

## How to grow our church

### Principles of Growing Churches for All

#### No. 3: Engaging with God

One of the eight characteristics of healthy, growing churches listed in Christian Schwarz's book *Natural Church Development* is 'inspiring worship'. Such worship should be engaging with God. As he says: 'Whenever the Holy Spirit is truly at work, He will have a concrete effect upon the way a worship service is conducted, including the atmosphere of a gathering.'



Our worship experience is determined by different factors i.e. tradition, age of the congregation, or style e.g. traditional, informal, all-age or seeker-sensitive. There is no one correct style, as different worship experiences will reach different groups of people. However, Jesus says 'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24).

Isaiah's experience in Isaiah 6:1-8 is instructive! He begins with an overwhelming sense of God's presence. Having recognised who God is, Isaiah then becomes aware of who he is, 'a man of unclean lips'. Praise and adoration lead to confession and the assurance of God's cleansing and forgiveness: 'your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'. Then comes the word: 'Who will go for us?' and the response of obedience: 'Here am I. Send me!'

Our Sunday worship should be relevant to those outside the church. However, this will not be achieved simply by changing the style of worship. The key thing is that we approach all we do with confidence, enthusiasm and expectancy.

Why not ask the following questions:

What traditions of worship should be maintained, and why?

What elements could helpfully be included i.e. people telling their stories, silence, a balance of different musical styles?

What's in it for the single mother, teenager or first-time visitor?

How might we include the congregation more significantly?

*From a new series, 'Principles of Growing Churches for All',  
Written by the Rev Paul Hardingham, a vicar in Ipswich.*

**If you have no joy in your religion,  
there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere.**

**Billy Sunday**