



A Two-Point Charge Launches Satellite Contemporary Worship **By Amy Yarnall**

Last spring, a new worshipping community was born in Cecil County, Maryland. Launched at an Easter Sunday service with 160 worshippers, “Jacob’s Well” has continued to draw at least 100 people almost every week since, with an average of five to ten new visitors weekly. The new service is a satellite of two United Methodist churches in Chesapeake City -- Town Point and Trinity – a charge I have served since July 2003.

Before Jacob’s Well, there was no contemporary worship in the area. Built around praise music offered in a “rock” style and a multi-media format, Jacob’s Well provides “living water” to people who feel like outsiders to the faith (John 4). The idea was first conceived in casual conversation around the idea of starting a contemporary worship service. But it took more than a year of prayerful discernment, deliberate decision making, and careful planning to make the dream a reality.

Getting started. The first formal step was asking each congregation’s Administrative Council to approve discussions around the idea of a new service. Then, in the spring of 2005, we issued a call for prayer and asked those who felt led to be part of either the launch team or the music team to come forward. One of the first launch team members worked with me to craft a presentation laying out the case for a new service. In May 2005, we made the presentation at our annual leadership retreat. The retreat was tension filled, but ultimately creative, as we seriously discussed creating a new worship experience. We talked about how this was a way of fulfilling our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, a way of reaching out into our community with the love of Christ, a way of appealing to younger folks. By the fall, both Councils were ready to approve officially the launch of a new service.

A team effort. Following the May retreat, planning and research intensified. The launch team met weekly, and continued to do so until the new service started. Twenty members -- mostly in their twenties, thirties, and forties -- came from both congregations. Each and every team member played a vital role, but several key persons proved critical: our staff musician who had a passion for contemporary worship music; a respected former pastor of the Charge; and a newly-hired youth director. The team visited other churches to learn from their efforts. We formed separate work areas for music, hospitality, technology, Christian education, and “everything else.”

The importance of time and place. The decision was made to hold the new service at the local high school instead of one of the two churches’ sanctuaries. This was a blessing because it allows both congregations to feel a part of Jacob’s Well. The location is also more familiar to newcomers.

Research and past experience with a short-lived Saturday night service convinced us that Sunday morning was the best time to connect with seekers, even though it meant Town Point and Trinity would have to adjust their Sunday schedules. After holding information meetings with both congregations, Town Point’s council voted to move their worship time from 9:00 to 8:45 a.m., and Trinity’s council changed their worship time from 11:00 to 11:15 a.m., allowing the Jacob’s Well service to occur at 10:00 a.m.



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Practice makes perfect. Musical rehearsals began in the fall with musicians who stepped forward from within the congregations and from beyond the church family. With a public launch date of Easter, “dress rehearsals” of the new service were held each Sunday during Lent. We asked our regularly attending folks to visit at least once during the practice period to experience the new service for themselves and then to invite others to attend on Easter.

Church in a box. The rehearsals made clear the amount of work involved in setting up and striking a satellite worship site each week. We were led to consider Portable Church Industries, which sells customized trailers with worship equipment and supplies stored in rolling cases. The trailer we purchased even includes a mobile hospitality station and what is needed to offer a nursery and children’s worship. A grant from the Annual Conference and a loan from Trinity’s endowment financed this investment.

Reaching out to the community. Leading up to the launch, we posted signs along the roadside. We advertised in the local newspapers. We issued press releases that resulted in a local newspaper story published on Holy Saturday (the day before the launch) and an article in another paper a few weeks later. But personal invitations proved to be the most effective form of outreach. We purchased business-card-sized invitations from Outreach.Com. Church members passed these out to friends and acquaintances. Direct mail has not been used yet, but may be in the future.

It has been quite a journey to witness God bringing together a launch team and then multiplying their efforts to create Jacob’s Well. Our music, hospitality, and tech teams have all grown. When one of our worship committee chairpersons visited Jacob’s Well for the first time, she took me aside and said, “I did not think this would really work. But I have to say, it is wonderful!” I never cease to be amazed at what God can do!

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