

## **Quality characteristic 5:** **Inspiring worship service**

***"There is probably no area of church life in which the important distinction between 'models' and 'principles' is so frequently ignored."***

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" (see pages 16-17) 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.

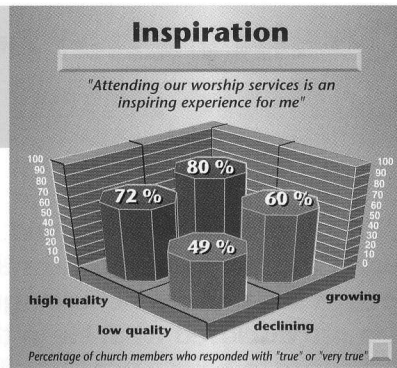
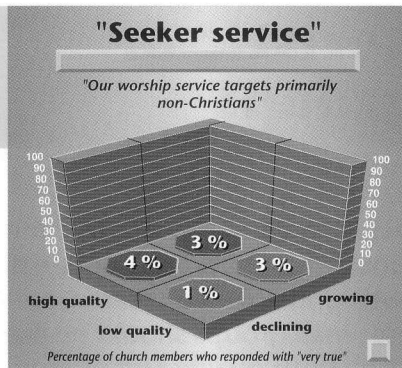
Our research shed some empirical light on the fog around the current discussion about worship services. Consider this example: many Christians are convinced that a church service which primarily targets the unchurched ("seeker service"), marvelously modeled by Willow Creek Community Church and others, is a church growth principle. I have spoken with numerous pastors who are 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 it can be demonstrated that it is not.

**The "seeker service" in the light of research**

In our research, we selected all churches which reported a "very strong" orientation towards reaching non-Christians in their worship services. We 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 (see the left diagram on page 31).

This doesn't mean that the so-called "seeker services" are not a wonderful evangelistic method that a church might consider emulating. It simply means that this form of evangelism cannot be classified as a church growth principle. Services may target Christians or non-Christians, their style may be liturgical or free, their language may be "churchy" or "secular"—it makes no difference for church growth.

A different criterion proved to be the deciding factor, namely, "Is the worship service an 'inspiring experience' for the partici-



## Part 1: 8 quality characteristics

While the question whether a church service targets primarily non-Christians (left) has no apparent relationship to church growth, there is indeed a strong correlation between an "inspiring worship experience" and a church's quality and quantity (right)

pants?" (see diagram above right). The answers to the eleven questions we asked churches about worship services all pointed in the same direction. It is this criterion which demonstrably separates growing churches from stagnant and declining ones.

The word "inspiring" deserves clarification. It is to be understood in the literal sense of *inspiratio* 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), He will have a concrete effect upon the way a worship service is conducted including the entire atmosphere of a gathering. People attending truly "inspired" services typically indicate that "going to church is fun."

Knowing this, the likely source of opposition to this quality characteristic becomes evident: Christians who go to church to fulfill their Christian duty. These people do not attend church because it is a joyous and inspiring experience, but to do the pastor 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."

The spiritualistic paradigm has a negative effect on worship services, too. Spiritualism suggests that "real spirituality" occurs exclusively in the "inner person." Such factors as a tasteful place of worship, a well-organized greeting team, a competent moderator, or a meaningful order of worship are unimportant for spiritualists or arouse the suspicion that they might contribute to the externalizing of the faith.

May worship services be "fun"?