

## Philosophy of Music of Redeemer Presbyterian Church

**Note:** *The following document was adopted by the Redeemer Session at 6/12/2019 meeting by a unanimous vote.*

The Bible and our Confessions are clear that the singing of “Psalms with grace in the heart” is to be “part of the ordinary religious worship of God (WCF 21:5).” However, neither the Bible nor our confessions give direction to either the specific songs that should be sung each service, or to the musical style that should be used (if any music is used at all). Just as the Bible does not contain a list of inspired songs (in addition to the Psalms, of course), neither does it give direction about the kinds of harmony, rhythm, or instrumentation of the music used to sing them.

In other words, there simply is no one divinely mandated way to sing hymns/psalms/spiritual songs to God. There is no one worship style of music that is inherently more biblical or “reverent” than another. You can have Biblical, reformed, and reverent worship regardless of whether you lead with a piano, guitar, drum set, or any other variety of musical instrumentation. God can be praised with the sound of trumpet, lute, harp, strings, pipe, cymbals, and yes, even loud crashing cymbals (psalm 150)! All Christians have preferences when it comes to the style of music played in church, but we must recognize that our musical preferences are not a divine mandate and often reflect our own cultural context and background. Generally speaking, for example, classical music and liturgy appeal to those who have more formal education.

Given this, one very practical way our congregation shows love for one another is by learning to submit our preferences to one another in this area. We all will find certain songs and styles more appealing personally, therefore an attitude of love for others and sacrificing our own rights is critical as we seek to discern what is best to sing each Sunday. Musical style should not be the glue that holds us together. We are united by our common faith, hope, and love in Jesus Christ, and our commitment to be part of a church that faithfully worships and proclaims that Gospel in a Biblical and reformed way each week.

As one church has stated well, “We imagine the Apostle Paul, if he were writing to the church today, might have something to say about our worship style. “If I sing in style of the hippest music, but have not love, I am only a banging drum or a strumming guitar. If I have a gift for reading music and enjoy the richest hymns, but have not love, I am nothing. If I am discerning of excellent music and fine poetry, but have not love, I gain nothing. The first principle for singing as a congregation and choosing music for the congregation is love.”

### **Guiding Principles for Church Song:**

While there is no mandated style or music, the Bible does give “big picture” guiding principles for singing in worship. In what follows, we set form several core commitments that inform music ministry at Redeemer. These commitments guide our song selection, musical style, and special music as a church from week to week.

#### **# 1 Biblical & Theological depth**

**Col 3:16** - *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

The songs we sing should have an “edifying” effect for the body. As Paul makes clear, singing is a form of “teaching and admonishing” each other. It is also a way that we stir up and express thankfulness to God from our hearts. This means we want songs that are meaningful and engage mind and heart with the truths of the Gospel. We don’t want purely emotive songs that have little content, or songs that you can just “replace baby with Jesus.” These may be very appropriate and helpful for private encouragement and worship, but not fitting for corporate worship. That being said, there are many simple but very profound songs that use repetition and music effectively to stir our hearts, and many of the psalms are written in way that expresses emotional and subjective experiences.

#### **# 2 Congregational Singing**

The congregation, themselves “priests” to God, have the duty and privilege of praising God in their own voice (1 Peter 2:4-10). Biblical worship is not a performance to be watched by the congregation, but something all Christians are called to participate in. Those who lead worship do so to assist and strengthen the congregational voice, not displace it, and should avoid drawing unnecessary attention to themselves. We want every member of our church to be an active worshipper, not a passive observer, as we sing praises to God. The primary sound in worship song should be the congregation singing.

This commitment has implications for how we choose and lead songs. We will avoid songs that cut out the congregation because they are too difficult for congregational singing. Nor do we want the instrumental and vocal leadership so soft that it cannot support the congregation, or too loud that it mutes the congregation. Where we can do it with excellence (see principal # 4) we believe both singing and instrumental leadership are not only consistent with congregational singing, but strengthen it. King David appointed priests and Levites to lead the Israelites in both singing and music (1 Chronicles 9:33; 15:19-22; 23:5; 25:1, 6-7; many psalms directed to “choirmaster”), as using the singing and musical gifts from God’s people encourages and supports the praise of his people.

### **# 3 Musical Diversity**

We will pursue musically diversity in two areas as we sing praises to God.

- Chronologically Diverse. We don’t believe the last good song has been written. Nor do we want to ignore the great hymns of the past which connect us with previous generations of Christians. We are committed to singing the best songs of the early, reformation, and 21<sup>st</sup> century church, and everything in-between.
- Musically Diverse. As stated above, no one style or instrument can claim to be the “Biblical” or more “reverent” style. The Bible and our reformed confessions allow for a diversity of musical instrumentation as we worship God. We recognize that every musical form in some sense is culturally conditioned and appeals to one type of person more than another. We

want a balance of different musical instrumentation and styles as long as it does not conflict with our other core values. We will use music from different genres and different instruments, everything from piano, guitars, drums, or nothing at all. As God gives us members who have musical gifts, we will seek to utilize them in building up the body of Christ.

#### **# 4 Commitment to Excellence**

We are not fixated on perfection, but we don't want to pursue anything less than the best we can give. This commitment will limit both what songs we sing, styles we use, and instruments that lead. What we have the abilities to do well, we will try, what we cannot, we won't.