

A Word to Church Leaders

REFORMING WORSHIP: Time to Change Gear

Persecution and hardship are increasing globally. For Christian worship to remain relevant and purposeful, it must reflect and address this reality. This does *not* mean we replace our joy with angst and our celebration with mourning. It does mean, however, that we need to make room in our worship for lament (after all, the situation is truly lamentable), the serious business of intercessory prayer, and the absolutely necessary work of preparing believers for dark days and testing times.



It would be unreasonable to expect such reform to happen overnight, for it usually requires a change in church culture—especially in churches that have grown insular during an extended period of comfort and security.

(Image: Christian Assyrian families find refuge in Arbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, after being driven from their homes in the Nineveh Plains, Northern Iraq, by Islamic State. June-August 2014)

What follows, is a proposed strategy / a few ideas for church leaders desirous of facilitating cultural change within their church.

- Commission a member of the congregation to serve as an “Ambassador for the Persecuted Church.” The ambassador should be willing and able to provide up-to-date information, as well as direction and advice regarding advocacy, aid, and prayer for the persecuted. For most churches, the choice will be obvious, and it will simply sanction and formalize a ministry that already exists, albeit on the margins.
- Have the ambassador submit one prayer need to the church office each week or fortnight or month, for publication in the church newsletter or mail-out.
- Regularly encourage the congregation, small group leaders, and those who lead intercessory prayers during gathered worship to make use of that material in their prayers, Bible studies, and discussions.
- Lead from the front: model the engagement and behavior you wish to facilitate.
- Set aside the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the Persecuted Church (early November, annually) for a full and creative service totally devoted to the issue of persecution.

Such reform will broaden global awareness, deepen prayer focus, generate perspective and equip believers to face their own trials—all with very little effort on anyone’s part.

Expect some resistance, as not everyone welcomes change. Be aware that many of those who resist the call to “Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) do so out of fear that the burdens of the persecuted might prove onerous and oppressive, compounding the burdens they already bear.

While this objection might seem valid, I can assure you that the opposite is actually true. Christians who obey Christ in this respect will find that the burdens of the persecuted do not compound their own burdens; rather, they actually displace them.