

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION - RESEARCH DESIGN.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT.

The Church of Christ meets on a weekly basis throughout the world. Sunday morning worship services for believers are customary and other meetings are targeted at specific groups: children, youth, Bible classes, cell groups, the elderly, prayer meetings, Holy communion, baptismal services, business meetings, special evangelistic outreaches, healing services, etc. All these appear in different formats according to the specific tradition of the denomination. Getz wants us to clarify why these meetings are held. He asks "...do they exist to achieve New Testament objectives?" (1984:215). He continues by saying that it is time for the Church to evaluate the kinds of meetings it has and to justify their existence on the basis of New Testament principles and purposes. The following are some of the questions that Church leaders should be asking:

- * What kind of services are we providing? For instance, worship services, evangelistic services, prayer meetings, etc.
- * What is the purpose of each service? For instance, is there a difference between the purpose and goal of the morning service and that of the evening service?
- * When and where should these services be held? At what time of day? Which day of the week ? Only in the Church building or also at homes?

It is clear that the church of Christ meets for various reasons, but a second question also needs to be answered, namely, what is the purpose of the Christian Church? Surely the Church exists to glorify God, to serve as the embodiment of Christ and to be the salt and the light of the world? Warren (1995:39) asserts that the Church should follow the example that Jesus set when He defined His ministry target by saying,

“Healthy people don’t need a doctor - sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough” (Mark 2:17). Warren (1995:103-106) explains that they continually remind themselves of this statement and that it assisted Saddleback to stay true to their original focus, which is to bring the unchurched, irreligious people of their community to Christ. He believes that the purpose of the Church is: firstly, to love the Lord your God, with all your heart and secondly, to love your neighbor as yourself. The third is to go and make disciples. Fourthly, to baptize the disciples and finally to teach them to obey. In evaluating the seeker service we need to look more closely at the third purpose that Warren identified, namely, evangelizing our communities.

The seeker service focuses squarely on the passion for the lost. The journey of the seeker is legitimized and recognized (Hybels 1995:125). Conversion is seen as a process and the seeker service aspires to facilitate that process. The question though, is how? Hybels (1995:203) posed the question that lies at the heart of the seeker service: “What is the method that can be used to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ?”



Various methods were utilized in the past to evangelize communities.

- * Preaching of the gospel message in Church at a worship service.
- * Special evangelization meetings were held - in stadiums or at conference centers.
- * Cold -turkey evangelism - door to door, or on street corners.
- * Relationship evangelism, or so-called body evangelism.
- * Home cell groups.
- * A seeker service, which consists of an informal, contemporary, no pressure, relevant to the people’s needs, casual, visually appealing presentation of the Gospel to seekers (Dobson1993: 25,26).

The problem according to proponents of the seeker service is that some local assemblies are not sensitive to the needs of seekers at all, but are mainly interested in

catering for the needs of believers. It is believed that a great percentage of the activities of the Christian Church consist of making believers better believers. Seekers are not being considered and might feel that the Church is irrelevant to their needs. Hybels (1995:32) believed that some mainstream Protestant Churches were not an attractive option for the unchurched. He concluded that these traditional Church services seem grossly abnormal to anybody except the already convinced.

Hybels(1995:160) relates an incident where he invited a friend to a traditional Church service and where he experienced huge discomfort when he began to see the Church through his unbelieving friend's eyes. He calls it the "cringe factor", because of his embarrassment with a Church that seemed to him to be clearly out of touch with a changing community.

This incident amongst others prompted Hybels to start a Church for people like his friend. To help reach their unchurched friends, they created a weekly event called Son City. They utilized contemporary music, team competition, drama and teaching from the Word as the main focus of the liturgy. The "Seeker service" was born, and scores of unchurched high school students came to Christ (Willow Creek Association {WCA} workshop document:1).

Warren (1995:33) relates one of the questions we must ask in evaluating a Church's health: "How many people are being mobilized for the Great Commission?" With this question he centralizes our attention on evangelization of the unchurched rather than merely maintaining the status quo. He defines the focus of the Church thus: "To bring the unchurched, irreligious people of our community to Christ" (1995:39). He further contends that the approach of the traditional Church is outdated and that seekers find it difficult to identify with (1996:283). Morgenthaler (1995:30) argues that real faith genuinely cares for people and offers a genuine relationship with a genuine God. She observes that we may be able to parrot the phrase "Lost people matter to God," but in many of our Churches lost people do not matter nearly as much as we matter.

Woods(1996:32) also quotes Fr. Patrick Brennan who once remarked that there would

be two kinds of Churches in the future; a dwindling Church with an ageing and dying structure and a mission Church that is reaching out to people. Shawchuck and Heuser (1993:78) warn that if the Church fails to adapt its programs, structures, goals and strategies it will soon be little more than a religious museum, dead in the waters of irrelevancy Woods(1996:19) seem to have more than just a seeker service in mind when he insists that the Church has lost its appeal to society. He argues that today's Church should go out into the community to attract people and not merely wait for people to enter their buildings. He suspects that people see the Church to be selfish because members are more interested in meeting one another's needs than in meeting the needs of society (Woods1996:31). Surely the Church exists in every community for the benefit of seekers? Someone once remarked that God blesses us because he has someone else in mind. Woods (1996:33) continues with a pressing question: "What will it take to minister to and attract people from today's society?"

The seeker service (see page 11: Central Concepts) is the object of this study. According to Spence (1998:47) Churches who warmed to the seeker approach have modified either their Sunday services to make the unchurched feel more comfortable or they have developed a completely separate service geared just for the unchurched.

Bill Hybels (Willow Creek Community Church) and Rick Warren (Saddleback Valley) currently enjoy center stage in the seeker service debate, but it is more accurate to call Robert Schuller from the Crystal Cathedral in California the father of the seeker movement, according to Basden (1999:89). Schuller is regarded as the first minister who regularly invited professional musicians and sports stars to his Church as a way to attract the unchurched. He devised innovative programs and methods to make the Church more attractive to unchurched people and believers alike. He summarized the seeker service perfectly (before the phrase was even coined) by stating that his goal every Sunday morning was pre-evangelism (Basden 1999:89). Schuller also used extraordinary architecture, indoor gardens, symphony orchestras and special guests to attract seekers.

In the seeker service the unchurched are called “seekers” and not sinners, the unsaved, unbelievers, or visitors. They are very important guests who are invited to investigate the Christian faith in a non-threatening environment. Everything in this special service is planned and structured to attract, entertain and eventually change the seekers into fully committed followers of Christ, according to the mission statement of Willow Creek Community Church: “Our mission is to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ” (WCA Workshop document:5).

The seeker service is still relatively unknown in South Africa, and the candidate attempts to investigate the service, evaluate it critically and make possible recommendations, if any, to individuals who may be interested in utilizing such a service.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH.

1.2.1. General Goals.



I have set the following general goals for my research. I intend to investigate, portray and evaluate the seeker service. In evaluating this service, I will focus on the objections and comments of critics and attempt to establish the theological validity and the Scriptural foundation of seeker-sensitivity. I intend to address the following general questions:

* Is the way we currently “do” Church still relevant for today’s generation? Has the Church been able to keep abreast with transformation in our communities?

- What constitutes a seeker service?
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* Should a Church be seeker-sensitive in their approach?

* To which degree is a local assembly currently seeker-sensitive?

- * What can a local assembly do to be more seeker-sensitive?
- * Whom are we trying to reach?
- * What kind of service is most likely to reach seekers?
- * How could the Church reach more unchurched people?

1.2.2. Specific Goal. Is the Seeker Approach the Way of the Future?

The specific goal that I have in mind is to evaluate the seeker service to determine its validity as an evangelistic tool for the Church today and the Church tomorrow and to find possible practical recommendations for interested parties.

1.3. MOTIVATION.



1.3.1. Crisis of Innovation.

Barna (1997: 29) suspects the Church of being apprehensive to invest in new modes of being Church, and that they are scared to break free from antiquated services and irrelevant traditions toward living the gospel in a twenty-first-century context. There seems to be a crisis of innovation in some Churches, specifically regarding reaching the lost. In evangelism, “reading the defense” means understanding and anticipating the objections unbelievers will have before they voice them. It means learning to think like an unbeliever. Warren believes that most unchurched people aren’t atheists: They are just misinformed, turned off, or too busy (1995:193). Therefore it seems logical and practical to develop new ways to attract, inform and eventually change seekers.

Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples in Matthew 28:19,20. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have

given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” These words are viewed as the great commission of the Church, but some scholars believe that a majority of traditional Churches fail to impact seekers. Dobson (1993:18) reckons that the problem with evangelism today is that nearly every Christian is agreeable to it, but that very few are practicing it. He holds that most pastors and Church lay leaders are more committed to maintaining the status quo than departing from it to reach people who would not be reached otherwise. We should move “from the safe ground into the uncharted territory of the unchurched”, and break through our evangelical boundaries and touch people who don’t go to Church anywhere (Dobson 1993:24). He believes that although the times, the culture and the methods have changed, the motive remains the same: using every available means to reach every available person with the gospel (Dobson 1993:19). He also contends that the passion for evangelism is in serious decline in the evangelical community, partly because in many cases they have become cloistered, monastic communities and have lost touch with the real world. I think he is taking it a bit far, for surely many if not most traditional Churches do care about the lost and are serious about devising ways to win them for Christ. Although they believe strongly in the seeker concept, people who propagate seeker services can never negate the rest of the body of Christ, or wipe them off the table as if they have lost touch with the real world.

Still, Hybels (1995:47,48) believes that the Church operates as an isolated island of subculture, wondering why it is ignored and unappreciated by the community at large. Evangelism is, more often than not, “something we ought to be doing” but aren’t. He recalls that a frequent answer he received from seekers on the question why they did not attend a local Church, was that the Church was irrelevant to their daily life. Hybels (1995:160) also argues that most Churches were only geared up to serve the already convinced because the teaching, budgets, services and programs are designed for those who were safely inside the family of God.

Warren (1995:39) claims that the original focus of the (their) Church is to bring the unchurched, irreligious people of the community to Christ. He conveys the words of

Christ from Mark 2:17. When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.” Warren (1995:191-193) conveys four common complaints about Churches from their survey in the Saddleback Valley.

* “Church is boring, especially the sermons. The message doesn’t relate to my life.”

* “Church members are unfriendly to visitors, and when I go to Church I want to feel welcomed without being embarrassed.”

* “The Church is more interested in my money than in me.”

* “We worry about the quality of the Church’s child care.”

Hybels (1995:16) decided to start a Church that would reach seekers. A Church that would answer their questions, address their needs, introduce them to Jesus Christ, and give them a taste of His kingdom on earth. They aspired to be the Church for people who thought Church was irrelevant but who needed it so desperately. This service would be designed just for them, a safe place where they could hear the dangerous, life-transforming message of Christ (1995:40, 41). The seeker service will be a weekly service that would provide a safe and informative place where unchurched people could come to investigate Christianity further.

Shawchuck and Heuser (1993:219) believe that most organizations live primarily in the past and are not able to keep up with the unprecedented change. They continue (1993:226) by saying that even denominations have prevailing paradigms and that congregational paradigms can keep members stuck and they are also unable to see new opportunities for ministry.

They also contend that Christ fits the model of “Paradigm Pioneer”, while the Pharisees model those who have “paradigm paralysis”. Resistance of the established religion to

the new paradigm, is seen in the number of times it is recorded, that the keepers of the old paradigm planned to silence Christ - because his message was dangerous to “correct religion” and to the society they desired (1993:227). They are convinced that the Church is in the throes of change and many of the old religious paradigms are already being replaced by new ones. Therefore, as leaders of the present and future Church, we should at least examine the new paradigms with an open mind and be willing to learn whether there be “a more excellent way” (Shawchuck and Heuser 1993:228). Shawchuck and Heuser (1993:299) observes that the Church which focuses on serving the needs and interests of the unchurched, rather than serving the interests of its members, will prevail in the as-of-yet unclear future.

1.3.2. The Legitimacy of Seeker-sensitivity.

Questions that come to mind regarding the legitimacy of seeker-sensitivity are:

- * Should a local Church be sensitive towards seekers?
- * Shouldn't we rather be sensitive to the Lord? Holy Spirit sensitive?
- * Is the move towards seeker sensitivity a Holy Spirit inspired initiative, or is it a sign of a humanistic and hedonistic emphasis that seeks to please, entertain and even glorifies the creature, instead of the Creator of all things?

We will address these and other questions in our evaluation of the seeker service in chapter three.

1.3.3. Why a Seeker-sensitive Service?

Woods (1996:11) is adamant about the need for the Church to change. He insists that the Church has to discover what unchurched people perceive to be barriers to faith and worship. It has to break with old ways of thinking, especially old ways that does not

reach or help people. He argues that we must strip away only the traditions, methods and ways that are not working, but not the mission, the purpose or the kernels of truth about God. Woods (1996:26) also expresses the need for better approaches to minister effectively to the unchurched. He maintains that we must find a way to entice the world by our love for one another, our love for them and our uncompromising commitment to God (Woods 1996:34). According to him the Church is now faced with the challenge to appeal to a new generation (Woods1996:15). He persuasively argues that this is an awe-inspiring moment in the history of the Church and that we need revitalizing, renewing and transforming. We could readily add: re-invention, rediscovery and reorientation and innovation. Even in the Church, the three questions of innovation should be asked again and again:

* What can we do differently?

* What can we do additionally?

* What can we stop doing?



1.4. METHODOLOGY: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD.

I will conduct a limited literature study of the seeker service of which the Willow Creek Community Church of Bill Hybels and the Saddleback Valley Church of Rick Warren are the primary exponents. A critical evaluation of the seeker service and possible recommendations for interested parties will be formulated. The method of evaluation will be as follows: I will quote each objection to the seeker service and then proceed to evaluate each individually.

