

## **Teaching Tool**

### **The Power of Worship Concerts**

The Windy City is noted for its racial tension, and so in our multi-ethnic congregation, we have tried to give careful attention to speaking the “first language” of each one of our worshipers. For us this has meant moving from a primarily a cappella traditional approach to an approach which promotes all styles of worship music, from a cappella to contemporary to gospel, hip-hop, and rap.

Obviously, moving in this direction is a sensitive thing, one not to be undertaken lightly. One of the strategies that we have employed here is the use of worship concerts to introduce new styles, new songs, and new worship experiences to our congregation. Our second such concert, entitled “Breaking Barriers”, was designed as a way for us to address some of the racial and ethnic issues important to us here in Chicago, and to promote greater unity and appreciation of the diversity of our congregation.

During Black History Month in 2010, we began with a Cross-Cultural Panel Discussion, featuring “champions” of Traditional/ A Cappella, Contemporary Christian, Urban Gospel, Latin Gospel, and Classic Gospel approaches. Each of these five people took time in the panel to answer specific questions related to their preferred style of worship, and then shared how that specific approach helped them to move into the presence of God more effectively in worship. In the concert that followed, we enjoyed all five styles of music, along with an energetic group of praise dancers and mimes, highlighted by Big City Goodwin leading us in some powerful gospel rap at the close. The enthusiasm was electrifying, as black, white, Asian, and Hispanic kids spontaneously jumped on stage, dancing and praising God at the conclusion of the concert!

Our third concert highlighted the need to engage all of the senses in worship. Entitled “Experiential Worship,” this concert featured a call to more deeply understand what it means to worship God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Concertgoers came into the lobby of our facility to the rich scent of freshly baking bread, as numerous small ovens baked unleavened bread, later to be used in a time of communing. The concert began with a painter, Ruben Mandujano, who set up on stage a large canvas that he would use throughout the concert to paint a work he would entitle “Experiential Worship.”

As we moved through a series of songs, spoken word readings, prayers, and two short worship thoughts, our painter painted, and disciples and their friends worshiped freely; at one point, during a softly lit meditative song, each worshiper wrote out on a note card a list of recent sins they were renouncing, took the card, and symbolically threw it in a trash can, then picked up the fresh baked communion bread and wine for communion. It was a powerful, moving and dynamic time. At the close of the evening, Ruben reversed his canvas and

displayed his profound artwork, which was later auctioned off for Missions.

We have continued to highlight concerts in Chicago. They have become a huge hit here, and with minimal investment, draw many disciples and friends together for a time of praising God and encouraging one another. In addition, the learning of new songs and styles has positively impacted our weekly services, helping our people to more freely and energetically engage in praising and honoring our God.

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