



Congregations, Pastors, and Musicians

Discipling Music Ministry: Twenty-first Century Directions deals with the music ministry of the local church, the pastoral ministry of music. Hence our investigation will be limited to concerns which touch upon such ministry. We must identify the people who participate in the local church's music program as well as review the purposes for which music is used. Eventually we will validate and substantiate the discipling aspect of music ministry.

Music ministry at its best is a cooperative venture among congregation, pastor, and musician. Though each has its own particular role to play, a concerted effort toward a common goal not only makes its actual achievement more likely, but produces an esprit de corps absolutely essential to healthy corporate life. The end result is a dynamic spirituality seldom achieved any other way. Congregations, pastors, and musicians need to know that pastoral music ministry is relational and interdependent.

Congregations

Congregations are, of course, the focal point of music ministry. Everything that is composed, planned, practiced, and

performed is for their benefit. All church music therefore must be attuned to the congregation. The assembly's importance may be noted in the following popular uses for church music: church music as textual information, church music as utilitarian function, and church music as offering.

Church Music as Textual Information

Church music as textual information exists to give religious witness via the text of a song. The emphasis is placed on immediate and direct communication. Texts are usually simple, often in the first person, and frequently experiential. The music to which they are set is popular in nature. Examples are: "Saved, Saved!"¹ "He Touched Me,"² and "Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul."³

Such witness music has a built-in proclivity toward the musical standards of popular culture. As a matter of fact, the first hurdle in the successful use of such songs is finding those which have a likeable music. In choosing what pleases people, musicians, like other popular communicators, keep the taste of their "audiences" in the forefront of their thinking. Music as textual information is successful to the extent that musicians choose songs that are easily understood, relevant, and enjoyable. Unless it considers the assembly's musical or topical preferences, message music does not succeed.

Church Music as Utilitarian Function

Another common practice is to use church music as utilitarian function. Music is regarded as an instrument, a tool, a facilitator, a mechanism for serving utilitarian ends. For example, music is often enlisted as a means of creating atmosphere, generating congregational praise, and celebrating liturgy. It covers the noise of walking and talking. It fills uncomfortable silences. Background music "enhances" prayers, scripture readings, and altar services. Its worth is believed to lie in its ability to fulfill a function.

The purpose of church music as utilitarian function is to service the assembly. If music is a means of accomplishing some functional or practical end, that end is invariably caught up in what is perceived to be of benefit to the congregation. If it is suspected that a particular use of music does not benefit the listeners, or is not congregationally hospitable, or is not conso-

nant with their inclination and outlook, it will eventually be discarded. Functional church music is a music “for the people.”

Church Music as Offering

In addition to seeing music as textual information and as utilitarian function, some see church music as an offering. That is, music is felt to be a sacrificial act, an offering to God. One branch of thought holds that music as offering is a matter of attitude. Personal in nature, it is offered from the heart of the individual performer directly to the heart of God. Popularized by the charismatic and renewal movements, music is often described as “ministering unto the Lord” or “praising the Lord.” Emphasis is placed upon individual “heart-felt” worship. The intense devotional attitude of the participant is its distinguishing mark. A second branch emphasizes the quality of the music. We are admonished to give God the very best of our talents and abilities, the first-fruits of the work of our hands. The objective goodness of the musical composition as well as the artistry of the performance are of paramount importance.

At first glance, both of these branches of church music as offering seem to disregard the collective nature of Christian worship. Yet it should be acknowledged that a certain congregational awareness on the part of the director must be present. If, in worship, singing praises directly to God by each individual person is stressed, it is necessary that the music be chosen on the basis of the congregation’s (that is, each person’s) ability and partiality. If music is chosen without carefully considering the congregation, the musical praise will probably be a failure. Music the assembly loathes or is too difficult to sing will not likely become a vehicle of heart-felt worship! If, however, a great deal of importance is given to the quality of the musical offering, the music being given to God on behalf of the congregation, the congregation must still be considered. Without vicarious participation of the assembly, such musical offerings are essentially meaningless within the context of the gathered community. The musical offering must still be chosen largely on the basis of the congregation’s ability to apprehend it.