1.5. CENTRAL CONCEPTS.

The following concepts need explanation:

1.5.1. Seeker.

The term seeker refers to a person who does not have a relationship with Christ. Others may describe those outside the Church as unchurched, sinners, unbelievers or even heathen. Hybels and others feel that “seeker” is a more appropriate and fitting term for those that still find themselves outside the Church, as they are supposedly still seeking for the true meaning of life and spiritual fulfillment.

1.5.2. Seeker-driven Service.

This service is a professional presentation of the Gospel, aimed exclusively at seekers. They are received as guests, and can sit back and relax while the gospel is being presented to them and they do not participate in the program. Hybels (1995:41) defines it as a “...service that would provide a safe and informative place where unchurched people could come to investigate Christianity further”. It is a pre-evangelistic outreach.

1.5.3. Seeker-sensitive Service.

This concept describes the sensitive approach that the Church displays towards unbelievers. In essence it is an attempt to be sensitive to the needs of seekers, doing everything possible to attract, entertain and change the seeker. The differences between seeker-sensitive and seeker-driven will be pointed out in chapter two. This worship service is directed at believers as well as seekers although it is designed to be a non-threatening environment for seekers. A comfortable atmosphere of love and acceptance is provided that will encourage them to seek Christ. Furthermore, it is an attempt to place the Gospel in a culturally relevant context.

1.5.4. Unchurched.

The term unchurched is used extensively by proponents of the seeker service and is preferred above terms like sinners, unbelievers, or heathen. It refers to unbelievers, non-Christians, people who do not yet have a relationship with Christ.

1.5.5. Willow.

Willow will be used for the Willow Creek Community Church of Bill Hybels, situated at South Barrington, Illinois.

1.5.6. Saddleback.

The term Saddleback will be used for Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California. Rick Warren is the senior pastor and founder of this assembly.

1.6. PARADIGM AND POINT OF DEPARTURE.

I grew up in the AFM of SA (Apostolic faith Mission of South Africa) and is an ordained pastor (since 1979) of this classical Pentecostal Church. I was exposed to other denominations during his high school years whilst at boarding school but a Pentecostal point of departure seems inevitable in my thinking and in the further development of this study.

My perception of the inability of some Churches to attract and turn seekers into disciples is one of the main reasons for this study. I daily minister mainly to seekers, as a chaplain in the SA National Defense Force and believe that followers of Christ should become involved in reaching the lost. I understand the way seekers think and are excited by new methods and models that impact them positively. I do not view myself as a fundamental Pentecostal as my denominational affiliation might suggest, but rather as a pragmatic pastor and theologian. I believe that the leader of the Church should be like his assembly and only if the Church reflects the community it serves, will it be genuinely effective. I strongly believe that the local assembly should go out of its way to adapt to relevant models and methods and to proclaim the gospel to the unchurched. This pragmatic approach to ministry causes me to be overly critical of many assemblies and their seemingly slumbering selfish and spiritually well-fed members.

I believe that the Church exists to reach the lost, not only to please herself, therefore I

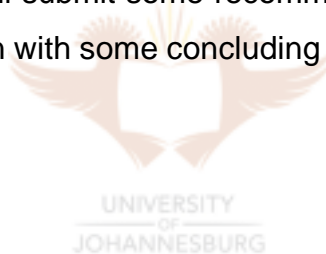
might be biased towards new methods of reaching the lost, including and specifically the use of a seeker service.

1.7. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY.

A description of the seeker-driven and -sensitive services will follow in chapter two. The Churches of Bill Hybels and Rick Warren are currently the world leaders in his field.

Following the description of the seeker service, chapter three will contain the researcher's critical evaluation of the seeker service. This evaluation is based on critique from various sources, and the researcher will attempt to evaluate and explain the numerous allegations from a practical theological perspective.

In chapter four the candidate will submit some recommendations on the seeker service. He will complete the dissertation with some concluding remarks in an epilogue.



CHAPTER TWO

DESCRIPTION OF THE SEEKER SERVICE.

2.1. INTRODUCTION.

Before attempting to describe the seeker service, it is necessary to explain that there actually are two different kinds of seeker service. The first form can be identified and described as a seeker-driven service, and the second a seeker-sensitive one. Ruth(1996:48-53) explains that practitioners of seeker services can be divided into two camps: those who do not call seeker services worship and those who do. The former, headed by Willow, holds evangelistic meetings for seekers and separate worship services for members. The latter offers a multiplicity of worship services that have varying degrees of adaptation to targeted seekers and varying degrees of reliance on previous liturgical tradition. The latter also reduces worship to evangelism. Let us look at the two types of services.

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2.2. THE SEEKER-DRIVEN CHURCH SERVICE. (WILLOW CREEK SYNOPSIS).

2.2.1. Introduction.

The model for seeker driven Churches is Willow Creek Community Church, pastored by Bill Hybels. In 1975, while still a college student, he became burdened to plant a Church in suburban Chicago. Being put off by what he perceived as staleness in traditional Churches, Hybels envisioned a Church that could speak to the contemporary concerns of suburban professionals like himself. His wife Lynne is the co-author of their book *Rediscovering Church*, and they describe at great length their growing need to influence and attract the unchurched, while the traditional Church seemingly struggled to win the lost for Christ. Hybels feels that the typical traditional Church is no place for the unchurched because it seems grossly abnormal to anybody but the already convinced.

It makes no sense to those who haven't grown up in it, to those who don't know the drill. "The music we sing, the titles we choose, the way we dress, the language we use, the subjects we discuss, the poor quality of what we do, all of these lead the average unchurched person to say, 'This is definitely not for me'" (Hybels 1995:32). He also expressed a common frustration with Church as it always had been done.

While still at high school, one of his friends once confessed to Bill that he needed spiritual help. Hybels invited him to his dad's traditional Church service in the country. His friend's interest in Christianity was quickly extinguished by this one exposure to the Church. He felt like the odd man out. He couldn't relate to the music, he didn't know when to sit or stand, he couldn't recite the Apostle's Creed with everyone else, and he had to suffer through a sermon that left him convinced that God is irrelevant and impossible to understand. Hybels recalled that this was the first time that he had to sit through a traditional worship service with a seeker next to him, and experienced it as the longest sixty minutes of his life. That was the day that he stumbled upon the dreaded "cringe factor", the awful internal flinching that Christians experience when they begin to see the Church service through a seeker's eyes. Needless to say, the whole experience was a disaster. The seeker eventually explained why he avoided Bill for days - "Look Bill, I'm going to shoot it to you straight. I live on the wild side, and you live on the religious side. But in spite of that I've always appreciated the fact that you are normal. You dress normal. You drive normal. You pitch normal. You talk normal. But what you took me to on Sunday was not normal. I've just been wondering why a normal guy like you goes to a place like that"

Hybels(1995:36) remembers his student days, when he desired to plant a Church in suburban Chicago. Put off by what he perceived as staleness in traditional Churches, Hybels envisioned a Church that could speak to the contemporary concerns of suburban professionals like himself. According to Hybels, Church is supposed to be fun - and supposed to be attractive to unbelievers. Lynne Hybels(1995:39) recalls the first real Seeker-sensitive service. "The night came and there were kids hanging out windows. Nearly six hundred charged-up students filled the Church auditorium, and everything,

from the opening jam to the prayer at the end, was designed just for them”. They had great contemporary music, sidesplitting drama, a powerful media presentation, and moving lead-in music. Then Hybels walked out in jeans and a T-shirt with and started sharing the Word of God with the young people. “Let me read you the greatest story in the history of the world...”

When the service adjourned, he wondered to himself where the seekers would be if there hadn't been a service designed just for them, a safe place where they could come week after week and hear the dangerous, life-transforming message of Christ? Then came the commitment that would shape his future. He prayed: “God, with your strength and for long as I am in ministry, I will always make sure that our strategy includes a regularly scheduled, high quality, Spirit-empowered outreach service where irreligious people can come and discover that they matter to You and that Christ died for them” (Hybels1995:40).

Within a year, his group grew from 150 to 1,000. Today, Willow Creek ministers to more than 15,000 people during a weekend of services. Willow Creek's success has not gone unnoticed. Three times a year, the Church sponsors a conference at which 500 Church leaders gather to see how it is done. In 1992, Hybels and his Church elders formed the Willow Creek Association, which currently has a membership of 5282 Assemblies (Geyser 2000:56), to provide support to other seeker-sensitive congregations.

2.2.2. Willow's Mission and Vision.

Willow (Dateless WCA Workshop document) believe that Jesus Christ had a mission, and that He came to earth to save the lost. They declare that they desire to carry out His mission and that while the message of Jesus Christ is timeless, the forms and programs they use to further His work is flexible.

Willow's Vision is “To become a Biblically functioning community of believers so that Christ's redemptive purposes can be accomplished in the world”.

They use the following outline to describe their perception of God's design for the Church.

Exaltation: Corporate and private worship of God our King.

Evangelism: Bringing lost people to meet our King.

Edification: Building up the relationship we have with our King.

Extension: Reaching into society with the compassion and justice of God's Kingdom.

Willow's Mission is to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. In explaining the title "Fully devoted follower" they mention the five G's that describe a Christ-follower. They contend that fully devoted followers are people who strive to live out these characteristics.

* GRACE. Christ-followers understand and have individually received Christ's saving grace. They have abandoned all attempts to earn God's favor through accomplishments of their own and find security only through Christ's sacrificial death on their behalf.

* GROWTH. Christ-followers know the grace of God that saved them is only the beginning of his work in them. They gratefully respond by actively pursuing a lifelong process of spiritual growth in Christ and seek to become conformed to His image.

* GROUP. A Christ-follower honors God's call to participate in community in order to grow in Christ-likeness, to express and receive love, and to carry out the ministry of the Church.

* GIFT. Christ-followers recognize that the Church is composed of interdependent members, who are uniquely fitted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body and furthering the ministry of the Church. They therefore seek to discover, develop and deploy those God-given gifts.

* GOOD STEWARDSHIP. Christ-followers realize that they have been bought with the price of Christ's blood, that everything they are and have belonged to Him. In the light of this, they desire to be responsible caretakers of the material resources that God has entrusted to them.

2.2.3. The Theological Point of Departure of A Seeker-Driven Service.

At the heart of the seeker movement we find a firm belief that being sensitive to the needs of seekers is to be Christ-like, as He is perceived to be a friend of sinners. The following information was found in a WCA Leadership Conference Workshop Manual: 4-9, of which neither the date nor author could be determined.

2.2.3.1. Willow's concept of repentance: the journey of a seeker.

Willow recognizes and esteems the spiritual journey of a seeker, before he or she makes a commitment to Christ. "During the time it takes a seeker to make a decision for Christ, he or she is encouraged to consider the claims of Christ, to investigate them with Christian friends, and to participate in other activities and classes designed to assist them in their search" WCA Bulletin (1998:3). Willow's leaders believe that if a seeker spends time listening to God's Word, interacting with God's people and observing God's work, the Holy Spirit will use these avenues as He convinces that person of his or her own need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Members of the Church body are then available to guide new believers as they begin their walk with God. The strategy to reach these so-called seekers is then to be sensitive to their needs to turn them into "fully devoted followers of Christ" (Hybels1995:25).

Woods mentions that it may take several experiences with God before a person is ready to make a commitment to God. He believes that the day is long gone when a single evangelist can grow a Church numerically. A public relations person told him that it might take up to twelve exposures to a new product before someone would eventually acquire the product (1996:50).

2.2.3.2. Style of evangelism.

Hybels believes that the beauty of the seeker service is that it involves the entire congregation in personal evangelism and that it is the task of every Church to figure out, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, how to fulfill the front end of the Great Commission (1995:175).

2.2.3.3. Willow's values.

Hybels believes that Biblically functioning communities can and should operate today. He has distilled ten specific core values (1995:183-194). They believe that:

* Anointed teaching is the primary catalyst for transformation in the lives of individuals and in the Church. Hybels warns against going overboard with "felt-need" messages. Although he declares himself to be a proponent of dealing with "felt needs" from time to time, he confirms that they are responsible for teaching the whole counsel of God in a balanced, biblical and mature fashion. "The reality is that you'll never grow up fully devoted followers of Christ on a diet of spiritual Twinkies"(1995:185).

* Lost people matter to God and therefore ought to matter to the Church.

* The Church should be culturally relevant, while remaining doctrinally pure. He holds that seeker services merely apply Jesus' method of being fresh and current, to our generation. While Jesus told parables, they use drama. He identifies a potential pitfall though. If one concentrates too much on being timely and topical, one could lose your biblical distinctiveness. "I've learned over the years that if I got an A for cultural relevance and a C for doctrinal purity, I've failed"(Hybels 1995:187).

* Christ-followers should manifest authenticity and yearn for continuous growth.

* The Church should operate as a unified community of servants stewarding their

spiritual gifts. They assert that greatness in God's eyes is humility, availability, downward mobility and servant-hood.

* Loving relationships should permeate every aspect of Church life.

* Life change happens best in small groups.

* Excellence honors God and inspires people. They believe 1Cor. 10:31 - "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God", and therefore it should be completed with excellence.

* Churches should be led by those with leadership gifts. "Leaders need to cast vision, summarize a mission, develop a strategy, undergird values, measure results, and coalesce people to advance the kingdom together".

* Full devotion to Christ and His cause is normal for every believer. To confirm this value, Hybels once wrote the following words in his journal "Ninety-five percent devotion to God is five percent short". He believes that "total yieldedness" should sum up the objective of Christ-followers.



2.2.3.4. Willow's strategy.

Hybels (1995:169-181) spells out their seven-step strategy to reach seekers and equip them as growing believers.

