

Two-service venture

Pastors Annie and Vern

Background and rationale

For some time, we your pastors have been contemplating the possibility of trying two worship services on Sunday morning. Based on the 80% rule ("The 80% Rule: Fact or Fiction" and other articles are attached), we are and have been "full" in worship for several years now. The rule of 80% makes the case that once available seating is generally 80% used, either new attenders stop coming or all attenders become less and less regular in attendance. We continue to have many new attenders. So we are experiencing the latter idea: less regular attendance. We are becoming an increasingly "part-time" congregation. From Sunday to Sunday, we see a very different congregation as we look out over the congregation. We invite you to consider whether or not you have noticed this as well. Are people opting more frequently to "take a break" or just stay at home for a Sunday or two? Do you see a fair number of different people each Sunday?

We are also experiencing an almost uncomfortable fullness in our Sunday morning worship service. It can from time to time feel like we're trying to do too much all at once for all people. We would like to venture the possibility of serving a bit greater diversity of worship sensibilities by trying to offer two worship services that have some shared "bones" but also will feel a bit different from each other: an early service that is a it more on the contemplative side and a later service that is more interactive.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, when a worship event is chronically over-full, attenders can default to becoming more and more like spectators rather than strongly-connected participants in the worship time. We think that addressing this question of an over-80% full worship time is important as we continue to strengthen our sense of membership and ownership in what happens in church and particularly in the worship time.

Over the past several years, we have offered several alternative worship events that have had some measure of success but have not fully flourished into strong additions: Friday evening worship, Sunday morning "add-on" worship offered right before the main worship (like we are doing for Advent this year), and Wednesday evening worship. Currently, there is a periodic worship time that is a gathering of several young adult small groups, on Sunday evenings. But we think that it is worth trying yet another approach.

The details:

Having discussed this with the Leadership Council, and having given it considerable thought and time to mature as an idea, we would like to offer two morning services, one before and one after our education hour, for an exploratory period running from Lent 1, 2010 (Feb. 21) though the last Sunday of the education program (the 1st Sunday in June, 2010), except for Palm Sunday and Easter, when we would have only one service. (If we continued in the future with two services, we would proposal that we still gather for one service on "high holy days" such as All Saints, All Earth/First Fruits Sunday, Christmas Program, Palm Sunday, and Easter, and possibly a music celebration Sunday in May. The second service would be suspended during the summer months as well.)

Morning outline with two services:

8:30a - 9:30a	1st service
9:45a - 10:45a	Education hour (coffee/donuts 9:30a - 11:00a by Jr. Youth/MYF)
11:00 - 12:00a	2nd service

The worship commission would continue to provide leadership and logistical support of the second

service. The first service would be lead primarily by a core group comprised of individuals that self-identified as having interest in an earlier service and through leadership selection with the pastors. This core group would also help with networking and encouraging individuals who might "fit" with the first service to begin attending this service.

The first service would be planned entirely by this core group and the pastors, who would take leadership in coordinating between this core group and the worship commission in the initial start-up phase. However, it is our intent that the planning of both services, should this two-service pattern continue, be shifted beyond a core group and primarily located in an expanded worship commission.

Both pastors would participate in both services and the same sermon would be given at both services. We would attempt to both share and rotate responsibilities with in the two-service format as seems appropriate.

The impact on other commissions will need to be discussed with each commissioner. For example, in terms of ushering, we would collect an offering at each service. However, there would be no need for ushers at the first service, as there is no open sharing time, offering is taken to the front during communion, and traffic flow is not anticipated to be an issue (see columns below). The ushers/greeters scheduled for the second service would be in charge of counting both offerings. Details like this example would be negotiated with each commissioner.

We think it would improve the interest and provide better for multiple styles of worshiping sensibility to make the services somewhat different, while retaining similarities in sermons, children's story and quality of music. Here's how two services might look:

1st Service

"Tone" words: *Intra-active, introspective, spiritual, intra-dependent, contemplative*

Children's story
Sermon
chimes, silence, confession

smaller by default?
serves a strong minority culture at FMC
more early morning quiet energy
no introit, but other child participation
communion every service
sharing but not open mike
no offering of life
tend toward more silence
good strong hymns but more contemplative
fewer "outside" presentations
simpler worship "card"?
bring \$ offering to front

2nd Service

"Tone" words: *Inter-active, extroverted, social, inter-dependent, verbal*

Children's story
Sermon
no chimes, but a unison
confession/affirmation reading
tend to be larger?
serves the historic majority culture at FMC
more "prime time" worship energy
introit with children
periodic communion
open mike sharing often be practiced
offering of life
tend toward more responsive reading
good strong hymns with more "rippers"
more "outside" connection presentations
worship folder
ushers receive \$ offering

Frequent concerns raised when congregations consider moving to two substantial services:

---We will not see each other on Sunday morning.
This is a leading concern. We go to church to be a community. In this regard, our pastoral

perception is that people no longer all see each other now, and that it is a time in our congregation when people can successfully migrate together to a service in which their best friends will also be present, or they will see each other at the shared coffee time in between. We are also finding that the feeling that "we don't know everyone" is inevitable, a sign of integration of many new people, and that it is okay and a good thing for us to relate more to sub-groups. This creates new challenges for nurturing First Mennonite as a community because we become more a "community of communities." We think we can meet these challenges and be a strong and vital church body together through new communication patterns, and with periodic all-church shared worship events and meetings.

---We don't want to "get big".

Our goal would not be to become a "big" church, but rather we wish to nurture the health of a congregation that involves increasing numbers of people in a way that maintains meaningful community connections in worship. This means we would not recommend moving toward a new facility with a larger worship space. We believe week to week worship happens best among people who know each other. We think two (initially) smaller services will meet this need for community better than trying to incorporate everybody and every worship sensibility into one large service.

---Won't we lose all the good energy of strong attendance at a single service?

This may be an issue with the later service, which is likely to be the one most folks attend and the service which is intended to be more energetic. But we think that 1) there are folks who prefer a quieter, more low-energy service (see majority and minority culture notes above) and 2) that ultimately, there are plenty of folks around to serve the energies of both services. And since the early service would remain a bit simpler in it's structure, the focus on large numbers of musicians and so on would continue to only be in one service - the later service.

---Could we just plant a church or two to help with crowding?

This is a very healthy thing to do. However, the record of church planting is that it tends to improve both the health and attendance of the parent church and therefore does not address the question of numbers in worship. But we would be pleased to work with folks who would like to consider a church plant or participating in one of several church plants currently underway in the metro area, supported by the conference.

---Do we have enough people to lead two services?

Our experience is that we have more than enough musicians, artists, and other potential "up-front" leaders for two services. It will be extra work on Sunday morning for us as well, but we nevertheless think it is something important and valuable to try.

We look forward to working with the congregation as we try this new approach, seeking the health and joy of this wonderful worshiping community. And if it ultimately becomes clear that this approach is not a good path for the congregation, we will happily leave this idea behind and seek to discover other ways for providing a church home for all who would join together at FMC.

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