All three emphases—church music as textual information, as utilitarian function, and as offering—are built around the congregation. This is a circumstance not generally appreciated

by the average parishioner. It is often unjustly presumed that music directors choose music and design music programs on the basis of their personal tastes and preferences; any correspondence between what music directors choose and the music congregations prefer is thought to be purely coincidental. While this is certainly possible, it cannot be substantiated on any large scale. Church music without congregational involvement and support founders. Musical decisions must be made with the congregation in mind.

People and Musician

Congregations, then, have power: the power of their musical preferences, of the purse, of cooperation and goodwill. But there is more to say. The musician's role is not one of simply providing musical satisfaction for a powerful assembly. The prophetic character of music ministry may very well necessitate going against the grain of popular trends. The prophetic role of music has strong pastoral implications. Musicians, as ministers, respond to what they believe their congregation's well-being requires. When the musician's conscience, sensitized to those requirements, dictates a course of action the people find unappetizing, congregations must realize that such decisions are made not to spite them, but out of concern for them. In reality, responsible decisions, even unpopular ones, demonstrate the power that congregations have over music ministry. The gathered assembly always stands in the forefront of the church musician's decision-making processes.

When trust exists between musician and people, a mutually beneficial relationship results. The music director nurtures the congregation, and the congregation responds affirmatively to that nurture. People's attitudes toward the director's efforts can be helped by the knowledge that church music's purpose goes far beyond the limits usually assumed (i.e., its practical function). Spiritual health and character may be built up or torn down, helped or hindered, strengthened or weakened by music. Church music has the potential for operating on a plane far above the pragmatic or aesthetic philosophies that drive so much church music making. Without the congregation's awareness of the higher purposes of church music, misunderstanding between musician and people easily results. Only a modicum of ministry will then be possible.

The assembly's major contribution to this cooperative venture is a teachable spirit. Musicians know that congregations are seldom perfect; teaching is needed. But in order for that teaching to be successful, what is needed, above everything else, is a willingness on the part of the congregation to be taught. Responding to and submitting to newly understood truth and believing God's hand to be at work in making the assembly after the image of God's own Son are marks of a teachable people. Without these attitudes progress cannot be made.

A New Direction

Another plane of ministering through music, different in emphasis from church music as information, utility, or offering, is explored in the following chapters. Comprehending this plane of ministry will go a long way toward helping congregations give that cooperation so necessary for the development of a deeper music ministry. In some instances this may have already begun, though with a sense of congregational apathy and remoteness. Perhaps there has been no overt explanation of what is being attempted. If this is the case, the following chapters will articulate and clarify the new direction. Explaining the spiritual aims and objectives of the music program as well as demonstrating the musical methodology to be implemented ensure a degree of cooperation between musician and people unattainable any other way.

Pastors

Pastoral Authority

Pastors greatly influence the music program. Their influence may not be as primary as that of the congregation, but it is certainly more immediate and direct. The degree to which pastors exercise control is directly related to a variety of issues: church polity, the relative abilities of pastor and music director, the size of the parish, and the pastor's interest, psychological make-up, philosophy of ministry, creative ability, and talent as an administrator. Whatever a pastor's natural inclination might be, almost all church polity requires that the chief or senior pastor oversee the music program in some way and act as the liaison between the director and the specific governing body of the church, be it board, session, vestry, or council.

The degree of control pastors exercise over the music program varies considerably. No two situations are ever exactly alike, with as many varieties of pastoral control over church music as there are pastors and music directors. Whatever the specific case, it is safe to say that most pastors assume more control than directors prefer; directors, in turn, usually want more control than pastors prefer.

Pastors and Musicians

Some pastors give church music an occasional cursory glance, others believe music a necessary bother (the less of it, the better), some show a modicum of interest, others an all-consuming or even dictatorial interest. Some pastors take the hired hand approach toward musicians; others could care less about them and the whole musical undertaking. And worst of all, some pastors know nothing (or very little) about church music, either technically or theologically and philosophically, yet they exercise arbitrary control over matters which are beyond their knowledge and understanding.

Certainly many stories of bitter disagreements have their basis in fact. Some stem from imagined slights, others from legitimate complaints. Some are too offensive to repeat, others too petty; all are unworthy of our Lord Jesus Christ. How can a congregation be expected to act Christ-like when its leaders act unchristianly, without charity or justice?

