

POLICY ON MUSIC MINISTRY

Adopted: June 18, 2012

Purpose: The Apostle Paul exhorts us to be “*filled with the Spirit*” and the first evidence he provides of this filling is “*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord*” (Eph 5:18-19). In this way, Paul informs us that music is at the center of Christian experience. Consequently, it is our responsibility to have a clearly understood philosophy of music ministry and, what’s more, a clear line of authority which designates who makes the decisions about what music will be utilized in our corporate gatherings.

Rationale: Worship is central to the Christian life because the Triune God whom we worship and enjoy is worthy of such praise. As C.S. Lewis trenchantly remarked:

But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.... The world rings with praise – lovers praising their [beloved], readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their game.... I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.

As the heavenly host – angelic and glorified humans – confesses in Revelation 4:11

*You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.*

Principles: Given that God is worthy of praise, the music that we offer Him must reflect the character of the One we worship. The *first principle* driving our music selection, therefore, is that worship is not first and foremost about the worshiper; rather it is about pleasing and honoring and glorifying the One worshiped. He is worthy and so we come to worship Him; He is glorious and so we come to acknowledge His glory. The character of the One we worship is to be reflected in the music we sing.

The *second principle* driving our music selection is that God’s Word must govern the choices we make (2 Tim 3:16). The music which is offered up to Him must be in accord with the commandments and precepts He has given. In an attempt to make this principle more clear, we have distinguished between content and form:

Content: The content is the words that are sung by the congregation. Paul exhorts us to sing “*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*.” In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, these separate Greek words correspond to the various names by which the different psalms are identified. There appears to be no clear distinction between the three terms, each being used interchangeably. So, for example, some psalms are labeled, “*A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. A Song*.” Consequently, to argue from Ephesians that Paul is identifying three separate types of songs roughly equivalent to our modern day psalms, hymns, and choruses is unwarranted. If anything, his words point us strongly to the biblical Psalter – as do the frequent quotations from the Psalter throughout the rest of the New Testament. Consequently, churches are to prioritize the singing of the 150 canonical psalms. To emphasize this priority, our congregation utilizes not only the *Cantus Christi* (which has a large selection of Psalms in the first half of the hymnal) but also *The Book of Psalms for Singing*.

Although we use *The Book of Psalms for Singing*, we reject the argument of its publishers that only psalms are permissible in the worship of God’s people. Psalms and hymns found throughout the rest of canonical Scripture justify the inclusion of songs not found in the Psalter (e.g., Hab 3:1ff; Nahum; Phil 2:5-11; Rev 5:9ff). Hence, we reject *exclusive psalmody* as unbiblical. Content may include use of the psalms and other hymns which faithfully resemble the psalms. But this does not mean that any and all hymns are

acceptable. Those hymns are to be selected which resemble the psalms themselves in content and form. As a general rule, therefore, revivalist hymns are precluded for their non-psalm-like sentimentality. The second half of the *Cantus Christi* includes many excellent hymns from which to choose. In addition, the elders permit the use of other music not found in either of our song books that meet the criteria below.

Given that the Word of God is to govern the music choices we make, all lyrics should uphold biblical truth. They should be useful for teaching, for reproof, for training in righteousness. After all, Paul commands us to use our singing to instruct one another (Col 3:16).

Form: The form is the musical genre or type used to accompany the words that are sung. Form and content are intended to correspond and communicate the same message. The centrality of form is evident in that specific psalms were to be sung to certain tunes (e.g., introductory words to Pss. 45, 53, 55, 56, 57, etc.). While God has not preserved these tunes for us, the fact that they existed and were written into the inspired text indicates that our songs should strive for such correspondence.

A variety of instruments are permitted and encouraged in the worship of God: the voice, stringed instruments, cymbals, trumpets, etc. Depending on the content of the song such musical accompaniment is a splendid expression of God's glory – provided that God remains the center of the service and not the accompanists. When the congregation is singing, such accompaniment must accentuate the voice of the congregation and not drown that voice nor distract from it. We are to “*continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*” (Heb 13:15). The accompaniment must not quash this “*fruit of our lips*.” To further the ability of the congregation to sing collectively with one voice unto the Lord, the elders will appoint an individual to ensure some degree of uniformity among the various accompanists (see below under Implementation).

