

A Recommendation: Music in the Context of Worship at Hawfields Presbyterian Church

Submitted to the Session for their consideration 8/4/14

Introduction

The Ministry to Staff and Ministry of Worship & Music Committees have taken the last three months to take a critical look at our music program and how it is integrated in the worship life of our congregation. We did this principally through prayer, goal-setting, visiting other worship services, frank and open discussions (and some hand-wringing).

It is impossible to divorce our music program from the overall picture of worship at Hawfields. As we looked over the notes we shared from our various worship experiences, a pattern we saw emerge was that everyone included items from the whole experience of the church being visited, even down to how they were welcomed. That is why you will find thoughts from us about our overall picture of worship in what is presented here.

Scripture

Music is an integrated part of the story of God and of the life of the people of faith in the Bible. From Miriam's song after the Red Sea event to the hymn Paul quotes in Philippians 2, music is the lifeblood of not only our expression of faith but also our experience of faith. It is not reasonable to talk about a music program and not reference Scripture (and the Psalms in particular) in our thinking.

In I Corinthians 14:26 we find,
"...When you come together everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or interpretation."

It is *everyone's* job to be involved in the worship life of our congregation and that includes our music, even if it's only a song in your heart!

In Psalm 96:1 we are commanded to "Sing to The Lord a new song!" This actually shows up in many places in Scripture both within the Psalms as well as without (for examples, Isaiah 42:10 or Revelation 5:9). This means not only should we be introducing new

music into the life of our congregation but where possible, we should be writing it as well. Not because everyone is capable of this but because God has seen fit to gift some of us with this. Songs should not only be new to us but new with our current experiences of faith. Miriam didn't sing about the Red Sea before it happened.

Read Psalm 150:

*Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary!
Praise God in his fortress, the sky!
Praise God in his mighty acts!
Praise God as suits his incredible greatness!
Praise God with the blast of the ram's horn!
Praise God with lute and lyre!
Praise God with drum and dance!
Praise God with strings and pipe!
Praise God with loud cymbals!
Praise God with clashing cymbals!
Let every living thing praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!*

It is a marvelously simple work that simply says praise God with everything you have available. We hear in this the variety we not only observed in the churches we visited, but in what we observe we need here. It is for us a confirmation of God's own Spirit that we would all collude and come to the same desire for our church music! Thus, Ephesians 5:19 commands that we bring variety as a response to the grace of God in our lives together!

Characteristics

The music at Hawfields should be varied, not only in style and content, but also in who's doing it. All 14 of the churches we've observed had multiple choirs, soloists, and instrumentalists. The degree to which all of these folks were paid staff is an open question, but what is not in question is that we have folks in our congregation who can do some or all that is needed in our space.

We are a Presbyterian church which means we adhere to Reformed theology. For this reason, there should be a particular pattern and philosophical bent to our music. Scripture should have a central place and the sovereignty of God, the pervasiveness of sin, the abundance of God's grace, and our grateful obligation as God's people, loved and chosen, should all be regular features of our music.

Worship is a teaching enterprise. In other words, with Christian Education not happening in the home as it used to and Church School attendance being lackluster, the Church (and most principally, the worship service) is where people do their Christian Education.

Related to the last two points is language. The language we use should either reflect today's use or, where possible, be accompanied with explanation or expansion when older forms are employed.

We should strive for excellence in the efforts of our music program. There was a time when the best music on earth was being produced within the Church. We should reach for that in all we do.

Lastly music should be a place where emotion is allowed and expected. With this in mind, our music should permit us the range of human emotion from grief to joy to angst to fun (our music should be fun to do).

