



***Actors? Writers? Producers? Directors?  
Crew Members?  
Use Your Gifts at Your Place of Worship!***

by  
Phil Cooke

*Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain...*  
-- The Wizard of Oz

*I often make a living watching church services.*

Although I create numerous television and motion picture projects for secular studios, networks, and other sources, I also produce and direct television programming for a wide range of churches and ministries in America. That task enables me to watch hundreds of church services, religious events, and other efforts and work with pastors, priests, teachers, and other ministry leaders to make their programs more powerful and effective.

I'm especially fascinated by watching *church services*, many of which are filled with believing prayer, heart-felt worship, and life-changing teaching and preaching.

But I'm constantly disappointed at gifted actors, directors, producers, and others, who although they are deeply committed to their faith, make no effort at all to use those talents and gifts to help their own church's outreach.

*Sure we're busy and have little time to help.* But you would be amazed at how much a simple conversation with your worship leader would help him or her to understand how to be more effective in the pulpit. The worship experience is far more complex than entertainment, but I've discovered that if we can keep people interested and

excited about coming to a place of worship, that goes a long way toward giving God the time to work in their lives.

The fact is, *despite their best efforts, many church services are exercises in agony*. Why does it have to be? Why is it that in some churches, worshipping the Creator of the universe is boring, frustrating, and sometimes a showcase for bad music, inept preaching, and poor taste?

Recently, while visiting some relatives and going to their worship service, the thought occurred to me that many of the techniques we use in making a television program more effective would also increase the interest and participation of the local congregation as well.

Keep in mind, I'm a director. A "behind the scenes" guy. My comments don't necessarily come as a prophetic word straight from heaven. Rather, they deal with the practical everyday, but important aspects of ministry.

The important thing? BE SENSITIVE. Pastors, priests, and other worship leaders often find it difficult to see things from the congregation's point of view, so above all, be gracious and inventive as you share these thoughts with your worship leader or other members of the congregation. Here are some places to start – but don't be afraid to bring your own talent and experience to your particular situation;

### **1) Encourage your Worship Leader or Pastor to See The Congregation's Point of View -**

Theater director Peter Brook often describes the birth of "directors". In fact, he says the role was developed in the theater during the late 1800's and up until that time, the actors themselves staged the play.

But apparently, an actor finally asked "*What would the audience think?*". So, it was decided that one of the actors would sit in the audience watching the rehearsal and make comments based on how he would react as a member of the audience.

Thus, the role of "director" was born - essentially, *a person who represents the audience*. Places of worship would do very well to learn from that tradition. Have your worship leader go out and sit in the audience. (*Not from the front row, but say, 15-20 rows back*). How is the lighting? How is the music? How loud is the speaker system?

Is the pulpit area appealing? Do the flowers and/or plants get in the way? Are there any physical distractions?

More important, remind him or her of the vast needs of the people. Keeping those needs in the forefront of any service is critically important to how effectively the leader touches their lives.

Small church or large - *don't ever lose touch with the perspective of the people sitting in those seats.*

## **2) Encourage Your Pastor to Tell Stories -**

Want to put people to sleep?

*Never tell a story.*

This Sunday, preachers all across America will preach sermons devoid of a single story. In every case, it will be a mechanical, dry, and boring exercise.

But look at the ministry of Jesus. Storytelling was just about all he ever did. He put the most profound and deep concepts into simple and compelling stories that captivated people and changed their lives.

Through the centuries, the power of a story has held generations captive. It's curious that instead of the Bible being a book of theological arguments and lessons, it's nearly a continuous book of *stories*.

## **3) Encourage Your Pastor to Question Everything –**

Why do you take up the offering the same way each week? Why do you always sing the same songs? Why do you always make announcements? Why... why... why?

Have a solid reason for every single thing you do during a typical service (and "*just because we've always done it that way*" doesn't count!).

## **4) Encourage Your Pastor to Try some New Jokes -**

*"I like the King James Version - if it was good enough for Paul, it's good enough for me!"*

*"How many of you would rather be here than the finest hospital in town?"*

Please... please... please... find some new jokes. The congregation is starting to laugh out of *pity*... not from *humor*.

#### **5) Encourage Your Pastor to Develop New and Contemporary Sermons -**

The headlines, issues, and problems we face are constantly changing, and sermons should be developing too. The message of the gospel never changes, but the way we present it should always be updated and strengthened.

Although new material may be unproven and a little shaky, there's a wonderful spontaneity and excitement about breaking new ground.

#### **6) Encourage Your Pastor to Understand The Surrounding Culture –**

Jesus always understood the culture that surrounded his ministry. He framed powerful sermons with stories that were filled with cultural and social perspectives. Messages, teachings, and sermons will always be more effective when tied to issues that the audience is facing everyday - drugs, abuse, AIDS, finances, violence, etc...

#### **7) Encourage Your Pastor to Learn About Their Audience -**

Don't take for granted that everyone they preach to is their age. Of course you realize they're not, but how often do you wonder about how a child will understand the message, or a teen, or a senior? From the entertainment business, you know that *Demographics* is the science of understanding everything you can about your audience - their ages, their backgrounds, their habits, their needs, etc... Madison Avenue spends billions of dollars each year tailoring their ad messages to very individual age groups. Work with your church or parish to make sure you're targeting the audience as well, in order to more effectively respond to their needs.

Remember, the goal is not to make your pastor an *entertainer*, but to help them become more and more responsive to their audience – a better *communicator*. Every week they have an opportunity to present the greatest story ever told to a group of people who are often desperately in need. As an actor, director, writer, or some other profession in show business, you're keenly aware of what it takes to capture the hearts and minds of that audience.

When you begin to see how your gifts and talents can be used to make that worship experience more compelling and exciting, your life will never be the same.

---

Have you signed up for the Cooke Pictures e-mail newsletter? It's a monthly journal filled with media research, creative concepts, production resources, and great ideas.

**Sign up today at <http://www.cookepictures.com/resources/newsletters/>**