Though some theologians (e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer) have rejected the practice of singing in harmony (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) as destructive of the unity of the body, the elders strongly disagree. We contend that harmony points to the Triune nature of God who is both one and many. This does not mean that every psalm or hymn must have harmonization but does mean that such harmonization is to be encouraged.

In summary, the following principles for content and form should guide those delegated with the task of selecting songs for corporate worship:¹²

- Theologically correct lyrics
- Theologically significant lyrics
- Literarily apt and thoughtful lyrics
- Lyrics and music appropriate to a meeting between God and his visible people
- Well written music with regard to melody, harmony, rhythm, and form
- Musical setting appropriate to the lyrical content
- Lyrics and music that demonstrate an appreciation for the musical heritage of the Church throughout history

The *third principle* guiding our music selection is that due appreciation must be paid to the weightier matters of the law. Those who lead must beware lest the musical settings stifle the praise of God by overwhelming the musical abilities of our congregation. We want our singing first and foremost to be joyful, robust, delightful, vigorous, full of faith. Having a high musical standard *in itself* is not the goal; the goal is that our singing increasingly reflect the beauty of the One we worship. Hence it is critical that we cultivate each member's heart attitude of love for God and His praise. Over time this heart of desire will manifest itself in gradually increasing musical ability. Yet it is easy to overwhelm or dishearten those trying to learn. So those who lead should strive simultaneously to stretch long-time members of the congregation while not exasperating those who are new. We recognize that this is an incredible challenge.

¹² Most of these are drawn directly from T. David Gordon, *Why Can't Jonny Sing Hymns* (P&R, 2011).

The *fourth principle* guiding our music selection is that worship is warfare (1 Chr 20; 2 Cor 10:3-6). Therefore, some of the music should be martial in tone, summoning the people of God to fight the good fight by overcoming the principalities and powers, striving against our sinful lusts, and keeping oneself unstained by the world. Because this is a battle, *each member of the congregation* needs to be equipped to fight well. Men, women, and children are called to join their voices together to batter against the gates of hell on the Lord's Day and throughout the entire week. Consequently, the elders encourage Heads of households to obtain copies of the *Cantus Christi* and *The Book of Psalms for Singing* to use in their homes. Heads of households are called to model a love for the psalms and inculcate such a love within their homes, growing in musical wisdom and maturity, all the while helping those who are just learning the psalms to catch the vision. Households are urged to avoid the dangers of complacency and disinterestedness that have come to characterize many congregations that sing sacred music. No soldier in active duty treats his weapons with benign neglect.

Implementation: Understanding that clear lines of communication are necessary to preserve the musical integrity of our corporate gatherings, the elders will designate (an) individual(s) responsible to oversee:

- Selection of Psalms and Hymns for the Regular Lord's Day Worship
 - Choose psalms and hymns predominantly from the *Cantus Christi* and *The Book of Psalms for Singing*.
 - Such psalms should be chosen with due consideration for:
 - Their place in our Lord's Day liturgy – whether during the Call, Confession, Consecration, Communion, or Commission sections;
 - Their place in the Church calendar – observing particularly the times of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Easter Sunday, Ascension Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday.
 - Avoid introducing songs during a Lord's Day worship that the congregation has not had opportunity to practice at a Psalm Sing.
- Selection and Direction of Accompanists for Regular Lord's Day Worship
 - Identify individuals in the congregation who could serve as accompanists;
 - Invite these individuals to use their gifts for the body by playing meditations or accompanying the service – in this way nurturing the musical talents of others in the congregation and paving the way for future generations of accompanists;
 - Assure that there is a competent accompanist designated for each Lord's Day;
 - Oversee any special music or meditations that are performed;
 - Deputize others to coordinate such special music;
 - Special Music recommended for Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday;
 - Ensure uniformity among accompanists so that the congregation is able to sing robustly unto the Lord when our regular accompanist is not present.
 - Organizing Tempo and Intro principles to guide accompanists.

Support: Without adequate support, lines of supply, the musical ministry of the church will wither. Consequently, the elders are committed to:

- Teaching regularly on the centrality of music for our life as a congregation, our strength as families, and our growth as individual Christians;
- Compensating our accompanists to reward and encourage excellence;
- Holding regular Psalm Sings to improve the ability of the congregation to sing the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs that are a part of our Lord's Day worship;
- Encouraging those with musical gifts to contribute to the worship of the congregation by playing for meditations, accompanying worship as able, performing at our special events, etc.
- Fostering the development of a choir;

- Praying for and planning to compensate well a chief musician to further our musical maturation.