

## 10. The celebrating congregation with *mixed economy*

*Vary your approach to appeal to different groups*

**Many local congregations only know the Sunday morning service. If there had been an afternoon service then this was abolished ages ago - too few churchgoers attended. This model says: have the courage to turn things around! We no longer abolish services, but extend them. Or if you don't want to do that: we introduce variation into our morning services. What is best for your congregation?**

The advantage of variation is that you can aim at a variety of groups. How often does it happen that people in the congregation are complaining about the morning service because certain groups want to make changes that others find obnoxious? The church council is caught between the different wishes. Before you know it the morning service is no longer a grey average that does not offend anybody but which on the other hand does not make anybody really happy either. Attendance numbers go down.

### **A number of suggestions**

- Some congregations opt for a dual approach, the so-called 'mixed economy'. There are two Sunday services, one is the service the congregation is used to and then there is one for guests and newcomers. The advantage is that during that second service you can devote yourself completely to this target group. The integration between the two groups is achieved because congregation members can invite guests to the second service. The people that do not feel at home in the second service have the opportunity to attend the service they are familiar with. It would be possible to have the first service at 9.00 AM and the second one at 10.30 AM, or the first one at the familiar time in the morning and the second one in the early afternoon - this is often an excellent time for guests.
- There are also congregations that organise several services on a Sunday. This increases the options for churchgoers. It has been shown that when several services are offered the number of churchgoers increases. If this approach is used there must be variation in what is being offered! The youth service is the best known example. After that there is a whole host of possibilities: the instruction service, the discussion service, an evening prayer, a Taize celebration, a praise service, a cantata service, a theatre service, a children's service, a prayer service, a service for the 50-plusers.

- The variation in celebrations offers the possibility for services that are more suitable for guests and newcomers, where the language and forms are more attuned to their world. The phenomenon of the ‘young people’s church’ is a good example of this, The ‘young people’s church’ is not a ‘church’, but a celebration at a separate moment, usually not on a Sunday morning. The celebrations are organised by and for young people and are aimed at their world.
- In addition to variation in form and target group it is also possible to have variation in terms of time. For people who have to work on a Sunday morning it would be quite nice anyway if another opportunity were offered. Teens and young people do not find 10.00 on a Sunday morning the most appropriate time for a church service. They would prefer a service in the early afternoon. And why should there not be celebrations on Saturday evening?
- Many people do not go to church on Sunday mornings but instead watch ‘Nederland zingt’, a Dutch version of Songs of Praise. Many people enjoy community singing of well-known hymns. It would be possible to organise this locally.
- Taize celebrations without a sermon and long silences are attractive to another sort of people. Experience has shown that people whom you would not normally see in church on a Sunday morning can catch their breath here.
- Many churches cooperate with the local primary school. Church and school services are organised, where many children and their parents see the inside of a church for the very first time.

A ‘timetable’ for the Sunday could have the following items on it:

- 9.00 hours: normal church service
- 10.30 hours: service for all generations in which children and young people are given extra attention
- 16.00 hours: youth service
- 17.00 hours: vespers with an emphasis on (classical) hymns

This timetable can vary per Sunday with regard to the afternoon and evening.

### **Organisation**

And who is going to do all this? Very often ministers being to panic when confronted with such proposals. They suspect that every Sunday they will have to preach four times instead of only once. That does not have to be the case. Vespers, youth services and Taize celebrations can be prepared and led by congregation members. It might also be possible to have a rota: ministers in the vicinity could assist in these varied celebrations according to their talents and opportunities.

A multi-track approach is therefore a good missionary option. There always remains the question: 'And after that?' If people come because they start being interested are there then opportunities for them to get further than that one service? It is important to include this in the reflection. How about a host or a hostess, recognisable thanks to a badge, with whom newcomers can have a chat. He or she can show them the ropes. You might also draw up a letter of welcome to be given to all churchgoers, including the newcomers. In this way you can give people information about your congregation and perhaps invite them to an orientation evening or course.

### **Possible approach for the church council**

- The church council can decide to go ahead with this concept. This often starts with a reflection during the afternoon service. Which variation would appeal to us. In this context think of the environment (what sort of people live in our village, our town, what are their questions and needs?) and also of your congregation (what suits us, what kind of people do we have 'in house' that would be able to participate?).
- Stick with this experiment for 12 months.
- Invite different groups of congregation members to work out an idea for a special service. Include children and young people. Involve people from the target group right from the start. Ask somebody outside the church to provide ideas for an accessible and interesting.
- The church council will draw up a plan in which these services will have a place and will approve it.
- The communication and the PR about this idea will be started up at an early stage and repeated continuously (See also model 4). It is of course important to publicise the services by announcing them in the door-to-door papers.
- Every special service is mentioned separately in the local media.
- Congregation members are invited and encouraged to invite their friends, acquaintances and neighbours.
- Don't give up. If the church is not full on the first occasion then this does not mean that the initiative was a failure. On the other hand: if in the long run it turns out that there is very little interest (but what is 'little?') you might wonder if you should continue.
- Evaluation of church services is important but difficult. Evaluation does not just involve numbers (was there sufficient interest?) or a 'feeling' (I enjoyed it), but also content. Decide beforehand what you want to evaluate; what are your basic premises/values and which questions do you want to ask about them? Involve visitors in the evaluation as well.