* Step one is for every believer to build an authentic relationship with a nonbeliever. They don't do house-to-house visitation to evangelize the community. They befriend seekers. They are actually following Christ's example by rubbing shoulders with unbelievers.

* Share a verbal witness. They boldly share their personal testimony with the unchurched by describing their past, their encounter with Christ and the changes that occurred since then. They believe that unbelievers must hear the gospel.

* The third step is to bring the seeker to a service especially designed for them. The combination of the groundwork done by the individual's verbal witness, followed by the impact of a highly relevant, creative presentation, brings home the message so that seekers consider anew the age-old truth of Jesus Christ.

* Fourthly, the new believers then join "New Community", the Wednesday evening worship service for believers. At this service they can partake in praise and worship, prayers and the sacrament of communion.

* Step five is to join a small group. They believe that a small group is one of the best places to experience life change and share your spiritual journey with others.

* Then they are encouraged to discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts.

* The final step is to steward your resources in a God-honoring way.

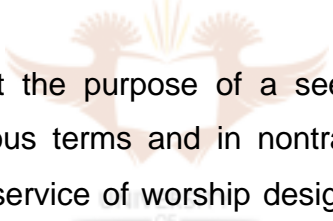
2.2.4. Purpose of A Seeker (Driven and Sensitive) Church Service.

According to Dobson (1993:27) the purpose of a seeker service is to win the right to be heard, by addressing the issues of today, in order to reach the people in their community for Christ. Through a non-conventional Saturday evening service, they will provide a comfortable atmosphere of love and acceptance for attendees, which will encourage them to seek Christ. This service will be a pre-evangelistic outreach and will provide an opportunity to share Christ and to teach the basic truths of Scripture.

They recognize that there is no single, exclusive correct way to share Jesus Christ. Dobson(1993:60) declared "To win as many as possible demands flexibility, adjustment and change" Warren (1995:156) also declares that he refuses to debate which method of evangelism works best, because he believes that it depends on the circumstances and whom you are trying to reach. Warren (1995:173) claims that even a casual reading of the New Testament would show that the Gospel spread primarily through

relationships. He holds that the most effective evangelistic strategy is to first try to reach those with whom you already have something in common.

Warren (1995:181) argues that, in the parable of the Sower, Jesus explained that there are hard hearts, shallow hearts, distracted hearts, and receptive hearts. For evangelism to have maximum effectiveness, we need to plant our seed in the good soil, the soil that produces a hundredfold harvest. No farmer in his right mind would waste seed on infertile ground that won't produce a crop. In the same way, careless, unplanned broadcasting of the gospel is poor stewardship. Hybels maintains that Seeker-sensitivity impacts on numerous aspects of not only the seeker service, but on the whole strategy of "doing Church". Almost everything is viewed from the perspective of seekers in the community and then they design the service accordingly. They are creating opportunities for spiritual seekers to "come to a safe place to hear the dangerous, life-changing and eternity-altering message of Christ" (1995:161).



Basden (1999:89) explains that the purpose of a seeker service is to present and explain the gospel in nonreligious terms and in nontraditional way to unbelievers. A seeker-driven service is not a service of worship designed for Christians. Seekers are given the best time to meet (Sunday morning), their own music to hear (in contemporary style) and answers to their deepest questions (felt needs). The leaders of Willow do not believe it is possible to minister optimally, to both seekers and believers, within the confines of one service. Seekers have a need to hear and receive the gospel message in an atmosphere of anonymity. Believers, on the other hand, need to regularly participate in worship as a body and to receive biblical teaching that enables them to more fully live their lives as believers.

In honoring the needs of both groups, Willow Creek has chosen to minister to each group through separate services. The midweek New Community services are designed for the believer. The seeker services, designed to reach people seeking to know God, are held on the weekends. One service is held on Saturday evenings, and the other one on Sunday mornings - which used to be prime time for believers. They believe that this

is when seekers are most likely to visit a Church.

Because the term “seeker” incorporates a wide range of individuals, Willow Creek’s leaders recognized early on that in order to focus their energies, they needed to define whom it was they were trying to reach. Gender, age, education, economic status, geography and other variables were all taken into consideration as they developed their target audience. What emerged was a profile of the person that the services would be designed to reach.

Willow then duly decided to target the professional, college-educated student between the ages of 25 and 50. This seeker is considered to be difficult to reach with the gospel message and also very demanding in his/her expectations of the Church and decided to call him “Unchurched Harry” (WCA Newsletter-Sept/Oct '99).

2.2.5. Elements of the Seeker-driven Service.

[I need to explain that some of the data quoted in this chapter (and in the others) were found in workshop documents of the WCA and on their Internet Address in SA (Louisw@icon.co.za 23-10-2000) on creating a seeker-sensitive service; both of which were published without revealing the date or the author of the publications. I assume that either Hybels himself, or his wife, or some leader distributed it freely for all to read without being too concerned for copyright regulations].

The elements that make up a seeker service, or impacts on it, are numerous. These items are valid for both seeker-driven and -sensitive Churches and can be discussed in three categories. Facilities, liturgy and general items that do not fit in either of the abovementioned categories but definitely impacts the seeker service.

2.2.5.1. Facilities.

Absolutely everything in the service and at the Church complex is scrutinized and

adapted to impress seekers. The following aspects make a major impact in achieving this end:

* **First impressions.** Special effort is made to impress and attract visitors. Willow's leaders insist that first impressions are crucial and love saying that "We will never get the chance to make a first impression again" (WCA Newsletter-Sept/Oct '99). They claim that "Unchurched Harry" is the primary target of the unchurched philosophy. He may not be attending Church for many reasons. One of the approaches to reaching Harry is "to keep him in his environment and not to cause any negative reaction to the concept of going to Church. That explains why the Willow Creek campus is designed to simulate his work environment. The entrance or lobby receives major attention; for instance, the lobby at Willow Creek is large and open and doesn't trigger the response of going into a Church. This allows for an open mind-set for the ministry that will occur in the auditorium. Defects in a building, like for instance the frayed carpet, faded paint, burnt out light bulbs, etc. are soon overlooked by pastor and members alike, but visitors (seekers) will notice details. Shawchuck & Heuser (1996:67) also comments on the picture that is presented to a first-time visitor as she looks at your Church sign, lawn, the exterior of the buildings and contend that it is already feeding her some highly important subliminal messages about what to expect when once inside. This underlines the necessity for clean, safe nurseries and clean rest rooms. Furthermore, the ushers may have a very positive impact on the seeker's perception of Willow Creek and Christ. The usher may well be the first person that will have verbal and eye-to-eye contact with the attenders. Their role, therefore is crucial in impressing seekers who may be frustrated from fighting traffic or from walking from the back of the parking lot. A positive, friendly smiling face can make the difference at this point.

* **Parking.** The parking attendant shows seekers to privileged parking closest to the building, which is a refreshing contrast to some Churches where the pastors or office-bearers enjoy reserved parking, next to the entrance of the Church.

* **Greeters.** Greeters and ushers are selected who match their target audience. For

instance, when they intend to attract youth, they train and deploy teenagers as greeters.

* **Information tables.** Information tables are set up at the entrance and directional signs are placed everywhere.

* **Architectural Design of the Campus.** Both Willow Creek and Saddleback's facilities are well designed and modern and definitely not looking like the "sanctuaries" we associate with a Church. They were specifically designed to make unbelievers feel welcome and comfortable. Stafford (1998:81) aptly remarks that the last thought occurring to builders of medieval cathedrals was whether "unbelievers" would feel comfortable. Yet that is the first thought behind many new Churches. Accommodating seekers on campus entails "secular" things like gymnasiums, sports facilities, restaurants and even a living room, where people could connect, linger, relax and be part of the family (Hybels1995:05-125).

Stafford (1998:82) also notes that first George Whitefield, then John Wesley, took preaching out of the Churches because they wanted to reach the saved where they were - in the coalfields. What is happening presently, is caused by the same concern for the future of seekers as these men of God had. Only now is the Church being turned into a place where seekers feel comfortable! This too troubles some Church leaders, just as Wesley caused a stir in his time. Warren is convinced that the shape of your building will shape your service (1995:264). He also believes that we should brighten up the environment through attractive and more efficient architectural design of the buildings, for it seems to be user friendly and attractive to seekers. Todd Hunter(Stafford 1998:83), national director of the Vineyard Churches told Stafford that their philosophy regarding buildings is pragmatic and functional. They would often say that people aren't afraid of a junior high school gym. It doesn't bear the connotation, "to darken the door of a Church". In fact, when they decided to build a worship center, Saddleback deliberately chose an architectural firm that had never designed a Church. They wanted to avoid creating an environment that might put off newcomers (Stafford 1998:76).

Schuller (1986:66) also believes that beauty excites and attracts people. Stafford (1998:82) remarks that beauty belongs to God and when we build in His name we want to make something beautiful. I think we can agree that cleanliness is more attractive than filth. Personally, I'd rather fill my car up with petrol at a filling station that is neat, well kept with lots of paving and flowers, than at a dilapidated, untidy one. It seems understandable then that an immaculate campus will attract and impress seekers and believers alike.

* **The Use of Outside Spaces.** Saddleback Campus utilizes open, airy spaces with a main patio, a broad rectangle of concrete with palm trees and benches. Another outdoor patio has the baptistry as its focal point, which is an attractive, below ground fountain, with steps leading into a shallow splashing pool. The fountain and pool looks nonreligious, but those who attend Saddleback would soon experience that frequent baptisms are performed there after services. The design allows the pool to be filled to a depth suitable for immersions, and the broad steps then give easy access into the water. Stafford comments further on the design. "The reasoning behind the design of the campus is that it should almost reach out to seekers, saying: We are people just like you, and you can feel comfortable with us, but pay attention, because we have a unique purpose" (1998:76). In the whole article he contrasts a traditional Church building with Saddleback, concluding that the latter is not a somber sanctuary, but a light and airy, simple and ordinary place designed for ordinary people. He believes that people need a clear message from outside spaces that they are welcome, will feel comfortable and can find friends if they want them (1998:77).

Much thought goes into the question of how people arrive and depart, including freeway access, providing ample parking, attractive patios and coffee bars for people who want to linger and mingle.

* **An attractive atmosphere.** An attractive atmosphere is created through comfortable seating, contemporary music and proper lighting in the building. Stafford (1998:78) also includes these characteristics of modern, seeker Churches in his contrast between a

traditional Church and Saddleback. He comments on the importance of the efficient use of light, saying that natural or artificial light is vital for effective communication. Davis (1996:145) agrees fully on the significance of effective light and sound in a Church building.

Sensitivity for seekers impacts on most, if not all, aspects of dynamic communication and aesthetics of a Church. Aspects like Climate control, the use of vegetation for decoration, artificial fountains, rock gardens with tree ferns, etc. He also mentions the preference for semicircular theatre seating, where each worshipper has his own space. In some cultures like Africa for instance, personal space might not be such an important issue. Another item that receives attention are registration cards (everyone, seekers and believes alike, have to fill out the registration card. When everyone registers, visitors aren't singled out). Everyone also wears a nametag.

* **Refreshments.** Refreshments are offered free of charge after the service. It seems there is something about eating together. Getz(1984:96-102) includes "corporate eating" in a chapter on vital New Testament experiences, with corporate prayer, -singing, and – giving.



2.2.5.2. Liturgy.

Dobson (1993:41-51) lists the liturgical elements of a Seeker Service. He mentions announcements and offering, music, drama, testimonies, scripture reading, talk or sermon, questions and answers and a closing prayer. A more comprehensive list of items that make up the seeker service would include the following:

* **A Friendly welcome.** A friendly, non-threatening public welcome that relaxes people are offered. Seekers are not identified or welcomed by name, but enjoys anonymity, and are treated as important guests.

* **Announcements via a Printed Bulletin.** A simple order of service is provided in a

printed Bulletin, for the unchurched supposedly do not know what to expect when they visit a Church. A printed order of service alleviates their anxiety, and tells them that there are no nasty surprises. In the printed bulletin the service should also be described in non-technical religious terms. The leaders and pastor steers clear away from terminology, that a seeker might find unclear. They also include miscellaneous explanatory notes in the bulletin. Internal church announcements though are kept to the bare minimum. Only events that is applicable for everyone is being announced. Members are trained to read the weekend bulletin. Appeals for help, like the announcements for vacant posts, shortages in the budget are never made from the pulpit. They believe that personal recruitment works better in any case.

* **Cutting-edge Communication Methods.** Because of seekers' exposure to seminars, work sessions and the like in the secular world where overhead-projectors, whiteboards, flipcharts, data projectors (video clips and D V D) are utilized for the training of their employees, the same are introduced in seeker services. No more linear preaching, and no more bored spectators. Cutting-edge communication methods are employed: contemporary Christian music, drama, multimedia, video and dance. State of the art technologies are used with great effect.

To fulfill its mission, the programming team also uses a variety of artistic disciplines. These include drama, music, video, occasional dance and the technical skills of production, including lighting and sound. Although the order of service during the first thirty minutes varies from week to week, the basic parts are similar each week and they are relevant to the sermon message. Nearly every weekend service includes a sketch performed by the drama team. The purpose of using drama is not to provide answers and a tidy resolution of issues, but rather to introduce a topic and to provide a point of identification for the audience. These humorous or dramatic sketches always deal sensitively with current issues and are thematically relevant to the scheduled message. Musical selections are performed by the vocal team, orchestra, or band.

Seekers are usually invited to participate in one chorus at the beginning of the service.

The message is being reinforced in the minds of the seekers through a play, mime or a skit (WCA bulletin:8).

