

Understanding Your Own Practices in the Assembly

I. Introduction:

- A. This chapter is designed to understand the cultural aspects of our assembly in your own congregational setting in a more objective way
- B. Understand, at this stage it is not intended to be an evaluation, only a better objective self-understanding
- C. These assessments⁵ will help to get a better, more objective picture on what you actually do in your assembly, what your styles and values are, and on what you place the greatest importance.
- D. After having a better self-understanding, you will be in a better position to evaluate yourselves

II. Worship Style

- A. This exercise helps to understand your congregation's worship values in terms of traditional, contemporary, and thematic
- B. Most congregations will have a blend of these three
- C. Keep in mind this is just a description of your worship style, not a critique
- D. Use the chart below to focus your reflection on your worship style

⁵Ken E. Read, *Created to Worship* (Joplin: College Press, 2002). Several of these charts are adaptations from self-reflection instruments created by Ken D. Read in his worship workshops and his book.

Worship Style Questionnaire

		0 - Never	1 - Occasionally	2 - Usually	3 - Always
Section A					
1. We use hymnals		0	1	2	3
2. We print bulletins with an order of service		0	1	2	3
3. We offer an invitation at the end of the sermon		0	1	2	3
4. Our communion table and pulpit are at prominent locations		0	1	2	3
5. We use a song leader to lead our songs		0	1	2	3
6. We take the Lord's Supper by passing trays		0	1	2	3
7. We sing event-defined songs (prayer song, communion song, etc.)		0	1	2	3
8. Most at our church dress more formally than they do during the week		0	1	2	3
					(A) Total:
Section B					
1. We sing mostly praise songs		0	1	2	3
2. We use a praise team, multiple leaders, or spontaneous singing		0	1	2	3
3. Some raise their hands during worship		0	1	2	3
4. We sing through large blocks of songs without breaking the flow		0	1	2	3
5. We do not offer a formal invitation at the end of the sermon		0	1	2	3
6. We do not have a formal printed order of worship		0	1	2	3
7. We project the songs for singing on a wall or screen		0	1	2	3
8. People tend to dress informally, as they would during the week		0	1	2	3
					(B) Total:
Section C					
1. The theme of our message is prominent (bulletin, church sign, etc)		0	1	2	3
2. Our worship is structured around the theme of the day		0	1	2	3
3. Everyone who came to our assembly knows that the "point" was		0	1	2	3
4. We try to explain the gospel to outsiders each week		0	1	2	3
5. We use various teaching tools: Drama, video, and other visual aids.		0	1	2	3
6. We have a spoken transition that introduces the central message		0	1	2	3
7. We have a worship planning team putting in lots of time planning & refining		0	1	2	3
8. Our singing time is well-thought-out and organized		0	1	2	3
					(C) Total:
Summary: Circle the score for each section below					
High	24	24	24		
	23	23	23		
	22	22	22		
	21	21	21		
	20	20	20		
	19	19	19		
Moderate	18	18	18		
	17	17	17		
	16	16	16		
	15	15	15		
	14	14	14		
	13	13	13		
	12	12	12		
	11	11	11		
	10	10	10		
Low	9	9	9		
	8	8	8		
	7	7	7		
	6	6	6		
	5	5	5		
	4	4	4		
	3	3	3		
	2	2	2		
	1	1	1		
0	0	0			
	Section A	Section B	Section C		

E. Worship Style Descriptions

1. Section A: Traditional

- a. Heritage from 19th century revivals and crusades
 - 1) Sermon with invitation
 - 2) Singing of hymns and gospel songs
 - 3) Sermons are central to the service
 - 4) Sermons tend to be expository or thematic series
- b. May have semi-liturgical atmosphere
 - 1) Service follows an order of set rituals
 - 2) Rituals take place in a "low church" setting
- c. Attire is generally more formal
- d. Built around a consistent structure:
 - 1) Generally follow the same order every week
 - 2) The order does not change much