Fortunately most pastors are genuinely interested in the welfare of church music and church musicians. Some understand music to be inextricably linked with worship, and they champion it at every turn. There are even ministers who assume music to be worship, not merely a decoration or an accoutrement to worship. These recognize the difference between music as ministry and music as entertainment. They realize the implicit biblical injunctions which give music a place of importance in the corporate life of God's people (see 1 Chronicles 6; 2 Chronicles 5; Nehemiah 12; Psalm 149; Matthew 26:30; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 5:19). They have the self-confidence necessary for employing knowledgeable musicians and delegating to them the authority for making the music program the very best it can be within the context of a particular congregational setting.

Recently the office of musician has undergone a subtle shift which has altered somewhat the relationship between pas-

tors and musicians. Influences such as the political democratization of whole societies, the societal importance of individual independence, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), and the relatively recent emphasis on the ministry of the laity have given rise to a church environment in which a shared or collaborative type of staff ministry has evolved. Musical leaders are charged with the development of the gifts of the gathered community and enjoy the freedom to exercise their leadership as they believe appropriate. Such an arrangement has the effect of somewhat lessening the autocratic control of the pastor and giving a wider scope of responsibility to the musician.

Nevertheless pastors still have, in most situations, the general oversight of the music program. For them to abandon all leadership does great harm. Without their hearty support, warranted by the close relationship between music and worship, the church music program becomes but one of many optional ministries dependent upon congregational preference. But the music ministry is much too significant to worship to be optional. The general attitude of the pastor will, in great measure, determine its relative importance. Strong clergy involvement, without arbitrary control, is the best type of pastoral leadership for advancing the work of an informed ministry of music.

Pastoral Understanding of Music Ministry

Seminaries seldom prepare clergy for general oversight of the music program. If there is training at all, it usually is in the area of practices (leading songs, chanting liturgy, reading music) or in historical study of music and worship. Unfortunately, the theological underpinnings of church music are seldom addressed. Without properly comprehending the nature of music ministry, the clergy's potential for crippling it is enormous.

Two areas need addressing. First, like congregations, pastors need an understanding of the deeper spiritual ramifications of church music. Without question the texts of our church music are significant. But it is the implications of music apart from text that have, in many ways, an even greater significance. It is precisely this fact of which most pastors (and to a lesser degree, musicians) are unaware. If pastors are to exercise competent leadership in encouraging and nurturing music ministry, then they must strengthen their understanding of its effect upon spirituality. Too often clergy have been satisfied with the philo-

sophical vagaries and trite platitudes of well-meaning generalities! Though sounding impressive, such philosophies are often clouded by wordiness and are essentially meaningless! But as general overseers, pastors simply need insight into what it is that gives certain music the potential for strengthening spirituality, and other types of music the potential for weakening it.

A second area which needs addressing is church music methodology. Agreement between pastors and musicians on the spiritual goals of music making in the church is relatively easy to achieve: people should be loving, exercise the fruits of the Spirit, show strong moral character, cultivate habits of mature worship, and be a people who live out their faith in a most inhospitable world. Almost every music director and pastor would not only agree with these goals but would zealously promulgate them.

The battle between musicians and pastors becomes most vexatious when, in opposition to the musician's methodology, the pastor dictates the musical methodology for achieving spiritual goals. If it is true that arbitrary decisions concerning music-making by a pastor who sees no relationship between music and spirituality are difficult to live with, how much more grievous are decisions by a pastor who agrees on spiritual matters with the musician but who then undoes the musician's ministry by insisting on musical practices that the musician knows will make their common spiritual goals largely unattainable. What a sad, but all too prevalent, situation!

One purpose of this book is to heighten the pastor's awareness of the spiritual implications of the church's melodies, rhythms, and harmonies. Christian discipleship is developed and exercised through the use of a comparatively narrow range of musical choices. Though the twentieth-century church has not always chosen wisely in this regard, our faith gives us hope that the church of the next century will do better.

Musicians

Church Music-making

Professional church musicians work heavily on the mechanics of music-making: correct fingering, clear conducting gestures, proper vocal placement, correct notes, exact cut-offs,

meticulous articulation, and accurate rhythms. Through these and a host of other technical and interpretive details, they bring alive the composer's intentions. They make music.