* **Music.** Taped music is played whenever people enter the facility - they claim that visitors are scared of silence. The style of music for Dobson's "Saturday Night" seeker service is late sixties and early seventies rock (1993:42). One of the reasons being, that seekers would immediately recognize that it is not a traditional religious service.

* **The Ministry of the Word.** The sermon message is the final component of the seeker service - the point to which every other part of the service leads. To demonstrate that Scripture is relevant to contemporary society and underscore the point being made in the sermon that will follow, a member of the ministry staff is usually assigned to read or quote scripture, scriptural commentary, a prayer, or a combination of these. This is the point in the service when a biblical perspective on the theme is introduced. Often, a personal story or current event is related, followed by a short quote from the Bible and some brief comments (WCA bulletin:6). Messages are most often topical, bringing a Biblical perspective to bear on whatever relevant, human issue they want to address. The messages also clearly and obviously introduce Christianity to seekers and seekers to Christ. Relevant topics are presented. Topics include how to improve your marriage, setting of priorities, managing finances, parenting, their individual quest for fulfillment and their sexuality are discussed to help them understand that Christianity isn't just true for eternities' sake, but that it can also work in their lives on earth. The preaching of the Word is packaged in ordinary, easily understandable, everyday language. Warren (1995:229-231) contends that people need fewer "ought-to" sermons and more "how-to" sermons. To the unchurched, dull preaching is unforgivable and that "truth poorly delivered is truth ignored". He feels that it is a sin to bore people with the Bible and believes in utilizing positive impulses to effect life-change, instead of exerting guilt or fear to motivate. Even the pulpit in a seeker service is just a lectern and access to the chancel or platform is usually by broad stairs, making little separation from the congregation (Stafford 1998:77).

* **The offering.** Another innovative idea concerns the offering. Prior to collecting an offering from the congregation at a seeker service, the speaker explicitly states that seekers are guests and as guests, they are not expected to participate in this part of the service. This disclaimer is designed to put seekers at ease and to reinforce the fact that they are valued at the Church apart from any financial contribution they might offer. The offering is for “those who call Willow Creek home and who have benefited from its ministry” (WCA Bulletin). (Any contribution that a seeker wishes to make despite this announcement will of course be received with thanks).

2.2.5.3. General items.

* **Comprehensive planning.** Comprehensive planning is essential for the design of a seeker service. It takes a lot of hard work from numerous committed people to design and execute a seeker service. A seeker service is planned with a specific target in mind and the question, “Who are we trying to reach” should be asked continuously. They believe that it should be made as easy as possible for seekers to attend, by providing, amongst other things, multiple service times, surplus parking and children’s Sunday school running simultaneously with the service. They also include a map to the Church on all advertising.

The process of creating a specific seeker service begins at least four weeks in advance, when the pastor provides information about the message to the programming director. A producer for that service is assigned to lead the brainstorming process. This process commences with a meeting of the brainstorming team. This team consists of a person from the Church’s music ministry, a person from the drama ministry, the producer, the programming director and a few other creative consultants. Subsequent to this meeting, vocal selections and musical arrangements are made. Vocal and musical rehearsals commence. More than a week before the service, the programming team hears the first draft of the drama script. One week before its performance, the script is given to the drama team, which puts the final stamp of approval on the script. On the Friday before the weekend services, a final production meeting is held. At Willow Creek, the

programming director, technical producer, music director and the drama director attend this meeting. Finally, on the Saturday of each weekend seeker service, the first of many technical rehearsals is held with the orchestra and vocal team, along with lighting, sound and staging. The 65-70 minute seeker service is divided roughly in half. The programming team is responsible for the first 30 minutes, while the pastor prepares a message for the final 30 minutes. Willow declares their goal is "To build a cohesive, thematic experience that leads people into considering God and His Word" (WCA Document 1999:4).

* **Continual Evaluation and Improvement.** Another essential part of the seeker service is continuous evaluation for they maintain that evaluation is a key to excellence. They suggest that one should keep on asking how one could do it better. Every single seeker service is carefully evaluated and analyzed. At this meeting every member of the team can be brutally frank about anything that might have offended the seekers.

* **Seeker small groups.** The title of a WCA Newsletter (July/August '99 WCA News) reads "Seeker Small Groups: A safe place to ask tough questions". Garry Poole, director of Willow Creek Community Church's Evangelism Ministry believes that small groups are a key component in introducing Christ to unchurched people. He mentions that the idea for seeker small groups came to him by accident. While at university, he started a cell group in his dormitory and when a lot of seekers showed up, he knew he had to do something different to win them for Christ. In this way he combined small groups and evangelism, both of which are his passions. "The key for the success of seeker small groups is for the leader to build bridges of trust. Leaders need to earn the right to invite people into their groups".

The question comes to mind how this differs from other forms of evangelistic outreach. Poole remarks that a seeker small group is a safe place for ongoing dialogue, not one-way communication and therefore a safe place to ask tough questions. The idea is to purposefully and patiently draw seekers out and let them discover the spiritual truths in the Bible. Furthermore, there are seeker groups focusing on specific niches at Willow

Creek: parent groups, Jewish-, apologetics-, hairdresser-, neighborhood-, office-, and more. But whatever the niche, the natural point of discussion is questions about faith. Seeker small groups are like an appointment to talk about Christianity. Most of the time, seekers become Christians during a one-on-one time with the leader. That happens for a couple of reasons: first, it is sometimes difficult to make a commitment like that in a group setting; and second, the relationship with the leader has been built on trust.

Seeker groups serve a two-fold purpose in a Church, for they provide next steps for people coming to Church who haven't yet made a decision for Christ and they provide an entry point for people not yet coming to a seeker service. Seeker small groups are one of the most transferable concepts for evangelism. No matter what kind of Church you have, seeker groups can be implemented without changing the service format of the Church.

What does the future hold for seeker small groups? Poole says that he'd love to see seeker groups started in all varieties of Churches: traditional, seeker-sensitive, and seeker-driven Churches.

* **Service Ministries.** One of WCA's bulletins also describes the so called "Service ministries", which contributes to the Church's mission of turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ through a balanced serving ministry. Service, in this context, includes ushering, greeting, counting attendance, serving Holy Communion in the believers' service, and taking up the offering. As front-door people (referring to the ushers and greeters), the Service Ministry volunteers strive to be sensitive to seekers' needs. This includes not asking people if it is their first time and by explaining the reasons behind procedures. For example, they explain why certain sections are closed or why crying babies must be taken to parents' rooms or the atrium. At Willow Creek, the ushers also play a key role in finding seats for latecomers and keeping distractions to a minimum during services. Latecomers are allowed to enter the main floor only between certain sections of the service and visiting media or anyone else trying to use flash photography are watched closely to make sure they don't interrupt the service.

* **New Community.** A seeker service also creates the need for another kind of service; a service that would cater for the spiritual growth of the members of the assembly. This ministry called New Community included marriage and family workshops, leadership training classes, doctrine and theology classes and more. It was started in January 1976, when the need was identified (Hybels 1995:64). During 1992 the New Community Institute was launched, to provide a broader range of teaching options for the new believers at the midweek services. A cell-group system was also introduced and by December 1994 there were 7500 people in 1000 small groups. Willow claims that although the seeker-driven service really focuses on turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ, once they become followers of Christ, they too receive pastoral care and their spiritual gifts and ministries are developed. As groups become more pervasive throughout the entire structure of the Church, they provide an intimate setting for various kinds of training. It seems that Willow also embrace the Cell Church model but accentuates sensitivity to seekers in the dedicated seeker services.

* **Special Events.** Willow have also discovered that many people who wouldn't normally visit a Church will be open to attend a one-time event. Many visitors return the next Sunday and join Willow. Other special events include women's luncheons and men's breakfasts, featuring special guests who ministers to the special needs of seekers. Some other Churches sponsor family picnics, marathons, bike trips, parenting seminars, gym nights and kids' fairs to provide entry points for seekers.

2.3. THE SEEKER-SENSITIVE SERVICE (SADDLEBACK VALLEY SYNOPSIS).

2.3.1. Introduction.

Dr. Rick Warren is the founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, recognized as the fastest-growing Baptist Church in the history of America. Founded just 15 years ago in the beautiful Saddleback Valley in Orange County, Southern California, Saddleback averages more than 10,000 worshippers each week at

their 74-acre campus.

Having just graduated from Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Warren, his wife, and their 4-month-old baby, moved to Saddleback Valley with no money, no personal contacts, no Church building, no members and no home. Their first member ended up being the Realtor who helped them find a condo rent-free for the first month. Warren's story of the research and prayer that led him to select Saddleback Valley is inspiring. After having studied the hundred largest Churches in America while in the seminary, he concluded that large, healthy Churches are generally led by pastors who've been there a long time. Upon graduating from the seminary, he asked God to help him select a location where he could invest the rest of his life. Warren felt God was calling him to plant a Church in the Saddleback Valley, the fastest growing county in the United States during the 70's. Since then, Saddleback has planted 26 other "purpose-driven Churches." He presented an open letter (a seeker-sensitive letter), to the community, in an attempt to lure them into the Church. In formulating his letter, he confirms that he tried to answer some rhetoric questions: "What would I say if I had one chance to speak to all of the unchurched of this community? How can I say it in a way that disarms their prejudices and objections to attending Church?" (1995:41). He contemplated a special kind of service that would attract seekers, as well as what style of worship would be the best witness to unbelievers. Every element of the service was planned and even a dress rehearsal was held for his first service (Warren 1995:42). Incredibly, 205 people turned up, of which no more than 12 were believers.

Warren (1995:251-257) discusses the design of a seeker-sensitive service in detail in chapter 14 of his book. He maintains that they are intent on "turning seekers into saints, turning consumers into contributors, turn members into ministers and to turn an audience into an army" (Warren 1995:46). Warren (1995 :51, 52) contends that people are attracted to Churches with quality worship, preaching, ministry, and fellowship. He also states that quality attracts quantity and that in the Church's case, as long as there are lost people in the world we *must* care about quantity. as well as quality He argues that people feel more anxious in a formal setting than they do in an informal setting

(1995:273), therefore they dress casually at Saddleback Valley and don't use reverential titles for the pastors. He defends their informal approach by quoting a recent survey by GQ magazine, which indicated that only about 25 percent of American men owned a suit. Warren adds that unbelievers have hang-ups about Churches asking them for money, or who use guilt or fear to motivate people and who pressurize visitors to stand up and introduce themselves (1995:198).

2.3.2. The Theological Basis for A Seeker-Sensitive Service.

Warren (1995:239-249) relates twelve deeply held convictions as his theological and practical reasons behind the seeker-sensitive service.

* Only believers are able to truly worship God, for worship is expressing our love to God for who He is, what He's said and what He's doing. Unbelievers have no relationship with God and can simply not worship Him.

* You don't need a building to worship God." He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't live in man-made temples" (Acts 17:24). Christ also said "Where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20).

* There is no correct "style" of worship. He feels that Jesus only gave two requirements for legitimate worship: "For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Our preferred style of worship says more about your cultural background than your theology (Warren 1995:248).

* Unbelievers can observe believers engaged in worship. They can see the joy and notice how worship encourages, strengthens and changes us. It is even possible for them to sense when God is "supernaturally moving" in a service, although they probably won't be able to explain it.

* Worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God's presence is felt and the message is understandable. Warren claims that more people are won to Christ by feeling God's presence, than all our apologetic arguments combined. It is the sense of God's presence that melts hearts and explodes mental barriers (1995:241). "In genuine worship God's presence is felt, God's pardon is offered, God's purposes are revealed and God's power is displayed. That sounds to me like an ideal context for evangelism...it creates the desire in unbelievers to know God too" (1995:242).

* God expects us to be sensitive to the fears, hang-ups and needs of unbelievers when they are present in our worship services. In 1 Cor.14:23 Paul taught a principle that we must be willing to adjust our worship practices when unbelievers are present. "Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting and hear everyone talking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy." Being sensitive in our worship is a biblical command. "Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity" (Colossians 4:5).

* A worship service does not have to be shallow to be seeker-sensitive. The message does not have to be compromised, just understandable. Making a service "comfortable" for the unchurched doesn't mean changing your theology, it means changing the environment of the service. It does not limit what you say, but it does effect how you say it. The needs of believers and unbelievers often overlap. Seeker-sensitive services focus on needs common to both believers and unbelievers, like for instance what God is really like, the purpose of life, how and why to forgive others, etc.

* It is best to specialize your services according to their purpose. Most Churches try to evangelize the lost and edify believers in the same service. At Saddleback, seeker services are held on Saturday night and Sunday morning and the service for believers is on Wednesday evening. It is important to note that evangelistic services are nothing new; many Churches held these every Sunday evening for decades. The idea of using the Sunday morning slot is a new innovation, after a survey pointed out that this is the most likely time that a seeker would consider visiting a Church.

* A service geared toward seekers is meant to supplement personal evangelism, not replace it. People generally find it easier to decide for Christ when there are multiple relationships supporting that decision. The seeker service just enhances the personal witness of members.

* There is no standard way to design a seeker service. Warren insists that there are only three non-negotiable elements of a seeker service; treat unbelievers with love and respect, relate the service to their needs and share the message in a practical, understandable manner. All other elements, like the style of music, drama, not wearing a robe or not using a pulpit are secondary issues that shouldn't get hung up on. What really attract large numbers of unchurched to a Church, is changed lives. New approaches and technologies are only evangelistic tools. You don't have to use drama or multimedia to reach unbelievers, these items might just make it easier to reach them.

* It takes unselfish, mature believers to offer a seeker-sensitive service. In every Church there is constant tension between "service" and "serve-us." Most Churches end up tipping the scales towards meeting members' needs because the members pay the bills. Offering a seeker service means intentionally tipping the scales in the opposite direction, towards unbelievers. It requires members who are willing to sacrifice their own preferences, traditions and comfort in order to create a safe environment for unbelievers to be exposed to the Gospel.