2. Section B: Contemporary

- a. Built around the praise and worship model
 - 1) Borrowed from charismatic tradition of 20th century
 - 2) More of an experiential orientation
- b. Song services ordered by mood or emotional flow rather than the event orientation of traditional churches
 - Songs may start out with expressive praise then move to intimate worship (praise and worship)
- c. Atmosphere and attire generally are more informal
- d. "Contemporary" can be a slippery term:
 - 1) "Classic Contemporary"
 - a) These are the Baby Boomer contemporaries
 - b) Choruses of 1980's with lyrical melodies & lyrics
 - c) More presentation oriented
 - 2) "Post contemporary"
 - a) More trendy but less presentation oriented
 - b) Songs are more asymmetrical
 - c) Tends to be eclectic
 - d) Mixture of ancient and future
 - e) May use multisensory, icons, incense, chants,
 - f) Must appear to be authentic and relational

3. Section C: Thematic

- a. Worship is more instructional, stronger educational focus
- b. Most of the worship events are tied to a unifying theme
- c. Sermon tends to be central
- d. Church seeker services usually have thematic orientation
- e. Much more careful planning usually goes into this

4. Variations: Some may be a blend of several orientations

III. Energetic focus

- A. This reflection helps to identify the emotional focus of the assembly
 - 1. What one says is the most important may not be what is most important to oneself emotionally
 - 2. The amount of time spent on a worship activity does not necessarily reflect the amount of emotional focus given to it
 - 3. Parts of worship that have the greatest emotional focus are
 - a. Those which we expend the greatest amount of energy making sure they are done well
 - b. Those which we feel the strongest about
 - c. Those things we absolutely cannot do without
 - d. Those things which occupy the greatest place in our worship and in our hearts
- B. Various worship activities one can feel strongest about:
 - 1. Evangelism: Emphasize evangelism and baptism
 - b. Whether the service is traditional or contemporary, it culminates with an appeal for an evangelistic response
 - 1) It may be an invitation to walk the aisle to the front
 - 2) It may be filling out a response card
 - c. The whole service culminates in the invitation
 - d. Until about thirty years ago, nearly every conservative church structured their assemblies evangelistically
 - 1) Invitation songs (all stanza's of "Just as I Am")
 - 2) Preacher appeals between verses
 - e. Some modern churches invite people to talk to someone afterward rather than use the older style invitation
 - f. While evangelism may not take the greatest amount of time, it still can have the greatest emotional focus
 - 2. Singing: Singing is the most dear part of the worship
 - a. Many of the songs are more emotional and expressive
 - b. There is typically a greater amount of singing
 - c. Songs are often sung in a seamless "set"
 - d. Songs are led by an experienced leader
 - 3. Scripture Reading: Very few place emotional emphasis on this
 - Reformation churches typically take a more rationalistic approach to their faith
 - 1) As a result they emphasize a type of scripture reading
 - 2) Their reading usually involves rational explanation and application of the word at the center of assemblies
 - 3) These type of churches often use Lectionaries
 - 4. Prayer: Few churches have prayer as their emotional emphasis
 - a. Mt 21:13 - Jesus said the temple was to be a house of prayer
 - 1) We the church are God's temple, 1 Cor 3:16
 - 2) This gives credence to prayer as an emphasis

- b. Some churches used to have mid-week prayer meetings
 - c. Prayer services often replaced by mid-week Bible studies
 - 5. Preaching: For many churches, preaching is the emotional center
 - a. The greatest amount of time is given to preaching
 - b. Other parts of worship might be mediocre, but many do not tolerate mediocre preaching
 - 6. Fellowship & Giving: For some, fellowship is the emotional emphasis
 - a. There is a huge ministry orientation, taking care of needs
 - b. There is usually time to share, give testimonials, etc.
 - c. These churches often sit in a circle
 - d. Many of these kinds of churches are based on small groups
 - e. Invitations might involve the entire congregation praying and laying hands on those who respond
 - 7. Lord's Supper: Some have the Communion as the emotional center
 - a. Historically, the rhetoric of Churches of Christ communicated that the Lord's Supper is the centerpiece of the service
 - 1) However, the rhetoric does not always match practice
 - 2) For many, there is little emotional energy expended on the Lord's Supper with little creativity, thought, or time
 - b. Churches that have Communion as the emotional center carefully make it the climax of the service
 - 1) Time is taken to engage in thoughtful reflection
 - 2) There is typically a devotional thought or lesson shared with the congregation appropriate for communion
 - 3) Communion often comes at the end of the service
 - c. Churches ensure that the Communion service is meaningful and understood
- C. Rank the following worship activities our congregation emphasizes the most emotionally. (Keep in mind, we are not talking about what is *supposed* to be most important, or what we spend the greatest amount of *time* doing, but what we actually feel strongest about emotionally)