As facilitators of amateur music-making, however, church musicians know that volunteerism, at its best, depends heavily upon an alive, vigorous, and exuberant enthusiasm. Technical brilliance becomes secondary. Such is the case for the Sunday school men's choir, handbell choir, orchestra, and the other ensembles of the music program. Energy and enthusiasm count far more than technical correctness. They measure the music program's vitality.

Nevertheless, the work of musicians requires them to strive continually for as much technical excellence as possible. In their practices with the parish choir, soloists, and instrumental ensembles, directors are confronted with less technical prowess than most music demands. Hence, much of their time is spent drilling notes, correcting rhythms, and teaching vowel unification. To be a music director means to work at the technique of making music. Church musicians are artisans.

Implications of Compositional Choice on Ministry

Spending so much time and effort rehearsing technically needy amateurs gives the average church musician a mindset that is more concerned with performance quality than compositional quality. Excellence of production, not excellence of composition, is emphasized. This is understandable. Music in the church does not purport to be "professional." It is largely a matter of marshalling parish volunteers into musical undertakings commensurate with their ability. It is not that directors do not carefully choose the musical material for their music programs; rather, their attention in choosing is usually riveted to practical matters: difficulty level, musical appeal, or available vocal and instrumental resources. Questions concerning musical value and the spiritual implications of the music itself retreat to the background. Compositional accessibility, not compositional integrity, is, for most musicians, the crux of the matter.

There are other reasons why many church musicians tend to embrace a pragmatic approach to music-making. The twentieth-century tendency toward extreme subjectivism, the failure to integrate faith and life, and the lackadaisical attitude

toward values all have a part in making the musician's decisions less thoughtful and more reflexive. Choice becomes largely a conditioned response to the cultural values adopted by a particular church or denomination.

As we have noted, however, the point of music in the church and the point of the musician's pastoral work are their spiritual impact on the life of the congregation. Musicians have a prophetic role to play in the assembly, which makes them ministers in the highest sense of the word. Ordained or not, church musicians have a call to ministry.

Ministry is not just sacerdotal functioning or some fuzzy notion of "helping others" or a kind of maudlin sentimentality. Ministry is salt and light, active and dynamic. Music ministry, as it is faithful to its prophetic role, helps shape the spirituality of every member of the assembly. It is pastoral, its vision a faith-building vision. Music becomes the agent of prophetic ministry just as words are the agent of the preaching ministry. Notes are not an end, but a means. Musical composition touches the ultimate concerns of ministry.

The Musician's Teaching Ministry

Church musicians need to be teachers. Even when they choose music for its spiritual character, its full spiritual potential will be lost unless the congregation recognizes its spiritual dimension. Playing the right music without reflecting upon its ultimate meaning is just as undesirable as playing the wrong music for the right reasons. The assembly needs teaching in musical/spiritual concepts. Once more, if the congregation lacks any idea of what gives music significant spiritual meaning, the full spiritual potential of the music is dissipated. Teaching is needed to give scope and definition to the lofty purposes to which church music is called.

The role of teacher is a significant change from how most musicians, congregations, and pastors view the work of church musicians. Usually, directors are hired to produce a commodity—music. In addition, their contractual arrangements required them to oversee the administration of the music program and occasionally perform other tasks peripheral to worship. Church musicians as teachers, therefore, is no doubt a relatively new idea for many congregations, pastors, and musicians. The

church, existing in a society generally not well versed in the musical arts or in apprehending the more elusive relationship *between music and spiritual life, needs to change the musician's portfolio*. For a congregation's own good the director's work demands regular and systematic teaching. Congregations and pastors must also provide a convenient forum for such teaching to take place. Midweek service, Christian education, Sunday morning sermon time, or a few minutes prior to the beginning of worship are possibilities.

The teaching ministry of church musicians is addressed further in the following pages. Little will be said about reading music, widening repertoire, or learning to appreciate music as an art. Rather, music's influence upon spiritual formation will be stressed. This aspect of church music is in the most need of shoring up.

Notes

1. Jack P. Scholfield, "Saved, Saved!," *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (Waco: Word Music, 1986), 530.
2. William J. Gaither, "He Touched Me," *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (Waco: Word Music, 1986), 504.
3. John W. Peterson, "Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul," *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (Waco: Word Music, 1986), 495.