



Should You Change the Worship Time for the Super Bowl?

By Adam Hamilton

We have five worship services each weekend at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection. The last of these services begins at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday evening. This year, on the Sunday the Super Bowl was played, we moved the start time for that service from 5:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. This permitted us to conclude worship by 5:30 p.m., allowing worshipers to go to their Super Bowl parties. One of our committed families wrote and asked if this change in the worship time wasn't sending the wrong message - that football was more important than worship. I appreciated so much this person's heart and desire not to compromise our faith or to capitulate to our culture. I also heard from other members who are deeply committed to Christ saying they would attend worship rather than watch the opening of the Super Bowl. I thanked them for their commitment and shared my rationale for the change.

I said the message we hope to send is not that the Super Bowl is more important than worship, but that reaching lost people is more important than our worship start time. Each year, on Super Bowl weekend, the 5:00 p.m. Sunday worship attendance drops by as much as 70%. Many of those worshipers attend one of the other services, but our sense is that many of the visitors and non-religious folks who normally would come on Sunday night do not attend. This year, with our sermon series on *Conversations with an Atheist*, we anticipated that as many as 300 non-religious people that normally attend the evening service would not be here because of the Super Bowl. So I began to wonder - if we moved worship to 4:30, maybe this would lead them to go ahead and attend the service.

My attitude is that I am willing to try anything once. If this works, then a change in our start time for Super Bowl Weekend might result in people coming to faith. If 100 people came to faith in Christ, or even ten, or one, because of our willingness to change our start time on this weekend, would it have been worth making this change? That was the question running through my mind as we announced the time change.

The experiment worked. Worship attendance at the Sunday evening service increased almost 400 over last year's Super Bowl Sunday evening service. As I shared this good news with the congregation, I thanked them for their willingness to move up their worship time to help us connect with the non-religious and nominally religious.

Adam Hamilton is pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas (www.cor.org) and the author of many books published by Abingdon Press.