.
5. Explore and use new communication technology – like the automobile, digital communication technology is here to stay, so church leaders should begin to understand and use it.
6. Invest in high-quality music and musicians – upgrading music is often the best single investment that will transform the quality of your church's worship.
7. Pray, a lot.

Resources:

- *Designing Worship* by Kim Miller
- *How to Start a New Service* by Charles Arn
- *The Worship Workshop* by Marcia McFee
- *ReConnecting Worship* by Rob Weber
- *Where 20 or 30 Are Gathered: Leading Worship in the Small Church* by Peter Bush & Christine O'Reilly
- iworship (DVD or MPEG) – contemporary worship music videos for use in congregational singing in churches
- www.midnightoilproductions.com, www.lumicon.com, www.theworkofthepeople.com - images & videos
- www.textweek.com - Lectionary-organized worship and preaching resources including an excellent art index
- www.gbod.org/worship - United Methodist worship resources, discussions, hymns, articles
- www.sermonspice.com - videos for preaching and worship
- www.ccli.com - Christian Copyright Licensing for using new music and movies in worship
- www.worshipmonkey.org – New England-based worship media & planning resources, training and coaching



Creating Inspiring Worship

Planning and Leading Worship that Connects People to God

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Gathering for public worship is the central action for most churches. It is often the largest gathering of people, the largest investment of building space, the highest priority of the church staff, and the activity to which many church leaders dedicate their offerings of time and talent. When a new person comes to church, it is often as a guest to worship. Worship connects us to God, to each other, and to the community.

Inspiring Worship

Worship is about a real encounter between the worshipper and God. God can be experienced through liturgical, traditional, contemporary, post-modern, casual, formal, high-church, low-church, or whatever style. The form and style of worship should serve to set an environment in which worshippers can experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Worship should never be only about the gathered congregation, but should be engaging for new people who might be unfamiliar with church culture and traditions. Some questions to ask about inspiring worship are:

- How often do people express through changed behavior that they have experienced God's presence during worship? When was it and why?
- How do you regularly plan, evaluate and improve your church's worship services?
- How can you include more people in planning your church's worship services?
- How does the worship music move people into a closer relationship with God?
- How do the preaching and liturgy serve God's purpose of connecting to all people?
- How are you using your best quality communication tools, technology and resources in worship?

Inspiring worship is worship that fills people with the Holy Spirit and commissions people to carry the energy of the Spirit into their world-changing, life-altering missions and ministries.

Context & Culture

Although rooted in Biblical principles and church tradition, the forms and styles of worship are an expression of the culture of the worshippers. What one group of people find inspiring may not be inspiring to another group of people. Too often, worship is only an

expression of the micro-culture of the people already part of a local congregation and doesn't reflect the culture of the people that congregation is called to serve in its community. Church traditions become traditionalism and then become invested with significance as the "right" way or the "Methodist" way of worship. From John & Charles Wesley to Vatican 2, the church continues to relearn that worship belongs to all God's people and not just to the people who have been taught the correct traditions.

In the wild, complex, shifting cultural milieu of New England, we have to constantly learn from our context. With great waves of new immigrants, a growing tide of secularism, and major generational shifts, New England worship is changing. Inspiring worship emerges from its context and produces culturally engaging ways to connect God's people with God's Spirit.

A Story

One of our churches was begun by two farm hands in the 1850's who gathered a Methodist class meeting at night. The first meeting became several, and eventually they formed a society. After years of meeting at schools and dance-halls, they went to purchase land to build their first building. The land was owned by the town and sat across the street from the Congregational Church. Their attempt to purchase this piece of property became quite controversial, and the town meeting minutes record that the Elders of the Congregational Church strongly opposed the purchase because they didn't want "those rowdy, singing Methodists" disrupting their solemn services. The Methodists decided to purchase a different piece of property.

Methodists began as a "rowdy, singing" bunch, but much of our worship today doesn't reflect this inheritance. Creating inspiring worship means reconnecting with the energy and passion that drove the beginnings of our churches in New England.

Getting Started

Making changes to an established worship service can be one of the hardest works of ministry, but it can also bring some of the greatest benefits to the entire congregation and community. Some first steps might include:

1. Gather a study group to discuss worship – include people from outside of the church to better understand your context.