

**NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**  
*QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC V*

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**“INSPIRING WORSHIP SERVICE”**

If little boys are made of “snips and snails and puppy dog tails,” does that apply to Jesus as well? “What was He made of”? Did He play tricks on His brothers and sisters? Did He make imaginary figures from the wood scraps in His dad’s carpenter shop? Did He complain about His chores?

Although we know very little about the boy Jesus, we do know that He went to worship. At the age of twelve, Jesus’ parents took Him to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. And when they departed for Nazareth, He became separated from His family. Assuming that Jesus was with others in the group of travelers, His parents were not immediately concerned. But after a day, they returned to Jerusalem to look for Him, and eventually “found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers listening to them and asking them questions.” (Luke 2.46). And Jesus responded to His parents “frantic inquiries” with these words: “Why were you searching for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2.49). Enthralled by the wonder of worship and intoxicated by the intellect of the rabbis, Jesus got “lost” in the temple. If only our worship were so captivating!

With that in mind, we join with Christian Schwartz, the originator of Natural Church Development, in asking: “What is the common element that distinguishes the worship services of growing and declining, above-and-below average churches from one another?” In other words, what should every church take into consideration in planning worship services?

There is probably no area of church life in which the important distinction between “models” and “principles” is so frequently ignored. Countless Christians believe that they must adopt certain worship models from other churches because they supposedly represent a particular church growth principle.

Their research sheds some empirical light on the fog around the current discussion about worship services. Consider this example: Many Christians are convinced that a church service which primarily targets the unchurched (“seeker service”), marvelously modeled by Willow-Creek Community Church and others, is a church growth principle. The N.C.D. researchers spoke with numerous pastors who were in the process of changing their worship services into “seeker services”, without ever having investigated whether this specific form of evangelism is appropriate for their context – for it is just one of many good approaches. They assume, however that the “seeker service” is a universal principle. Yet, N.C.D. can demonstrate that it is not.

In their research, they selected all churches which reported a “very strong” orientation toward reaching non-Christians in their worship services. They found that this position was not typical of any single category of churches, neither growing nor declining, neither qualitatively above average nor qualitatively below average.

This doesn't mean that the so-called “seeker services” are not a wonderful evangelistic method that a church might consider using. It simply means that this form of evangelism cannot be classified as a church growth principle. Services might target Christians (as ours does!) or non-Christians, their style might be liturgical (as ours is) or free, their language may be “churchly” (as ours is) or “secular” – it makes no difference for church growth.

Rather, a different criterion proved to be the deciding factor, namely: “Is the worship service an ‘inspiring experience’ for the participants?” The answers to the eleven questions they ask churches about worship services all pointed in the same direction. It is this criterion which positively separates growing churches from stagnant and declining ones.

The word “inspiring” deserves clarification. It is to be understood in the literal sense of “inspirato” and means an inspiredness which comes from the Spirit of God. Whenever the Holy Spirit is truly at work (and His presence is not merely presumed!), the Holy Spirit will have a concrete effect upon the way a worship service is conducted, including the entire atmosphere of a gathering. People, the researchers say, attending truly “inspired” services typically say that “going to church is fun.”

Now that we know this, the likely source of opposition to this quality characteristic becomes evident: Christians who go to church to fulfill their religious duty. These people do not attend church because it's a joyous and inspiring experience, but, instead, to do the pastor, another person or God a favor.

Some even believe that their “faithfulness” in enduring such boring and unpleasant services will be blessed by God.

Those who think this way will always tend to pressure other Christians to attend church. They have failed to comprehend the divine growth automatisms which are particularly evident in worship services. When worship is inspiring, it draws people to the services “all by itself”.

We on the Worship Committee have been working to make our worship services as inspiring as possible. But we need you to pray for our worship, to participate with enthusiasm and to suggest ways that worship might be more inspiring to you.