

## Ways to Integrate the Old and the New into the Worship Life of Your Church

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When visiting different churches the complaints about music, style, and feel seem similar from place to place. The older church members are complaining about all this “praise and worship” and rap in the church, and the younger members are complaining about how irrelevant worship is to them. Worse yet, the people stop complaining because they’ve stopped coming to church altogether. Believe it or not, as trite as accommodating people in worship according to their music comfort level, cultural and societal experience, and/or age may seem, it really is an act of pastoral care that the music ministry can and should provide.

Music has the ability to make a person feel at home and valued in one’s worship community. Furthermore, connecting with the people of God through music in many ways gives the layperson (and clergy for that matter) a tool and spiritual guidance needed to make it through the week, and throughout their lives. Think about it . . . how many times have you been able to sing a line from a hymn or praise song to lift your soul when you couldn’t bring a Scripture verse to your remembrance? As devoted a Christian and as much as he studied Scripture, it was “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. O what a foretaste of glory divine” that my Granddad hummed with his last breath. No matter the age of the person sitting in the pew or standing on the street corner, putting a musical bug in his or her ear makes a huge difference because it then can start to live in his or her heart.

How can we do this effectively and affectively in our regular worship services? And perhaps more importantly, how do we communicate inter-generationally the importance of the old hymns, spirituals, and gospel songs and the new praise and worship songs, hymns, raps, etc.?

1. Talk with your senior pastor, pastoral staff, and Christian Education personnel about the needs you see. Work out a plan to have Bible study and Sunday school classes in which information about hymns and spirituals is taught. Stress their biblical and historical significance and highlight their spiritual significance as they have sustained generations of Christians in their faith. Look for a curriculum that specifically focuses on spirituals as a guide. Once you’re in a church-wide study a starter question can be: what is a contemporary song (remember the word “contemporary” is also relative) that has been a source of spiritual sustenance for you and for black folk?
2. Your pastor or whomever is preaching should be communicating with you about the theme of his or her sermon from week to week. If not, open the lines of communication. Approach it from the angle of being in a position of support for the sermon through songs. (As we know, a person may not remember the sermon, but they’ll remember a good song.) Ask her or him if she or he will be using any song references in the sermon. If so, be ready to support that musically.
3. If your pastor isn’t sure about his or her song references, count them in the sermon. (Whether or not he or she realizes it, most preachers make at least 1 or 2 song references.) After the

sermon, moving into the invitation or altar call, be ready to transition into the most singable song he or she mentions.

4. Listen to and buy ALL TYPES of music all the time. Music should become like Scripture. Let the music inspire you to put different genres together that you wouldn't ordinarily do. The more music you know, the more creative and free you can be, and the more informed you'll be to your music staff, choir, and congregation.

5. Prepare your music staff. Encourage them (instrumentalists, vocalists, praise team, choir(s) etc.) to listen to all types of music all the time so that they too will be familiar with various styles. You want to be able to perform various genres with artistic integrity and be comfortable enough to include your collective and individual creativity.

6. Listen especially to new versions of old songs. Arrange some of your own.

7. Develop a positive relationship with the people in charge of the church bulletins. You do not want the person typing the bulletin/service sheets/jumbotron sheets to change the songs because of a negative or non-communicative relationship. Be prepared to give aloud any changes you may need to make during the duration of the service.

8. Be intentional in your diversity as you come up with your plan for designing worship services. Really think about what goes together textually and musically and key and time changes.

9. Plan spirituals, hymns, and anthems that are appropriate for children and youth according to their skill level. Many of the songs are old, but young people can sing them too.

10. Plan contemporary hymn, praise and worship songs, and raps for the senior choir. Bring in the youth choir to help the senior choir learn the new material.

11. Be mindful of the capabilities of your musical staff. If you have seven people in your choir who sing two vocal parts and you want to do a spiritual that requires five vocal parts, see if you can find an arrangement for two parts or arrange it for two parts yourself. The same for praise and worship—if you don't have a full band, see what you can do with just piano or organ. Use what you have.

Finally, whatever you do, do it well, and do it wholeheartedly to minister to God's people and to yourself. Remember that diversification of the music in worship is not JUST about catering to your congregation's comfort zone. It is about bridging generations, making each person feel welcome and valued in your congregation, educating concerning the spiritual and historical significance of songs, and most importantly providing the people of God with resources to build and sustain their relationships with God, self, and others.