2.3.3. Differences Between the Seeker-Sensitive and the Seeker-Driven Service.

The difference between Willow's seeker-driven service, where every aspect of the service focuses on communicating the gospel to lost people, and Saddleback's seeker-sensitive service lies in the latter's focus to lead seekers and believers to worship (Basden1999:89).

Basden further identifies four worship styles: Liturgical, traditional, revivalist, praise and worship and seeker-service. He views the difference between seeker-sensitive and seeker-driven as follows: “Warren, however does not practice a true seeker service as Hybels does. Saddleback’s approach to worship is a creative, California-style blend of the seeker-service and the praise and worship style of worship. This reveals the difference between the Willow seeker-driven service, where every aspect of the service focuses on communicating the gospel to lost people, and Saddleback’s seeker-sensitive service, in which the goal is to lead Christians to worship God without the ‘cultural baggage’ of traditional language and forms, whilst seekers are present”.

There are three main differences:

2.3.3.1. Worship.

The seeker-sensitive fraternity holds one of two positions on worship in a seeker service, according to Brauer (1998:11). “Practitioners of the seeker service consciously choose music that the unchurched are comfortable with and they remove patterns of behavior that make unchurched people feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. This involves presenting quality music (usually rock), employing an excellent sound system to amplify the music with a well-trained technician to run it, limiting or eliminating participation by the audience in the singing. Providing music that will cover times of silence or prayer and using singers and musicians in the band who are the same age as the target group. Music is not seen as a servant of the words (proclamation, prayer, praise), but as a servant of expanding the users of a faith system by getting and keeping the attention of the seeker. Music is more about culture than content. It does not intend to proclaim the Word of God or to lift praise or prayer. It is just one more tool for drawing new people toward a belief system”. On the one hand the seeker-driven fraternity believe that seekers cannot worship and should not be expected to participate in the singing. The seeker-sensitive promoters on the other hand, are convinced that seekers should be encouraged to worship together with the believers and so be exposed to the presence of God, which will manifest when real worship occurs. Classical Pentecostals believe that

Psalm 22:3 implies that the Lord dwells amongst the praises of His people. They believe that seekers will not be offended by the revealed presence of the Lord in a worship situation but rather be drawn closer to God.

Regardless of this distinction, the music in a seeker service, every chorus and item, is specifically chosen and rehearsed to impress a certain theme on the seeker's mind and spirit. Contemporary praise and worship are preferred over traditional religious music and choirs.

Morgenthaler (1997:479). objects that a seeker service is the start of a non-worship epidemic. The theory is that seekers don't sing anywhere in public and resists having words put in their mouth and would therefore prefer to be entertained. Luecke remarks that "What he (the seeker) doesn't get, is a chance to see people like himself engaging in a worship relationship with God". The power of such a worship experience can hardly be overestimated.

Morgenthaler (1995:31) strongly believes that the time has come to make technique the servant of spirit and truth (John.4:23,24). She states that when we engage believers in heartfelt, active response to a living God, our worship will be genuinely attractive to the seeker who is hungering to see what a supernatural relationship with God is like.

Luecke(1997:479).summarizes deftly: "...many Churches settle for being 'seeker sensitive' or 'seeker friendly' by arranging the service to be more accommodating to the unchurched, but still retaining the focus of a worship service. He believes that helping Churches be sensitive in this fashion is Willow Creek's lasting contribution".

2.3.3.2. Altar Call.

In some Churches, the sermon is followed by a call to the audience to respond by raising a hand, standing to their feet, walking to the front, or going to a separate prayer room for counseling and prayer. The difference in the approach to an altar call between

the seeker-driven and the seeker-sensitive service is: In the seeker-driven service there is no invitation to respond publicly after the sermon message (Dobson 1993:26). The sermon is closed with a prayer, with a word of encouragement to the seeker to respond privately in his pew. The seeker is invited though to remain behind and speak privately to counselors after Church, or whenever he/she feels the need. On the other hand, in a seeker-sensitive service an appeal is made to seekers to respond to the gospel message, but they are not coerced or embarrassed in any way by this low-key invitation. They can also respond at a later stage if they so wish.

Exponents of both seeker-driven and -sensitive services acknowledge the journey of a seeker and they relate that some current members were unbelieving seekers for months, some even for years, before making a decision for Christ.

2.3.3.3. The Lord's Supper.

Holy Communion is excluded from the seeker service, because it is obviously intended for believers only. Larson (1995:72) expresses the unique challenge that seeker Churches have. "They must tell seekers that the Lord's Supper is only for those who know Christ. Yet seekers need not be alienated. They can be invited to understand the symbolism and to seek God for themselves during the time of communion. In this way the Lord's Supper becomes an opportunity for evangelism rather than alienation".

Is the seeker service the way of the future? David Luecke discusses this question in his review of Gregory A Pritchard's book - *Willow Creek Seeker Services : Evaluating a new way of doing Church*. Pritchard poses the major question regarding the Willow Creek phenomenon. "Is this pragmatic, consumer-oriented approach to the unchurched the way of the future for Churches in Northern America?" Luecke(1997:479) disagrees, but suspects that congregations in the 21st century will undoubtedly be more seeker-friendly.

In this chapter I attempted to portray most aspects of a seeker service and which factors

are major role players in this kind of service. It seems clear that to create and execute a seeker service in a local Church is a huge undertaking indeed. In chapter three I will proceed to the critical evaluation of the seeker service. I will also consider and evaluate the various objections to the seeker service and ascertain if Pritchard's question can be answered clearly.



CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE SEEKER SERVICE.

3.1. INTRODUCTION.

Many Churches worldwide employ a seeker service as a pre-evangelistic tool, which becomes evident when one learns of seeker services all over the world. Geysers (2000:56) lists a total of 5282 Assemblies in the USA, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, England, New Zealand and in South Africa, who are linked to the Willow Creek Association. I have also found reference to a Seeker Church in Russia (Nickles 1998:58).

Despite this tremendous worldwide trend, opposing voices have emerged and some are quite blunt. In this chapter we will evaluate some documented criticism, objections, disapproval and even vehement opposition to the seeker service.

“Should we go with the Church growth flow?” is a question raised by Stephen Spence (1998:47-51) in an article from The Christian News. Kenneson and Street (1997:35) warns that the market driven seeker Church is selling out the Church. They believe that adopting a marketing orientation and seeker service runs the risk of transforming the Church into a kind of community God never intended it to be.

Spence (1998:47-51) identifies two main streams in the Church growth movement, the first being the phenomenon of the Mega-Church and secondly the Seeker-sensitive service. He continues to relate Willow's history, the characteristics of a seeker service and quotes some support for the seeker service. He concludes with hinting that the Church growth stream (including the seeker sensitive stream) is heading over the falls and should be avoided.

3.2. OBJECTIONS TO THE SEEKER SERVICE.

3.2.1. The Primary Concern of Seeker Services is to Attract and Satisfy More Customers, Instead of Seeking and Glorifying God (Kenneson and Street 1997:66).

Kenneson and Street (1997:73) allege that seeker Churches, by catering to the whims of discriminating consumers, encourage their constituents to expect the Church to function as another service agency whose purpose is to court them by providing a smorgasbord of programs and services. In such cases, 'ministry' and 'service' underwrite a kingdom other than God's kingdom.

When one considers the following four modern concepts, seeker-services appear to dance to the tune of:

* Absolute relativism, where everything is absolutely relative, or relatively absolute. Situation ethics is applied at the cost of Biblical Ethics.

* Hedonism, which advocates "If it feels good, do it! Just do it!"

* Practical pragmatism, which ignores timeless theological and Biblical truth and believes that as long as it works, it is acceptable behavior.

* Tolerant pluralism, God, Allah, the Buddha, etc. They stretch religious tolerance beyond the limits. Isn't this the spirit of Anti-Christ?

In an informal presentation to chaplains during the summer of 1998 Dr. Rex Mathie expounded the abovementioned concepts and pointed out two important influences in the world that seriously impacts the Church.

* **Existentialism**, which promulgates the world view that life's meaning and values are

found in one's own existence, or in one's own experience. He thinks and acts from himself, and lives therefore completely for self. My feelings, my desires, my needs must be met. All that counts is what do I think and feel.

* **Secularism**, which does not fall into the scope of the seeker-service.

Mathie proclaimed that the pretended autonomy of man must be exposed and that the Church should challenge this world-view and declare the sovereignty of God in every area of life.

With this in mind, we must consider the following questions. Is Kenneson and Street correct in their conclusion that a seeker service is consumer-oriented and not sensitive to God? Is God sensitive to seekers? Was the Lord Jesus seeker-sensitive? Is the Holy Spirit seeker-sensitive?

* **Seeker-sensitive or Holy Spirit Sensitive?**

Some scholars that I have spoken to about the seeker service, feel that seeker sensitivity is a humanistic approach, trying to please and appease man. They hold that the question to be answered is not what can we do to attract seekers, or please them, but rather how can we please God and claim that our quest should be to be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit than to seekers.

Warren (1995:40) agrees that it is not the Church's task to give people whatever they want or even need, but that the fastest way to build a bridge to the unchurched is "to express interest in them and show you understand the problems they are facing". Felt needs, whether real or imaginary, are a starting point for expressing love to people.

To the question, is God the Father sensitive to seekers? The answer is simply found in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life". Because God loved seekers so

much, he sacrificed his Beloved. He does not want a single soul to perish and all to come to repentance.

Was Jesus seeker sensitive?

When we consider the ministry of Jesus Christ, how did He interact with seekers? We find abundant evidence that Christ spent a lot of His time in the presence of seekers, tax-collectors, prostitutes and Samaritans.

Luke 15:1-7. Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such despicable people-even eating with them! So Jesus used this illustration: “If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it? And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. When you arrived, you would call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found. In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!”

Mark 2:15-17. That night Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. (There were many people of this kind among the crowds that followed Jesus). But when some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with people like that, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with such scum?” When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.”

Luke 7:31-34. “How shall I describe this generation?” Jesus asked. “With what will I compare them? They are like a group of children playing a game in the public

square. They complain to their friends, 'We played wedding songs, and you weren't happy, so we played funeral songs, but you weren't sad.' For John the Baptist didn't drink wine and he often fasted, and you say, 'He's demon possessed.' And I, the Son of Man, feast and drink, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of the worst sort of sinners!'

Warren quotes these words of Jesus and mentions that it enables them to stay true to the original focus of their Church: to bring the unchurched, irreligious people of their community to Christ (1995:39). Warren maintains that Jesus' ministry was sinner-sensitive; He walked among the people, spoke their language, observed their customs, sang their songs, and used their current events to capture attention when he taught (1995:237). On the other hand, he was fearless in confronting and condemning the hypocrisy of the self-righteous Pharisees. Jesus said in John 12:49 "I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me gave me his own instructions as to what I should say". Warren reckons that we should notice that both the content and the delivery style of Jesus' teaching were directed by the Father (1995:223). Whenever Jesus encountered a person he'd begin with their hurts, needs and interests (1995:197). Warren points out that Jesus did three things with the crowds. He loved them: Mat.9:36, He met their needs: Mat.15:30; Luk. 6:17,18; John. 6:2 and He taught them in interesting and practical ways: Mat.13:34; Mark.10:1; 12:37. Warren concludes that the same three ingredients will attract crowds today.

Although it might be argued that God is seeker-sensitive in the degree that He sent His Son to seek and save the lost, one should always keep the threat of Absolute Relativism, Hedonism, Practical Pragmatism, Tolerant Pluralism and Existentialism in mind when one considers seeker services. Surely we should seek to please the Lord more than mere men.

A final remark on Kenneson and Street's criticism: They definitely have a valid argument against sensitivity to seekers at the expense of sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, for Church services is supposed to be about God and His glory and not about man and his needs.

Seekers' needs can never be the central concern in any meeting of the people of God, although a sensitivity about the way the gospel is presented to them is vital to win them for Christ.

3.2.2. The Gospel is being Compromised in A Seeker Service.

The second objection comprises of the notion that the proponents of seeker services desire to minimize the offense of the gospel, in tailoring their message to cater to the wants and interests of the unregenerate. German traditionalists express concern that a watered down gospel is being marketed and that Hybels and Warren are people - pleasers who are more concerned about modern man's desires and needs. They should instead be fearlessly preaching the Gospel (Nyberg 1995:24). Maudlin & Gilbreath (1994:21-25) voices the same concern: "Bill Hybels, senior pastor, has caught the ire of Christian leaders who question the legitimacy of the seeker-sensitive, mega-Church movement. The overarching concern is that such Churches compromise the gospel, tailoring their messages to non-Christians; that the use of polished entertainment, feel-good sermons, and marketing techniques subtly alters the gospel". It also entails that the Gospel message is being compromised. Spence (1998:47-51) elaborates that supporters of the seeker concept fail to recognize the "offensive" nature of the Gospel to the unsaved. He then quotes the words of the apostle Paul from 1 Cor. 1:18, 23,24, where Paul advises Timothy to "preach the Word" unashamedly, even as he faced a generation who wanted their ears tickled. He again quotes Paul in Romans 1:16. "For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes-Jews first and also Gentiles". His interpretation of both quotations and it's application to the seeker concept is that "The Gospel, not ministering to felt needs, is the right approach to sinners". Willow's elders declare that they are creating a safe place for seekers to hear a dangerous message (WCA Bulletin).

Warren (1995:79,80) clarifies his position on the allegation that he compromises the gospel, by expressing his concern for a Church where seekers are in the driver's seat. "While we must be sensitive to the needs, hurts and interests of seekers and while it is

wise to design evangelistic services that target their needs, we cannot allow seekers to drive the total agenda of the Church. The Church has a higher calling. It should be *seeker sensitive*, but it must not be *seeker driven*.” It is not the Church’s task to give people whatever they want or even need. What seekers really need most is a relationship to Christ (1995:40).