Ranking of the Emotional Focus of the Assembly

Worship Activity	Rank of Emotional Focus (1-7)
1. Evangelism	_____
2. Singing	_____
3. Scripture Reading	_____
4. Prayer	_____
5. Preaching	_____
6. Fellowship and Giving	_____
7. Lord's Supper	_____

IV. Sensitivity to Interested Guests

A. The terminology used in the questions below:

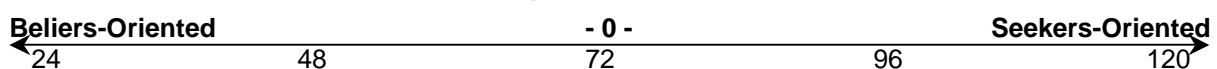
1. **Unchurched person** - Someone who has not been enculturated in the church subculture. Could include a new Christian or unbeliever
2. **Seeker** - A person seeking or interested in finding or learning more about God, religion, and spiritual things.

B. Chart will help you to rate the level of seeker sensitivity in your assembly

1-Disagree Strongly	2-Disagree	3-Neither disagree nor agree	4-Agree	5-Strongly Agree
1. Everything we do in the assembly is geared for the unchurched	1	2	3	4 5
2. Our guests find the best parking spaces	1	2	3	4 5
3. We provide helpful printed material for the first time visitor	1	2	3	4 5
4. Directions to classrooms, restrooms, etc. are clearly marked	1	2	3	4 5
5. Our nursery is always ready	1	2	3	4 5
6. We leave special seats for visitors	1	2	3	4 5
7. We avoid religious symbols in our meeting place because it might confuse visitors	1	2	3	4 5
8. Someone who owns only jeans and T-shirts would not feel out of place	1	2	3	4 5
9. There is an overriding sense of warm welcome for people of all types	1	2	3	4 5
10. We avoid insider terminology and humor	1	2	3	4 5
11. Announcements include newcomers	1	2	3	4 5
12. We use quality graphics and design in our printed materials	1	2	3	4 5
13. We spend little time in our public assembly doing things uncomfortable to visitors	1	2	3	4 5
14. We emphasize encouragement in our assemblies	1	2	3	4 5
15. Our singing is of excellent quality and does not sound like it belongs to another era	1	2	3	4 5
16. Our means of inviting a seeker to the Gospel is clear and authentic	1	2	3	4 5
17. We address the seeker directly rather than make him feel like one who is overhearing	1	2	3	4 5
18. We give clear instructions for visitors (communion, visitor's cards, offering, etc.)	1	2	3	4 5
19. We regularly survey our first time guests	1	2	3	4 5
20. We listen to our guest's feedback with discernment	1	2	3	4 5
21. We follow up on every guest who wishes a follow up	1	2	3	4 5
22. Our members feel good about inviting friends to the assembly	1	2	3	4 5
23. Most newcomers have been brought by members	1	2	3	4 5
24. The overall mood of the service is positive and upbeat	1	2	3	4 5
TOTAL:				

Raw Score	Avg/question	Assessment
24-40	1.0 - 1.6	Our church has made a clear choice not to use Sunday morning for outreach
41-71	1.7 - 2.9	Perhaps we occasionally aim for seeker sensitivity, but mostly we do not
72-95	3.0 - 3.9	We have made some choices to include seekers, but have not made consistent choices about outreach
96-109	4.0 - 4.5	We are above average in our quest to evangelize during the assembly
110-120	4.6 - 5.0	We are highly committed to evangelism, and have taken clear step to carry it out in our assemblies as well

Where do we lie on this spectrum? Does this seem accurate?



V. Summary

A. Summarize each area

1. Your Worship Style

- a. What are your worship values according to the worship color?
- b. Would everyone agree with these values?
- c. Are your observations consistent with what you strive for?

2. Your Emotional Focus

- a. Which parts of the assembly does your church emphasize most?
- b. Which is neglected the most?
- c. Are your observations consistent with what you strive for?

3. Your Outreach Focus

- a. On the spectrum of believers orientation to seekers orientation, where does your congregation fall?
- b. Are your observations consistent with what you strive for?

B. What do you feel at this point are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?