

Starting a "Coffee House" at your Church

Les Reynolds (Unity of Middletown, Louisville, KY) shares his experience with church coffee houses.

I don't have an official title, although I do run a small sound/mixing board for the Sunday services and occasionally produce special musical events. I also have produced coffeehouses at the other larger unity church downtown here and wanted to share a few thoughts with you to see if anything might help.

I think a few things are pretty standard, because these conditions didn't necessarily exist 100% when I first began my coffeehouses (I did them for a couple of years, then, as interest waned somewhat, I suspended doing them, then I switched churches)

* Be sure you and the ministerial staff are on the same page regarding reasons for having them, kinds of talent you will recruit (and the quality level you are after and/or will settle for), lyrical content (whether it needs to be 100% new thought or not), etc...

* Find what aspect of this you are best at and stick with doing that--recruit for the other tasks (this isn't always easy. .generally, you'll find that the volunteer level is minimal once you've been doing this for a while...and I also discovered that there is always one or two "key" volunteers who are always present --for you or anyone else going on in the church--who you can count on, just try not to burn them out)

* Start with musicians within the congregation if there are a few who are at least reasonably good, or at least popular, to gain some attendance base and momentum...we had a group headed up by an associate minister at unity of Louisville who did classic and oldies rock and everyone loved them! They weren't chart-toppers as far as talent was concerned, but they really knew how to excite a crowd.

* Themes can help, too: decorations, music style, even the printed publicity material should match to have a nice continuous message

* Have refreshments...it's easier to get people out if food is involved...nothing elaborate, but have good quality snacks and beverages (coffee of course)...someone to oversee and even serve if necessary; decorate (simply but tastefully); watch lighting and venue (fellowship hall? Gym?)...time of year sometimes dictates how the light comes in the windows (if there are any)...be aware of acoustics and have a knowledgeable sound person involved, even if it's just a duo with a couple of guitars who are performing--make it a quality experience for everybody.

* I'd start out quarterly at first...if attendance requires it, then go monthly...in fact, I'd start out just doing one, then survey to get the reaction and go from there; also, circulate a sign-up/email list at each and every show...can't emphasize that enough

* Have plenty of enthusiasm yourself for this--it's contagious...employ Sunday service announcements, too, and build up to each one to pique interest...maybe have a door prize at some of them, a drawing, a "mystery" musician guest...

* It is always best to have a foundation of support (financial, material, equipment, personnel) so as to not have to constantly recruit and scramble for everything every time...however, reality often is that those ingredients are not always in place...but establish what you can from the outset and build on it

Hope this helps...you may contact me directly at Les.Reynolds@il.proquest.com (or musicalwhoosh@yahoo.com) if you desire any further information or assistance...I am no expert; I am just passing on my personal observations and experiences

Thanks

Les Reynolds