Other conservatives complain that Willow Creek has turned the Bible into entertainment, a shopping mall where customers can select the religious teachings they like and ignore those they do not want (Burger 1997:76). Luecke (1997:479) expresses a few reservations pertaining to the Willow Creek service. “In their pursuit of seekers, the danger exists that Biblical truth and power will be so diluted that the Christian Church will lose effectiveness at ministering the gospel.” He immediately answers to his own objection by remarking that God has a way to rise up new leaders and ministers to meet the needs of a changed day.

According to Yoder, sceptics believe a seeker approach disregards Western Europeans’ strong aversion to entering any Church service, their suspicion of innovation and deep fear of sectarianism (1997:61). That might be exactly why a new approach to doing Church might well interest seekers. A special service for seekers, modern architecture and seeker small groups might just be what is needed to gradually switch them on spiritually. Their disappointment in and disgust for the traditional Church needs be replaced with renewed interest in an entirely new approach. The problem seems to be that, according to Douglas; “Many congregations are unwilling to pay the price of becoming seeker sensitive so that a few stray nonbelievers could be converted and feel comfortable among us. That’s what the Church is for, but try and tell that to a normal Church board in Germany” (Yoder 1997:61).

Does a seeker-sensitive service truly compromise the Gospel when seekers are specifically targeted to hear the Gospel message and be transformed? It is my submission that the Church does not merely exist to turn believers into better believers? May God help us to never become so complacent that we are no longer moved by the

condition of the lost, but rather enable us duplicate our Master's heart when He lamented over the Holy city - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me" (Matthew 23:37).

Hybels (1995:63) explains their intentions with the seeker service clearly. It was their desire from the beginning to lead people to a moment of truth, when they would decide to go God's way. When they would repent of sin and turn to Christ for salvation, when they would become part of the community of believers, the Church.

Warren (1995:235-238) responds to the complaint that the seeker-sensitive services are minimizing the offense of the gospel by tailoring their message to cater for the needs and wants of the unregenerate; by relating how the Church should respond to culture. He holds that there are two extreme positions: imitation and isolation. The former argues that the Church must embrace our culture to be able to minister effectively to it. These Churches sacrifice the Biblical message and mission of the Church in order to blend in with the culture. In their attempt to be relevant, these Churches sacrifice biblical theology, doctrinal distinctiveness and the Gospel of Christ. The call for repentance and commitment is compromised in order to attract a crowd. The isolation group insists that we must avoid any adaptation to culture in order to preserve the purity of the Church. They fail to see the distinction between sinful values of our culture and the customs, styles, and preferences that each generation develops. This group rejects for instance new translations of Scripture, current musical styles and insists on maintaining traditional dress codes. These Churches confuse their cultural traditions with orthodoxy. They do not realize that the customs, styles and methods they feel comfortable with were probably labeled as modern, worldly and heretical by a previous generation of believers.

Warren (1995:231) rightfully asks "Why choose between liberalism and legalism if there is an alternative to imitation and isolation, namely infiltration". He believes that infiltration

is the strategy of Jesus, for He walked among people, spoke their language, observed their customs, sang their songs and attended their parties. He claims that Jesus' sinner-sensitive ministry made the religious establishment nervous and they criticized Him ruthlessly. They attempted to tarnish His reputation by calling Him "a friend of tax-collectors and sinners" (Mark.2:17). They even alleged that his ministry was inspired by Satan (Mark 3:22). Fulfilling God's purpose must always take priority over preserving tradition. "Never confuse methods with the message. The message must never change, but the methods must change with each new generation" (Warren 1995:61).

3.2.3. Lack of Worship.

An interesting view of seeker services and valid and substantiated objections is found in a brilliant book *Worship Evangelism* by Sally Morgenthaler, hailing from Germany. Morgenthaler maintains that seekers should be involved in worship and that a service void of worship, (as the seeker-driven fraternity suggests) is an abomination. She strongly believes that the revelation of the presence of God during worship is exactly what seekers want and need. What is needed is evangelism through worship, not entertainment. Let us consider Morgenthaler's point of view.

She contends that what will keep and draw people, is real and culturally relevant worship, where God is present and where He interacts with people in the pews. She mainly opposes the seeker-driven service, arguing that people are not crying for more entertainment, but for more participation (Morgenthaler 1995: 23). She observes that while believers are huddled in their exclusive worship formations, millions of seekers are positioning themselves as far away from believers as possible. While we are engrossed with sound systems, synthesizers and skits; time is running out for the few seekers who are still willing to give Jesus a chance. Morgenthaler convincingly argues that it is pointless to fixate on culturally correct but Christless programming. She opposes turning worship into something it is not, just to accommodate seekers. She argues convincingly for real worship in seeker-services, but also believes in being relevant. "Should we then revert to pipe organs and plainsong and curl up in the introspective womb of

traditionalism? Not if we are going to take the Great Commission seriously. It would hardly be responsible to prescribe irrelevance in an age when (according to Barna) fewer than three in ten people consider the Church to be relevant. If anything, we need to increase our ability to speak in the vernacular of our time”(Morgenthaler 1995:30).

At the first glance it seemed that Morgenthaler was only concerned with worship and not with seekers. But the honest student of her work finds that she articulates a need to not only impact believers, but also to evangelize seekers through an encounter with the living God through worship. Although she seems to oppose the seeker-driven approach, she supports the seeker-sensitive service. Warren (1995:248) confirms that they sing worship songs in their seeker-sensitive services. The question is not what should take preference, worship or evangelism - for the former is the main function of the Church, and the latter, the primary occupation and purpose of the Church (Morgenthaler 1995:39). The real question the Seeker-approach addresses: What can we do to attract seekers to a service and only then how should we design that service to introduce them to Christ. Of course, the seeker-driven service does not allow for seekers to worship, for they are merely spectators, which vilifies Morgenthaler's resistance. But many Churches are seeker-sensitive, not -driven, and should certainly take note of her stance.

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Basden (1999:32) asks pointedly about reconciling worship and Church growth: “Is there a simple answer to how we can grow Churches and at the same time worship with integrity? Jesus (Mark 12:29-31) pronounced that we should love the Lord and our neighbor. Basden (1999:86) remarks that this Scripture should guide the Church in decisions and actions related to growth and worship. Basden (1999:86) also observes that worshippers experience an intimate encounter with God. They sense a deep awareness of His presence through the spiritual and emotional impact of the music, prayers, testimony and sermon. Morgenthaler (1995:45) suggests a solution to the dilemma of reaching seekers, whilst retaining real worship: “...a matrix of seeker events and dynamic worship that is open to nonbelievers (worship evangelism) is a possible option”. Tenney (1998:150) proclaims that being “seeker-friendly is fine, but Spirit-friendly is fire”. He believes that we should create a comfort zone for God and a

discomfort zone for man by repentant worship.

It seems that worship is one of the non-negotiable elements of a Church service and must therefore be included in a service for seekers.

3.2.4. The Professional Presentation in a Seeker Service Minimizes the Power of God and the Role of the Holy Spirit to Change Man.

Spence (1998:47-51) interprets the words of Jesus where He said, "I will build my Church" and citation from Zechariah when the latter revealed to Zerubbabel that God's work is accomplished, "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts". He is convinced that the Church growth (seeker) emphasis on "excellence in programming" and planned and rehearsed celebrative worship, minimizes the power of God and the role of the Holy Spirit to change men.

Dobson (1993:14) disagrees with this stance. He declares that the seeker-sensitive service attempts to relate the gospel in a culturally relevant way. Minimizing or negating the power of God and the role of the Holy Spirit is not the issue. He maintains that the seeker service is an attempt to place the gospel in a culturally relevant context (1993:16). "The times have changed. The culture has changed. The methods have changed. But the motive remains the same: using every available means to reach every available person with the gospel" (1993:19).

Hybels claims that the purpose of the seeker service is to communicate biblical truth in a way that prepares and persuades seekers to receive the message of the gospel. He holds that the truth of the gospel is communicated without diluting its content or using methods that do not honour God's truth. (We will discuss the views of critics on this point in chapter four). Willow Creek believe strongly that the seeker service is a tool for believers to use as they reach out to their seeking friends. In addition, they feel that seeker services have proven to be significant spiritual experiences for believers, even when they come without a seeking friend (WCA Bulletin 1998:2)..

3.2.5. The Church Growth Movement Embraces Unbiblical Methodologies.

Spence (1998:47-51) contends that the use of rock music in seeker services destroys the concept of God's holiness. He also claims that the seeker service (which replaces the traditional worship service for God's people) destroys the principle of Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day set aside for God's people to assemble for worship. He also feels that seeker services replace both God's method for reaching sinners and the preaching of the Gospel with dramatic productions. It seems that Spence believes that the Gospel message should not be shared through any other means than preaching or personal witnessing.

In answer to this criticism leveled at seeker services, Woods quotes Fr. Patrick Brennan who once remarked that there would be two kinds of Churches in the future - a dwindling Church with an ageing and dying structure, and a mission Church that are reaching out to people (1996:32). Schawchuck and Heuser warns that if the Church fails to adapt its programs, structures, goals and strategies it will soon be little more than a religious museum, dead in the waters of irrelevancy (1993:78). On the other hand, Woods seem to have more than just a seeker approach in mind when he insists that the Church has lost its appeal to society - and that today's Church should go out into the community to attract people and not merely wait for people to enter their buildings (1996:19). He suspects that people perceive the Church to be selfish, because members are more interested in meeting one another's needs than in meeting the needs of society (1996:31).

Does Spence perhaps suggest that all Churches throughout the whole world should use the very same method in reaching seekers? I suspect that because of the radical changes that have occurred in the world and our different communities, cultures and languages, we could devise new programs and services to reach the unchurched? The question remains if we could effectively convert the X and Y-generation with traditional Sunday services, while they grow up in a fast-moving high-tech, mosaic world? Did God honestly decree that the only way the gospel should be shared is through linear

preaching? In a Church building only? From an elevated pulpit, while the listeners endure the severely uncomfortable wooden pews? I do not find such specific instructions on Church models in the Bible. Indeed, the New Testament Church met at various homes and had no building of their own at all. To pronounce a service for seekers on a Sunday as utilizing “unbiblical methodologies” just seems wrong.

3.2.6. The Church Growth Philosophy is based on Faulty Exegesis.

Spence (1998:47-51) interprets Paul's statement that he was "all things to all men that I might by all means save some" by observing that this remark only refers to his willingness to set aside his rights if exercising those rights became a stumbling block to preaching the Gospel. He insists that there is a world of difference between Paul's attitude of "I am willing to give up my rights so that I can reach as many as possible with the Gospel" and the Growth crowd saying, "We'll use whatever method it takes to entice the unsaved". Luecke (1997:479) acknowledges the appealing freshness of the seeker service to reach the unchurched society. "If Sunday morning is prime time for believers, why not recognize it as prime time for unbelievers. Let the people who've made a commitment come at a less convenient time".

Spence(1998:48) closes this objection with genuine concern for the lost though, which is commendable. "The issue is not a failure of programming, but rather a failure of passion. We have grown indifferent about the condition of the lost. We no longer have the concern that once drove the Church to its knees and then into the streets. While it is not necessary to cling to the programs of the past, it is essential to restore the passion of the past that produced great evangelistic fervor". Spence and Hybels are in agreement on this issue, because it is precisely this passion for the lost that got Hybels started. The time might be right for every Church to take a long hard look at their passion, or lack thereof, and the programs and methods that they employ to reach the seeking.

Spence's(1998:47-51) next remark though, warns against a new approach. "To anyone who is contemplating wading into the new current of the Church Growth Movement,

beware of the dangerous undertow. You may find yourself swept far downstream before you know it. Don't go with the flow!".

Warren remarks that your target audience determines your approach (catching fish on their own terms). Just as you would not use the same bait, or the same size of hook for catching different kinds of fish, likewise, one should utilize a fresh and innovative approach to catch our generation. "You should use the bait and hook that best matches the fish you want to catch" Warren (1995:196). He then quotes Paul from 1 Corinthians 9:19-22:

This means I am not bound to obey people just because they pay me, yet I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are oppressed, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ.

Warren believes that Christ commands us to be sensitive to local culture when He said in Luke 10:8 that, if a town welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you (1995:195). I am convinced that we should try to fit in with those we want to reach, and adapt to local customs and culture as far as it doesn't violate Biblical principles.

3.2.7. Seeker Services is A Shallow One-dimensional Evangelical Outreach That Negates the Growth of Believers.

Willow Creek responds to the objection that they are shallow, in the following way: They discerned that a seeker service also creates the need for another kind of service that would cater for the spiritual growth of the members of the assembly. That was initiated

in January 1976, when the need was identified. Hybels (1995:64) also launched marriage and family workshops, leadership training classes, doctrine and theology classes and more. During 1992 the New Community Institute was launched to provide a broader range of teaching options for the new believers at the midweek services. These included Bible studies. They maintain that conducting Seeker services does not equal the neglecting of members, for a counseling center were also started, to attend to the pastoral needs of believers. A cell group system was also introduced and by December 1994 there were 7500 people in 1000 small groups. It seems that although the seeker sensitive service really focuses on turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ, once they become followers, they too need pastoral care and are guided to develop their respective spiritual gifts and uncover their gifts and ministries. A special believers service are held every Wednesday night, which is called New Community. This indicates that Willow is still sensitive to the Holy Spirit and will be able to direct their respective ministries to even greater victories in future (Hybels1995:63). The following remark by Luecke (1997:479) that “the most worrisome consequence is that ...Willow Creek may lose it’s effectiveness and not know how to adapt” is refuted by the leadership of Willow, when they explain that they have already adapted by producing a curriculum designed to “turn seekers into fully devoted followers of Christ”, according to a WCA official brochure.

