



**March 23, 2009**

# Practical Tools

**Vern Sanders**

## Two Minutes about Worship

### What Would You Say?

One of the standard business speeches is the "elevator pitch." In short (pun intended), it is a succinct "tell" about your business, designed to be delivered in the time it takes for an elevator to move from floor to floor. It makes the assumption that someone will ask you the question "What do you do?" or "Tell me about your company?"

**Creator** subscriber **Joseph Hopkins** was asked to prepare a 2 minute summary of his church's worship situation for an upcoming conference. We won't give away where or when that will be, because this is the preview--actually, the entire pitch. Are you easily able to "tell" your situation in two minutes or less?

===

I am presently serving in a medium-large evangelical main-line denomination church as part-time minister of music. When I arrived a few months ago, the twenty-four hundred members had taken up sides over issues of musical style. After decades of a rather traditional worship legacy, the church hired a *contemporary worship leader*. After 12 months the pastor and the worship leader were gone, but the congregation was left with mixed responses.

Proponents of traditional music spouted the virtues of rich poetry and the heritage of congregational song, waving hymnals in the air and bemoaning the presence of a screen in the sanctuary. Champions of contemporary music pointed to scores of young new church members keen on the idea of hearing a familiar style of music and media led by guitarist and band; they talked about being relevant and engaged. The traditionalists feared that the church would offer less than its best in worship, and the contemporarians feared stoic and heartless music. As interim leaders, we were asked to bring the two together.

Initial efforts led me to unexpected answers. I learned that only two church members had been called upon to sing solos over the past year, and the choir and "Praise ensemble" had been relegated to backing up the worship leader. The involvement of church members in music ministry had dwindled to a small core of devoted yet unchallenged servants.

This church is typical of so many across the nation. A loss of purpose in worship permits congregations to battle over the manner and mode of music. Uninformed pastors, ministers, and church leaders attempt to grow the church **by offering a table for everyone, rather than a place for everyone at the table.** The *minister of music* who came to the vocation by a calling is replaced by a *worship leader* who is perceived to be relevant and was handpicked by a pastor who functions more as chief executive. Too often, young musicians are caught up in the opportunity to lead in worship only to find angry congregants assailing their efforts in a rather self-righteous language that recounts how the church may have worshiped for the past seventy or eighty years.

Regardless of whether you wrestle with these issues in your congregation, you are certainly aware of a larger community of churches confused by these circumstances. What then of promoting a call to vocational church music? How can universities, churches, and convention leaders appeal to students with a call to serve in a life of ministry and music?

Too often, it seems would-be ministers are turning away; perhaps they hope to avoid the volatile battleground of the worship wars, or maybe they fear the capricious manner in which far too many music ministers have been asked to give up their position to make way for the new leadership's "music person." Isn't it quite possible that the church's slackened expectations for academic preparation cause young students to lower their standards?

I submit that the community of Baptist churches, educators, and denominational leaders must come together and deal with the question of calling. There must be a strengthened voice from the pulpit and a genuine commitment from educators to call out and equip young ministers. **We must all turn our focus from an affinity for styles and modes to an**

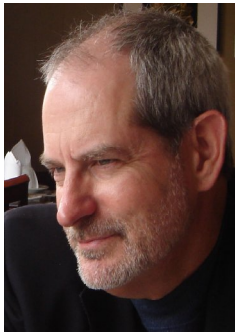
***affection for the people of God and worship of the Almighty.*** For every Sunday that we choose to focus on worship conflict, we are missing the opportunity to experience Pentecost and we are losing generations of disciples in music ministry.

A few Sundays ago, an elderly member of the congregation came to me and offered this comment. "You know, our church has become so focused on why and Who we worship that we just don't argue anymore." May it be true this Sunday in our churches...Joseph Hopkins

## Final Thoughts

**W**hat may not be clear above, is that **Joe Hopkins** is also the Dean of the School of Arts at Samford University. As a "bi-vocational" music and worship leader he understands the difficulties from both the practical and the academic side. Want to hear more about Joe's church situation? Email him [here](#). Got your own elevator pitch? Click on my name below and send me yours. I'd love to read it.

Blessings.



### [Vern Sanders](#)

***Vern has served in some form of church music and worship leadership for 40 years in a variety of denominations both in the US and in Canada. He is currently Director of Music at First Presbyterian Church, Templeton, California. He regularly consults with churches and church leaders. Look for his new book on the subject of the worship wars in 2009. Click on his name above to email him.***

© 2009 Creator Magazine All Rights Reserved