

PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP

Holy Scriptures are our only infallible rule of faith and practice; therefore, the principles of corporate worship must be derived from the Bible alone. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF), the Regulative Principle of Worship, the *Book of Church Order* (BCO) and our Church Session enable us to remain focused upon corporate worship in which the triune God meets with His chosen people. The New Testament has relatively little to say about a specific order of liturgy or the style of musical instrumentation; nevertheless, we believe that Scripture *as a whole* provides us with fundamental principles and guidelines that govern our worship, the end of which is the glory of God. Corporate worship is an integral part of God's plan and instruction to build Christ's Church to perfect the saints and add to its membership such as are being saved. Christ is the Mediator by whom alone the worshippers may come unto God. Corporate worship must be presented in spirit and truth from hearts renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Our denomination's **Book of Church Order**, Part III, contains *The Directory of Worship*, an approved guide, which shall be taken seriously as the mind of Christ agreeable to Holy Scriptures and the Westminster Standards. Chapters 47 through 55 are not to be considered obligatory in all parts except as guided by the Church Session. Chapters 56, 57 and 58 have been given full constitutional authority and are to be followed.

Music made with instruments and the human voice is a divine gift to mankind in the realm of God's common grace (Gen. 4:21), and, as such, its unique power to express and evoke emotions can be used to glorify either man (Dan. 3:4-7) or God. Moses and Miriam led Israel in singing to God when they had passed through the sea (Ex. 15), before the giving of the law. Later, Jericho's walls fell before Israel's trumpets and shouts (Josh. 6:16-25), and singers even led the army into battle (II Chron. 20: 21-22). David, anointed with the Spirit, played skillfully enough to drive a distressing spirit from Saul (I Sam. 16: 14-23). It was apparently his habit to play, sing, and compose psalms to God long before becoming king. As king, he had music played in both transportations of the ark (II Sam. 6, I Chron. 15: 27-29). Music was institutionalized under the Levites (I Chron. 15: 2, 16, 22, 28) and David provided instrumental and choral music "before the ark" in its temporary shelter in Jerusalem, distinct from the regular tabernacle services that went on during that period at Gibeon (I Chron. 16: 37-42, cf. II Chron. 1: 2-6).

The role of music grew to play a major part in worship in the Solomonic temple, which God's glory filled like a cloud amid the loud playing and singing (II Chron. 5:13). When the temple fell, its sacrificial system was abrogated, but instrumental/choral music in the worship of God cannot therefore be said to have passed away with the Mosaic sacrifices. Its origin preceded them (Exodus 15) and music was hardly an integral part of that system to begin with. The priestly activities in the tabernacle described in the books of Moses may have been done in silence. We understand that worship music originated in godly hearts before the ceremonial law (e.g. Moses and Miriam) and beyond the purview of the ceremonial law (e.g. David) in ways of which God approved, and which were progressively incorporated into ceremonial worship as He directed.

We understand by these examples that music, directed to the glory of God in corporate worship, complies with the **Regulative Principle of Worship** as found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (XXI, 1). Since God gave music in general to mankind in His common grace, it need not be restricted only to the singing of psalms and hymns. Preludes, anthems, solos, offertories, etc. can also be used according to the principles of the Word (WCF, I, 6) under the oversight of the Session in the light of God's creation and Christian principles. Church musicians and their elder overseers should be much in prayer for knowledge and discernment that they "may approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1: 9-10).

BCO Chapter 47-9: "The Bible teaches that the following are proper elements of [a] worship service:

reading of Holy Scripture
singing of psalms and hymns
the offering of prayer

the [expository] preaching of the Word
 the presentation of offerings
 confessing the faith
 observing the Sacraments
 and on special occasions taking oaths.”

“Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright.
 Praise the Lord with harp; sing unto him with the
 psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.
 Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.”
 -Psalm 33:1-3 KJV

Musical offerings are made to God at His command (Ps.33: 1-3; I Chron. 25, II Chron. 29: 25-30, Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), for His own glory (Ps. 96: 1-3), and for the help, consolation, joy, and edification of His people (Ps. 57; 8-9; Ps 147:1; I Cor 14:26; Col. 3: 16-17). Some are particularly equipped for singing, for playing musical instruments, and for training and leading in the musical offerings to God (I Chron. 15:22; I Cor 14:26); yet it is the privilege and duty of **all** to join in the praises and to sing to the Lord (Ps 150:6). Because God has enabled some of His people to make music in special ways (I Chron.15:16-24; I Cor. 14:26), it is fitting that the musical offerings of individuals, ensembles and choirs within the congregation be included in the public worship of God. As members of the body join their hearts with the minister in making corporate prayers to God, so the congregation should join their hearts with the choral and instrumental musicians for the offering of worthy music in the worship of God.

The writer of Hebrews (5: 12-14) instructs believers to grow from milk to the strong meat of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We encourage this same growth toward maturity in our musical choices, setting high standards for both melody and doctrinal content. In the corporate worship of an infinitely holy God, we strive to maintain distinctiveness over and against the prevailing culture, whatever that culture may be. We find in the great hymns and psalters of the church and the approaches to harmony and musical form, that have largely developed since the Reformation, a vibrant, edifying, and still-living heritage that reminds us with clarity, gravity, and appropriate joy of God’s eternal truths. We recognize that this custom is neither perfect nor worthy of reverence itself, but we believe it has proven its usefulness in assisting God’s people to glorify Him alone who is high, holy and majestic as we are edified in the corporate worship of this great God. (I Cor. 10:23, 31; I Cor. 14:26; Rom. 14:22; Phil. 1:10; I Thess. 5:21).

The Psalms of the Holy Scriptures ought to be used regularly in the public worship of God since they formed the book of praise for Israel and became, in part, the basis of praise in the New Testament Church. Other hymns and spiritual songs may also be used. The hymnal and psalter, provided for our corporate worship as well as family worship, enable the expression of every aspect of the gospel in agreement with the Word of God, which provides the principles and guidelines that govern our worship.

Second Presbyterian Church will uphold its over-one-hundred-year standard of traditional worship, the vision of which finds expression in the manner in which we pursue excellence (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 8:1) in carefully chosen, skillfully led praise (I Chron. 15:22; Ps. 33: 1-3) and, therefore, adequately rehearsed, appropriate, thoughtful and excellent music, presented by talented musicians within our fellowship (II Chron. 34:12), all of whom share the common goal of glorifying and enjoying God (Ps. 24:3-5) and edifying all who worship Him in spirit and truth. All of our musical offerings should therefore be worthy expressions of a Biblically grounded theology (Ps. 119:171) and chosen with God-honoring purpose suited to each particular service of worship. There may be special occasions when guest musicians are warranted.

All music used in services of worship shall be under the authority of the Session.

Other aspects of music (Weddings, Funerals) are found in other sections of this manual, as are additional guidelines for the Corporate Worship of God.)