It appears that Saddleback is not shallow in their approach either, because they genuinely want people to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, grounded in the Word, maturing in Christ and involved in ministry (Warren 1995:50).

3.2.8. Seeker Services is Just Another American Fad.

A Protestant group in Germany - the “No other Gospel” movement, charged Willow Creek with marketing the Gospel with cynical marketing principles and complained that they were promoting a gospel of success that reflects the American way of life and personal ambition. They expressed a common fear of American fads and suggested that Hybels was turning biblical evangelization into a “Church propaganda show” (Nyberg

1995:24). Nyberg quotes Lou Hueneke, the head of the German branch of the WCA concerning fears of encroaching Americanism. Hueneke asserts that Willow Creek's seeker approach must be culturally relevant in any country, because setting up a seeker service has nothing to do with the USA or Germany, because you have the same problem when you go from Frankfurt to a small town in Bavaria (1999:25). This is certainly true everywhere. There seems to be a massive difference in ministry philosophy, approach to ministry and a congregation's expectations of the pastor of a small town Church and that of one of the Mega-Churches in a city.

Ulrich Eggers, a leading German Evangelical also comes to the defense of the seeker-sensitive service. He is being quoted by Yoder as saying that Willow Creek's "central message has nothing to do with drama or music, but rather with the living portrayal of dedicated Christians". Klaus Douglass, a Lutheran pastor in Eschborn, also refutes the so called American threat by saying that that they have simply made the same basic decision that Willow Creek made; to become a Church for the unchurched (Yoder 1997:61).

Hybels defends the seeker concept aptly by recollecting prayer meetings where young people literally wept for the lost. It appears that they were clearly concerned about reaching the lost and had, and still does not, have a hidden agenda, or a mere humanistic approach. Hybels constantly challenged the kids to make the right decisions regarding their Master, their mate, their mission and to yield their resources of time, talents and treasures wholly to God (1995:37). At their first major outreach nearly six hundred students showed up and when Bill gave the invitation for making a decision for Christ, nearly three hundred responded by rising to their feet. He thought they had misunderstood and had them all sit down. After explaining the basic gospel message again, he again invited them to respond to a call to receive Christ. Again they stood up, and although the meeting ended at 9:30, kids stood waiting to be introduced to Christ and prayed for until midnight. "Introducing people to Jesus is just the starting point of course, our ultimate goal is that they would become true disciples" (1995:40). Hybels explains their intentions clearly, i.e. that it was their desire from the beginning to lead

people to a moment of truth, when they would decide to go God's way, when they would repent of sin and turn to Christ for salvation, when they would become part of the community of believers, the Church (1995:63).

In answer to the above-mentioned objections, we find more support for the seeker approach in Germany. Bernd Kanwischer, pastor of a Free Evangelical Church in Ottobrun that embraced the seeker service aptly remarks: "Willow Creek is theologically conservative, it is engaged in serious Church growth on Biblical principles; yet its methods are progressive" (Nyberg 1999:24). In an interview with Pastor Bill Hybels, Banks (1997: 484) asked him how he would describe Willow's theology? Hybels replied- "It would be classic historic Christian theology. We would fall right in line with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association or any classic evangelical institution(s). Our statement of faith will be almost identical".

Willow and Saddleback maintain that they are extremely conservative evangelical Churches. Hybels remarked once in a discussion with Schuller: "We use the s-word Bob", explaining that they do preach about sin in their seeker services. They are concerned about the health of the Church and about protecting the basic Christian doctrine and Gospel message but are equally convinced that we should adapt our methods to reach the people of today.

According to Dobson (1993:14) the Church has become trapped in an evangelical subculture where our language, our music and our worship cannot be understood by the world of the unchurched. George Barna supports that contention from a survey that listed the leading reasons why the Gospel does not communicate with the non-Christian. He deduced that "Americans are seeking first and foremost a deity who will handle their consumer-driven wants, needs, dreams, hurts and disappointments. Their concern is in the here and now, not in the hereafter. They do not see the relevance of the gospel" (1991:25). He also reckons that the Church (in America) is in desperate need for a new model, for "we currently develop Churches based on a model for ministry that was developed several hundred years ago, rejecting the fact that the society for which that

model was developed no longer exists". He implores the Church to heed the cry of the unchurched by developing a new model. It must be noted that these comments were documented in 1991, and that it seems that Barna's appeal has been at least partially answered by the seeker model.

Geyser (2000:91-95) warns against definite dangers and points out specific benefits within the seeker model with which I broadly agree, of which I will only quote those applicable to the seeker service per se.

3.2.9. Dangers to the Seeker Service.

- * The diminished canon may lead to the reduction of scriptural principles.
- * The practical preaching style may lead to the impoverishment of good hermeneutical principles, where the Gospel message is watered down and may even become redundant, or at most a ministry-aid to help us attain our own human potential.
- * Because of the huge emphasis on professionalism in the preparation and presentation of a seeker service, much of the spontaneity of the service may be lost.
- * Professionalism may also actually be a poor substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit.
- * Pragmatism may lead to heresy.
- * The emphasis on entertainment may become so overwhelming that life-change is either forced to the background or ignored completely.
- * The balance between believers and seekers may be disturbed, in favor of seekers.
- * Methods should not become more important than message.

* Repentance may become a substitute for discipleship. The journey of a seeker should continue after he made a commitment to Christ.

3.2.10. Advantages or Benefits of the Seeker Service.

* The gospel is presented in the simple and understandable language.

* Repentance is seen as a process and not a momentary event.

* An environment is created for the seeker where he can assess the Christian faith at his own leisure and pace. The non-traditional atmosphere creates a safe place for a seeker to explore Christianity further.

* The service becomes exciting and relevant because of the emphasis on creativity.

* The growth of believers is just as important as the journey of seekers.

* The legitimacy of tradition is being scrutinized critically.

* Seeker services are extremely flexible and adaptable to every possible environment.

* The seekers in the service tend to be representative of the community.

* Niche marketing causes the gospel to be more relevant to the people in the community.

* Seeker services fills needs that were mostly addressed by Para-Church organizations.

I have endeavored to discuss the objections to the seeker concept in this chapter and identified some dangers and advantages. It seems that all that glitters is not gold as far as the seeker service is concerned and that very real dangers exist to this form of

evangelism and its impact on a local Church. On the other hand if the seeker service is utilized circumspectly and with responsibility, many seekers may be drawn to the Church and be ministered to with a degree of success. I will now proceed to formulate possible recommendations regarding creating a seeker service in a local Church in chapter four.



CHAPTER FOUR

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter I will attempt to integrate the previous chapters and submit a few practical recommendations on seeker services for local Churches.

4.1. INTRODUCTION.

Regardless of our position on seeker services, whether we are for or against, we should take note of the seeker as a pre-evangelistic tool. Furthermore, investigation of this kind of service does not imply condoning it, or implementing everything that Willow or Saddleback does without questioning it and testing it against Biblical principles for evangelism. Still, whilst we take note of the complexity of the arguments for and against seeker services, I would offer some recommendations to interested Church leaders.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS.

Every local Church who is serious about the kingdom should at least investigate this new way of evangelizing our communities.

4.2.1. The Church Should Redefine Her Evangelistic Strategy.

We have to define and possibly redefine our evangelistic strategy, redraw the boundaries, and reinvent the Church. Lt. Gen (Ret) Roland de Vries, the previous deputy chief of the Army used to say during the transformation to the new SANDF: “The past is a foreign Country, they do things differently!” When Barna discussed what user-friendly Churches did not do, he mentioned that they did not go knocking on people’s doors (1991:180). For creative methods of evangelism to be effective, Churches must be ready to welcome seekers. “We need a fundamental rethinking of the Church and the

way it formulates its worship experiences and services” (Bruggeman et.al. 1993). Barna” (1997:29) relates that millions of people are searching for something to believe in, so there seems to be a crisis of faith. He says that there is also a crisis of innovation in the traditional Church. “The Church seems afraid to invest in new modes of being the Church, breaking free from antiquated models and irrelevant traditions towards living the gospel in a twenty-first-century context. He also identifies a crisis of leadership, for he believes that all the other crises will simply become opportunities if only visionary leaders could emerge. We need leaders that will inspire widespread, genuine interest in Christianity through the strategies and structures they would facilitate for the faith to become real. Barna (1998:28) states that “questioning what we do, who we are, how we minister and what we stand for is not a hallmark of fear and weakness; it is a sign of wisdom, courage and hope”. Knowing when, why and how to change, are important insights that must direct our efforts to contextualize our lives and ministries. We have to do all of the above without compromising the fundamental truths and principles that define our faith (Barna 1998:44).

4.2.2. We Should Differentiate Between Methods and Message.

Warren (1995:61) claims that we should never confuse methods with message. “The message must never change, but the methods must change with each new generation”. He also feels that too often, Churches offer a message that emphasizes the benefits of the Gospel while ignoring the responsibility and cost of following Christ. We should follow the example that Jesus set, He never lowered his standards, but he always started where the people were. “He was contemporary without compromising the truth”(Warren 1995:56). Einstein once lamented that we habitually confuse the means with the end. “This is especially dangerous for the Church. We must never become so enamored with methods that we lose sight of our mission and forget our message”(Warren 1995:57).

4.2.3. We Should Recognize and Legitimize the Journey of A Seeker.

Some of us will sow, others reap and still others must cultivate the fragile vegetation. Woods (1996:50) believes that it takes several experiences with God before a person is ready to make a commitment to God. He then states that people need at least five exposures to the gospel before they will respond - then mentions seven, and then twelve, the latter number quoted by a media person, who feels that multiple exposure to a product is necessary before people will buy it. "Gone are the days when a single evangelist can grow a Church numerically" (Woods 1996:50).

Most spiritual decisions are the result of a process. Therefore, we should plan and conduct seeker services that are process-oriented, in which you cooperate with the Holy Spirit's process of drawing seekers to Christ. We can afford to be bold with the truth of the gospel, but give seekers permission to arrive at their own conclusions. We should trust the Holy Spirit to convince the unchurched to turn to Christ. Let us respect and even publicly legitimize the spiritual journey of the seeker.

4.2.4. We Should Realize That it Takes Hard Work to Conduct A Seeker Service.

Warren (1995:277) mentions that building a seeker service is hard work and takes a lot of planning, creativity, energy, time, money, preparation and commitment from a team of focused people. Luecke (1997:479) comments on the seeker service from his own experience as a Church planter. Whilst establishing a suburban Church he found that developing a seeker service with contemporary music and coordinated drama is a challenge in itself. He remarks that it took a lot of planning, effort and commitment from pastors and leaders and he reckons that it seems a prescription for physical and emotional burnout. He then questions the durability of Willow Creek's leaders and wonders how long they will last. He acknowledges though that pastors and leaders in this movement must be exceptionally competent in their respective fields, whether it is oral communication, contemporary music or drama.

4.2.5. We Should Have Leaders with Vision.

In answering his own question if any way of “doing Church” was the way of the future, Luecke (1997:479) states that he came to believe that there is more randomness than method in Church planting and growth. He believes that success does not depend only on the personality and competence of the pastor. Barna disagrees with the notion of randomness, because many well-meaning and sincere servants of God have failed dismally in the ministry, not because they did not pray enough, or lack of Christian character of calling, but due to their lack of competence. Barna (1997:24) mentions the three distinct qualities what makes a leader a leader- Calling, character and competence. I believe that personality, leadership skills and vision are major factors in planting and growing a Church. Surely God wants His Church to prosper in every community? Randomness could not be the reason why the Church does so well in some areas and battle to eke out an existence in another. On the other hand, Luecke confirms the importance of a team of competent leaders who can also significantly contribute to the success of the Church. Of course technique, methods and competent leaders are not everything, because without God’s providence and involvement there could be no Church at all.

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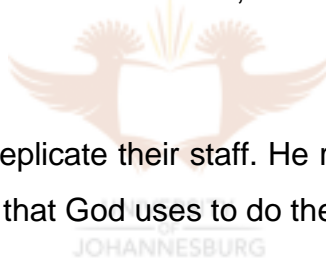
The apparent influence of randomness could become a lame excuse not to implement practical measures to reach the unchurched, or become a more skilled leader in the Church. I firmly believe that we have a role to play in achieving God’s objectives for His Church. That not only includes faith (according to your faith be it unto you), but we need to evaluate the role of visionary leadership and the correct understanding and application of seeker principles in the success rate of any given Church.

4.2.6 We Should Not Attempt to Copy Willow Or the Saddleback Seeker Service Blindly.

Some Church leaders are convinced that the seeker service is a relevant tool for evangelism and decided to imitate Willow and Saddleback. Luecke' (1997:479) confirms the danger of imitating a success story at one Church by saying that we can celebrate those Churches where everything comes together, but imitating their approach offers no assurance of a second success, because the mix of people and circumstances are different. Warren also conveys his concern for this trend, and suggests a few tips (1995:67-71).

*** What you cannot copy.**

Firstly, you won't be able to transfer their context, for every Church operates in a unique cultural setting.



Secondly, you won't be able to replicate their staff. He relates that he spent fifteen years to put together a team of people that God uses to do the work.

Finally, you cannot be Rick Warren. He declared "I can only be me, and only you can be you. That is the way God intended it. God made you to be yourself. He wants to use your gifts, your passion, your natural abilities, your personality, and your experiences to impact your part of the world".