Given these we specifically recommend:

1. a mix of contemporary and traditional music
2. music should be live where possible and only "canned" when necessary (say, for a liturgical dance, for example)
3. variety of style, instruments, vocalists, and choirs; at least two adult choirs, a youth choir (Grades 6-12) and a Children's Choir (Grades K-5); this would include the use of drums, strings, brass, banjos, guitars, chimes, etc.
4. having one professional musician on staff with enough hours paid to allow them to be fully a part of the church planning process and to coordinate our volunteer musicians
5. sustaining a list of musicians from both within and without our membership that we can call on for producing various pieces
6. music that coordinates with the central themes of the Scripture(s) in question for a given service and conveys the theological concepts in a memorable way

7. bulletin pieces that feature the name, author and (when pertinent) a brief history on the music in question
8. tiers of participation so that pieces that require weekly rehearsal have the benefit of that level of commitment from folks and more casual opportunities for folks who can only commit occasionally
9. our music should invite various kinds of participation from the congregation including clapping, speaking, dancing, social media responses, to name a few.

Liturgy

Liturgy literally means "work of the people." Our music and liturgy should be seamless and flow from the central themes of the Scriptures being used for a service. Also our liturgy should follow the same considerations given under *Characteristics*.

Given these we recommend:

10. a mix of contemporary and traditional approaches
11. variety of style, presentations, and participation
12. liturgy developed not only by professional staff but by lay leadership as well
13. (see *Technology*) liturgy presented with high production values both in printed and other visual presentations
14. liturgy that incorporates the use of social media in real time (see *Technology*)

Technology

Technology should always be understood as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. We observed churches using their screens to countdown the time to begin worship, show lyrics and much more. All of these were consistent with the values of the community in question.

Also, technology is an intergenerational affair. Several of our visitors have reported that they found us on Facebook, our website, or observed our marquees. Everyone is accustomed to receiving information visually. Whether read, watched or observed on the Internet, this is a part of our culture that is not going away.

It should be clear that well-planned and thought out print materials are a part of our technology. Several folks returning from church visits brought back samples of bulletins, brochures, and other materials all consistent with the values of the churches in question. There was a definite sense of coordination and very high production values (Philippians 4:8-9). Our efforts should reflect this.

Given these we recommend:

15. using screens judiciously at both services (see *Times & Places*)
16. having bulletins and other print materials that not only connect with a particular service but also showcases our congregation in various ways and can be used for further devotion
17. the use of technology to make our services interactive both before, during and afterwards
18. upgrading the sound system and A/V systems in the Sanctuary and the Fellowship Hall
19. adding additional wireless microphones to our inventory

Times & Places

(This section was NOT adopted.)

When should our services be and where should they be? We are unique in the area.

Is there a possibility we're missing something important other churches have observed in moving their services to all be on Sunday? On the other hand, having our Saturday service means that we offer an alternative and opportunity unlike anything else offered in our area.

Also, the changing culture around us demands we evaluate in a real way when our services take place. The 11 O'Clock hour on Sundays was established because the surrounding culture at the time were all farmers. Why shouldn't we consider other times if the surrounding culture has changed?

Given these we recommend the following schedule (and places) on a one-year trial basis beginning in January 2015:

20. having our traditional service on Sundays at 9 a.m. in the Sanctuary
21. having Church School at 10 a.m.
22. having a blended service at 11:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary

23. having a contemporary service Saturdays at 5:05 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall
24. having our monthly Hawfields Home Service at 10:15 a.m.

Last Thought & Recommendation

One of the accomplishments made during our process was a list of common practices we noticed in communities of faith that are growing. Among them we observed small groups were a conspicuous aspect of their church life.

While the majority of the groups we learned about were social in nature, some of them were also studying Scripture, just praying together, pursuing common interests, and more. It was observed that for a long time Hawfields had small groups built into its structure: our generations-old families. We didn't really need to develop small groups because they were being replenished through progeny. Not only has the surrounding culture changed, but that trend has changed as well.

Given these we recommend to Ministries of Christian Education, Fellowship and Outreach:

25. work together to develop small groups to address the need for community in our congregation

Respectfully submitted,
Ministry of Worship & Music
Ministry to Staff