



Church in Rockford, Illinois, puts it, "When people discover that God speaks through a contemporary style, they find they can respond to him that way." The target group in worship renewal tends to be those whom Thiessen calls "raw recruits"—those with minimal Christian background—although others who had a church background in the past, but have dropped out, also discover new meaning in renewed forms of worship that emphasize a life-giving encounter with the mystery of God rather than a rationalist, word-oriented type of corporate gathering.

Frequently an evangelical church will retain a more traditional service for those who prefer it, while adding a service in contemporary style. Others have been able to mix the two, introducing elements of renewal into a "standard" format. Some churches periodically schedule special occasions for renewed worship at times other than Sunday morning.

Several influences are at work to shape the renewal of worship in evangelical congregations. The "praise-and-worship" style has been popularized through recordings, Christian broadcasting, and exposure of church members to the worship of other churches in the community. Evangelical worship leaders have been able to introduce this less formal style to their congregations partly because it has always been present to a degree in their church life, in the worship of specialized groups such as children's ministries or youth camps and conferences. Although evangelical churches tend towards a more "laid-back" approach to celebrative worship than what might be encountered in some charismatic churches, one may often observe features formerly associated only with Pentecostals and charismatics, such as clapping or lifting of the hands. In a few evangelical congregations made up largely of people who have come from Catholic or liturgical Protestant backgrounds, contemporary worship resources from those traditions may be incorporated into renewed celebration, especially for Holy Communion.

The use of a worship team of lead singers and instrumentalists, in place of the traditional choir, is another practice adapted from the "praise-and-worship" movement. The worship team not only provides musical support but also functions to encourage worshipers to become more involved in the

act of Christian celebration. The technology of the "praise-and-worship" movement also makes its appearance in overhead projectors and enhanced sound systems.

Renewed worship may also incorporate a time for open prayer and testimony from members of the congregation, a practice influenced not only by liturgical renewal in the Catholic community and by charismatic worship, but also by the format of the traditional midweek prayer meeting of many evangelical churches.

Worship, formerly a neglected area in many evangelical churches, is being rediscovered as (in A. W. Tozer's words) "the missing jewel of the evangelical church." More and more, the exaltation of God and the direct expression of love to him, as well as instruction in his Word, is being viewed as a priority in congregational life. Some churches have created the staff position of *minister of worship* (not just "minister of music") or have assigned greater responsibility to their worship committees. Carl Stam, of Chapel Hill Bible Church in North Carolina, writes:

Exalting Christ as Lord means to thoughtfully worship him—to come with adoration, exultation, and thanksgiving, acknowledging him as Lord. The congregation and the elders feel it's worth having someone trained to do these things. I'm the one they look to to develop a philosophy and a means of worship so that the congregation can be more thoughtful in what they do. ("Worship That Integrates Faith and Music," *Worship Leader* [February/March 1993]: 20)

### The Basic Pattern

The following representative orders of worship come from the First Evangelical Free Church of Rockford, Illinois, and from South Park Church, an independent evangelical church in Park Ridge, Illinois, in January 1993.

#### First Evangelical Free Church

The salient features of the contemporary worship service at First Free Church, Rockford, are *theme* and *flexibility*; the order of worship varies from week to week depending on the theme of the service, though it always moves through the three stages of adoration, exhortation, and dedication. The sermon and its worship context are an integrated whole.

**Adoration**

Choruses (may include Scripture readings)

Prayer

Offering

The evangelical tendency to turn worship into instruction is countered, however, by the fact that the opening segment always focuses on praise offered directly to God. The service begins with up-tempo, hand-clapping choruses that phase into those in a more intimate mode of personal adoration. The music may proceed without interruption, or the theme of the day may be introduced during the opening segment through drama or Scripture readings. The music itself may introduce the theme; for example, the motif of stewardship may be expressed through the chorus "Jehovah Jireh, My Provider," or that of thanksgiving through "It is Good to Give Thanks to the Lord." Solos as well as congregational singing may be included in this segment, but often the music is familiar to worshipers through Christian media, and they may join in singing a refrain. The transition into the exhortation phase occurs with the offering.

**Exhortation**

Drama (may appear earlier)

In a culture steeped in entertainment media, drama is an effective means of focusing on issues of Christian faith and life in the worship setting. Larger churches (First Free is the largest congregation of its denomination) especially have the resources for this kind of ministry. The model for worship drama is ultimately a biblical one; the worship of Israel was essentially a representation of the historic saving deeds of the Lord, and the Lord's Supper is a dramatic visualization of Christ's action.

Scripture Reading

Sermon

Prayer

The Scripture reading and sermon bring the theme for the day to a clear focus and may lead the worshiper to a point of decision. The sermon concludes with a prayer summing up its theme, leading into the dedication phase of the service.

**Dedication**

Chorus in Response to the Word

Benediction

Invitation to Fellowship

The final chorus is a response to the theme; for

example, if stewardship is the motif the chorus might be "We Are an Offering." The benediction is taken from one of the scriptural blessings, and the service ends informally with the pastor's invitation for worshipers to greet one another.

**South Park Church**

The order of service from South Park Church shows some similarities to First Free's, and some variations. South Park's service is *flexible* but stresses *participation* more than theme.

**Praise and Worship in song**

(may include Scripture)

Welcome and Announcements

Morning Prayer

Offering (with special music ministry)

Scripture Option:

Scripture Reading

Responsive Reading

Dramatic Reading

The service opens with a period of praise in song, led by a worship team. Following the pastor's welcome, announcements are made from both platform and congregation as appropriate; the pastor then offers general prayer for church concerns. A solo or other act of music ministry accompanies the offering, after which the Scripture lesson is read. The Scripture may also take the form of a responsive or dramatic reading.

**Sharing Options:**

Servant's Word

Sharing Time

Witness of Faith

Baby Dedication

The next segment, a time of congregational participation, may follow several optional formats. Someone involved in a ministry opportunity may share it with the congregation in the "servant's word." A general "sharing time" may provide for open expression of prayer concerns, a Scripture passage a worshiper has found especially meaningful, or a testimony to God's working in the life of a believer. When new members join the church, they are given the opportunity to tell how they have come to Christ in the "witness of faith." In a congregation including many younger families, infant dedication occurs regularly during this segment.

**Hymn or Song**

Message (may incorporate drama)