*** What you can learn.**

First, you can learn principles. He claims that while you cannot grow a Church trying to be someone else, you can grow a Church by using principles someone else discovered and the filtering them through your personality and context. "You can learn from other Churches without becoming a clone... never be embarrassed to use a model; it is a sign of intelligence". Intelligent people are always open to new ideas. In fact, they look for

them (Proverbs 18:15). Warren declares that it is his goal to learn as much as he can, from as many people as he can, as often as he can.

Secondly, one can learn a process. In his case it is the purpose-driven process, which is a New Testament Church that is driven by the two most important teachings of Jesus: the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37 - 40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19 - 20). He declares that these two passages summarize virtually everything that Saddleback does. If an activity or program fulfills one of these commands, they do it. If it doesn't, they don't. To help communicate this purpose, Saddleback's slogan is, "A Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church" (Warren 1995:70).

Warren contrasts purpose-driven Churches with those that are driven by tradition, personality, finances, programs, buildings, events, or even seekers. His warning is, "We cannot allow seekers to drive the total agenda of the Church. We must adapt our communication style to our culture without adopting the sinful elements of it or abdicating to it (1995:75)".

Finally, you can learn some methods. Warren remarks that no method is meant to last forever or to work everywhere, but that doesn't make it worthless. His next remark reacts on traditionalist objections to the overemphasis of methods. He believes that methods are just expressions of principles. There are many different ways to express Biblical principles in different cultural settings. The book of Acts has many examples of how the first Christians used different methods for different situations. If you study the Churches of today, it is obvious that God uses all kinds of methods and that He blesses some methods more than others. It is also obvious that some methods that worked in the past are no longer effective. Fortunately, one of the great strengths of Christianity has been its ability to change methods when confronted with new cultures and times. History dramatically illustrates the Church's continuous creation of 'new wineskins.' God gives the Church new methods to reach each new generation. We read in Ecclesiastes 3:6b that [there is] a time to keep and a time to throw away. Warren reckons that this

verse could be applied to methodology and that each generation of the Church must decide which methods to keep using and which ones should be discarded. We should never change our doctrine. Doctrinal truth comes from God's Word, which is eternal.

Barna agrees that we should not endeavor to change principles, for principles come out of truth, but our methods should be modernized (1997:187).

Saddleback's purpose statement is "To bring people to Jesus and *membership* in his family, develop them to Christ-like *maturity*, and equip them for their *ministry* in the Church and life *mission* in the world, in order to *magnify* God's name" (Warren 1995:107). Warren(1995:79,80) also maintains that though a business should be market-driven and strive for customer satisfaction, the Church has a higher calling.

4.2.7. We Should Consider to Conduct Alternative Services and Special Events.



Another possibility to attract seekers and simultaneously retain believers is to use Alternative Worship Services. One should consider and question the frequency, time, venue and purpose of the meetings. Getz (1984:213-218) asks a few crucial questions. "How many meetings should the Church conduct (per week), What kinds of meetings should be scheduled, what should the patterns and format (objectives?) of those meetings be and where should they take place?"

It seems that for many years we took it for granted that there should be, for instance, two meetings on a Sunday, both at the Church building. We desperately need to clarify the purpose of each service. Why do we continue with certain meetings, even when everything clearly indicates that a specific meeting might be obsolete?

A seeker service can then be accommodated in most Churches, although I seriously doubt that many South African Churches are ready and willing to adapt to a seeker concept.

Geyser (2000:110-113) also expresses his doubts whether a seeker service or -model would be embraced by the AFM of SA, and offers some recommendations in this regard. He mentions, amongst others, the possibility of alternative services for believers and seekers, the value of small group ministries and the urgent need to understand the purpose of the Church, which is evangelizing our communities.

Woods (1996:130) presents a novel idea in his chapter on holographic programming, to enable the Church to reach a segment of the population that they formerly neglected or failed to reach. Each and every Church need not change their traditional Sunday morning service into a seeker event, for a seeker service can be introduced as an additional service on Sundays. Some local Churches in Pretoria, who are perceived as traditional reformed theology Churches have moved in this direction by changing the character of their evening services to suit and appeal to the youth. Others introduced an additional morning service for those who want a more informal service, whilst retaining their formal, traditional service. A warning ought to be sounded however, that some (if not many) members might find it confusing, because of the great difference in ministry philosophy and vision of the traditional order and the seeker approach. Ultimately, all denominations and local Churches will eventually have to devise ways to make the gospel more relevant, or they might find themselves growing more and more irrelevant. "Stagnation is a painful way to die" according to Barna(1991:113). Barna (1998:7) also comments on the systems, structures, institutions and relational networks and claims that they are "archaic, inefficient, and ineffective and perhaps, even unbiblical". In South Africa alternate services could be held for different language groups as well, although the danger exists that such a move could be interpreted as racist.

Dobson (1993:95-99) offers some advice in a chapter on what they have learned. He agrees with Woods on alternate services for seekers and believers, by declaring that one should not mix traditional and seeker services. Secondly, he warns that the seeker service can become a Church within a Church. He also confirms that setting up a seeker service takes much more effort than to conduct a traditional service. He identifies

four focus areas - planning energy, preparation energy, execution energy and follow-up energy. He also warns that a seeker service will probably be misunderstood and criticized and observes that it is easier to start a new Church on seeker principles, than to change a traditional one.

4.2.8. We Should Develop Our Own Brand of Seeker Service.

When the leadership of a Church takes the decision to create seeker service, the following modus operandi seems important. Dobson (1993:92) suggests some ideas on creating a seeker service.

*** We Should Conduct a thorough survey of the community.**

Firstly one should conduct a thorough survey of the community one intends to serve. The five questions that Warren (1995:190) asked the people in his community when he first started out might be helpful in this survey. What do you think is the greatest need in this area? Are you actively attending any Church? Why do you think most people don't attend Church? If you were looking for a Church to attend, what kind of things would you be looking for? What could I do for you? What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people?

A similar survey by Hybels found a wide array of complaints, why seekers have given up on the traditional Church. He lists some complaints. Irrelevant preaching, lifeless, boring monotonous and predictable services, judgmental pastors, and Churches who are always seeking for money (1995:58).

I did an informal survey at the SA Army Engineer Formation in Centurion in 1999 with 351 SANDF members of all races, backgrounds and age groups. To the question "If you were looking for a Church to attend, what kind of things would you be looking for?" The following response (70% and higher) were recorded

* the need for informal fellowship.

- * relevant issues to be addressed in sermons.
- * contemporary praise and worship.
- * less emphasis on money.

This survey should include the demographics, geographics and pneumographics of the community that they are serving, or intend to serve. They should also ask, whom are we trying to reach, what is their target audience, and what kind of service is most likely to reach them (Dobson 1993:25).

* **We Should Draw a profile of our target audience (niche market).** Warren (1995:169,172) created a composite profile of the typical unchurched person he targeted. “Saddleback Sam” is the typical unchurched man who lives in our area. His age is late thirties to early forties. He has a college degree...” Warren continues to describe this composite profile in great detail, including his job, family, health, preferences with regards to dress, etc.

We have already mentioned that Willow Creek decided to target the professional, college-educated male between the ages of 25 and 50. Dubbed ‘Unchurched Harry’ he is considered difficult to reach with the gospel message and tough in his demands upon the Church. History has demonstrated that if this individual is reached, then women and families are reached as well (WCA Document 1998:4).

It seems to be clearly impossible for any specific Church to reach a whole community, and highly unlikely that one Church should attempt to satisfy all the needs of different groups of people. Still, legitimate questions concerning ministering to felt needs, and marketing of the church is raised by Kenneson and Street (1997:64).

- * “Which needs should the church attempt to meet?”
- * Who determines which needs are to be met?

* Does the church's meeting of specific needs serve a larger goal or purpose, or is such activity its own end?"

Targeting a specific group or niche of society through marketing inevitably excludes certain individuals and groups. To sanction segregation in the name of attracting a specific group of people is to forget what the Church is called to be. Kenneson and Street (1997:96) believes that "the Church is to be a sign, a herald a foretaste of the new humanity that God is bringing into being".

This question of targeting a specific group at the exclusion of others, falls outside of the scope of this dissertation on the seeker service, but obviously needs to be researched in order to establish it's Biblical validity and theological correctness.

4.2.9. We Should Plan Well Ahead Before Venturing Into Incorporating A Seeker Service.

When one recollects the description of the seeker service in chapter two, it is evident that thorough planning is essential for seeker services. Dobson (1993:27-30) relates different categories of work that the seeker committee had to attend to. He mentions the identification and listing of topics for the seeker meetings, the development of programs, taking care of advertising and the costs of these media, the need for commitment from his personnel and the development of an overall budget.

4.2.10. We Should Consider the Financial Implications of Setting Up a Seeker Service.

Dobson disclosed the cost implications for six seeker services and it came to fifteen thousand US Dollars (1993:28). It surely seems to be expensive to create a weekly seeker service, when one considers advertising costs, the hiring of sound equipment, setting up of professional lighting and a stage. About 65 percent of the budget is spent on advertising (Dobson 1993:78). Obviously advertising is of prime importance, because

you are targeting the unchurched. The seeker services are advertised on billboards, radio, daily newspapers, weekly papers, television and on posters, programs and handouts. Although they recognize that the best form of advertising is word of mouth, they still invest in advertisements.

EPILOGUE

The Church should certainly focus on her mission to save the lost, but how? Shawchuck and Heuser (1996:61) aptly remark that the Church faces a persistent dilemma, whether to be in the world but not of it; to relate to it, but not join it. They declare that one of the most important questions a congregation must ask itself is how to love and serve the world without belonging to the world and losing its soul in the process.

The relationships between the Church and its environment can take on two extremes. On the one hand the Church can befriend the world to such an extent that it becomes so comfortable with it, that it loses its Christian identity and distinctiveness. On the other hand the Church can forfeit its mission by insulating itself from the environment because of a fear of worldly contamination. Either way, the Church is stumped, so we need grace and wisdom to determine and implement a balanced and effective ministry to seekers in our communities.

The mission of the Church is a matter of both being and doing. Mission clarification is the effort of the congregation to discern God's calling and exploring what they must be in order to do God's calling. The congregation must decide it's being and doing with an eye to the *timeless* understandings of the Christian faith and tradition, and also with an eye to it's own *timely* environment. Because each congregation has it's own unique environment, each must have it's own unique understanding of it's mission. Again Shawchuck and Heuser (1993:211) affirm that the congregation that does not change to meet the changes in its environment (paradigm shifts) will soon find itself cut off, irrelevant, lost.

We should always remember whom we are serving. We are children of God, but servants of people. Warren (1995:276) concludes his chapter on designing a seeker service with a bottom-line statement: “The only non-negotiable elements of a seeker service are, to treat unbelievers with love and respect, relate the service to their needs, and share the message in a practical, understandable manner”.

Is the seeker service the way for the future? Many Churches opt to cater for the members’ needs first, so-called maintenance ministry, because the members pay the bills. “Offering a seeker service means intentionally tipping the scales in the opposite direction, towards unbelievers” (Warren 1995:249). He then continues that it takes enormous spiritual maturity of believers to move out of their comfort zone and offer a seeker service. Jesus said, “For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others.” Matt.20:28. Until we possess this attitude of unselfish servant-hood, we are not ready to begin a seeker service.

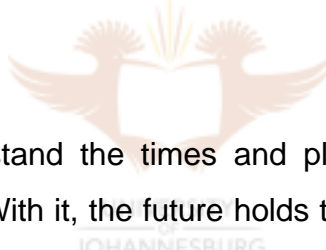
Dobson (1993:67) concludes that not all traditional Churches are ready for a seeker service. He even suspects that most are not ready. Shawchuck and Heuser (1993:300) asks “Who among us can provide the necessary innovation, entrepreneurship, and vision to lead the Church through the uncertainties of an all-pervasive paradigm shift, and into an as-of-yet unclear future pregnant with promise and opportunity?”

How we respond to the future is of our own choosing. “We may be filled with fear at facing uncertainty and problems. We may get bored by all the monotony and trivia, or by faith stretch beyond our own little abilities and allow God to do extraordinary things through our ordinary endowments. The choice is ours: whether to merely finish, or to finish well” (Shawchuck and Heuser 1993:301). They also declare that the necessary transformation must happen at the local level, or it will not happen at all. They do not suggest that the timeless truths and values of the Christian community be abandoned, but the tangible programs, the intermediary goals, structures and strategies by which the Church seeks to embody it’s core values must change and change again, or else the Church will soon be a little more than a religious museum, dead in the waters of

irrelevancy (1993:78).

One thing is certain: our Church services will not automatically become seeker-sensitive. Every Church leader will have to take a conscious decision to research the subject. Barna (1998:130) declares that the Church is at a crossroads and it must decide if it wishes to defend its traditional structure, or if it will re-engineer itself. I suspect that this is an incredibly significant decision that the leadership of every Church has to face. We should be willing to be taught, changed and be stretched in our minds. Furthermore, we should envision the plea of the lost and draw up a plan to minister to them and finally commit ourselves to become what we envisioned.

I close with a remark on 1 Chronicles 12:32. *All these men understood the temper of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.* An entire book on Church growth is based on this phrase. The Issachar factor is described as the ability to understand the times and know what to do.



“The leaders’ ability (to understand the times and plan of action), or lack of it, will determine the Church's future. With it, the future holds the promise of vibrant growth and effective service. Without it, the future leads to stagnation and decline. Let's face it. Most Church models of ministry were developed in an entirely different age. Our nation has changed, people have changed, and we must develop new models of ministry relevant for today's society if we are to fulfill Christ's commission to make disciples” Dobson (quoted by Spence 1998:49).

Hybels (1995:203) is convinced that nothing on this planet is more important, more strategic and more urgently needed than the local Church. May God help us to reach our generation of seekers with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, be it with the help of the seeker service or without it.

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