



Christ Covenant Church

Introduction

Christ Covenant Church (CCC) is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). We seek to live in obedience to the teachings of scripture and while we acknowledge that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and life¹ we subscribe to the teachings of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Book of Church Order (BCO) as being consistent with the teachings of scripture and as being beneficial to the administration of the church.

This document seeks to advance corporate worship by reminding us of essential biblical principles regarding the use of music in corporate worship and by providing guidance within the specific context of our corporate body. Corporate worship is broader than music and involves reading of Holy Scripture, singing of psalms and hymns, the offering of prayer, the preaching of the Word, the presentation of offerings, confessing the faith, observing the sacraments and, on special occasions, taking oaths². The scope of this document extends only to the singing of psalms and hymns in the context of corporate worship.

Overview of Worship

Chapter 47 of the BCO gives a concise and excellent summary of corporate worship. Note especially section 3 which states that

The end of public worship is the glory of God. His people should engage in all its several parts with an eye single to his glory. Public worship has as its aim, the building of Christ's Church by perfecting of the saints and the addition to its membership of such as are being saved -- all to the glory of God.

Note that it is both the *duty* and *privilege*³ of every member to fully and attentively participate in every part of the worship service. It is thus the duty and privilege of every member to sing psalms and hymns in the worship service.

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1. Rev. 22:18-19, 2 Tim. 3:13-18, WCF 1.1
 2. BCO chapter 47, WCF chapter 21
 3. BCO 51.1

Jesus describes the kind of people that are able to worship God: those that worship in spirit and in truth⁴. We are reminded that our songs must be true and that our hearts must be fully involved.

It is an error to believe that corporate worship is meant to stir up our emotions by using whatever means currently popular but it is equally erroneous to believe that the mind alone matters and that the emotions of men are of no consequence. The rest of these guidelines assume that the songs we sing intentionally seek to be doctrinally true and that they intentionally seek to stir the spirit of man to praise and reverence.

Guidelines (Questions and Answers)

Question: While the BCO mentions the 'singing of psalms and hymns' it does not mention instrumental music as an element of worship. Is instrumental music an appropriate component of corporate worship?

Instrumental music is used in a variety of contexts in scripture⁵ and we thus reject the teaching of some that musical instruments should not be used at all in corporate worship. We also acknowledge, nonetheless, that corporate worship can truly and fully occur without musical instruments.

When instruments are used to accompany corporate singing, the overarching purpose of the instruments is to support and assist the singing itself. This implies that the instruments be played so that the congregation can sing with one voice; keeping both rhythm and harmony.

Question: Can instrumental music be used when nobody is singing?

When instruments are used other than as accompanying congregational singing, the purpose should be to direct the congregations hearts and minds towards the glory of God. We use music during the prelude as a way to prepare heart and minds for the worship service, during the offertory as a way of drawing hearts and minds to a thankful response of God's grace, and during the postlude as a way of drawing hearts and minds to celebrate our redemption. Music is also used in limited settings as 'special music' in order to draw the congregations hearts and minds to give glory to God.

Since the purpose of solo instrumentation is to draw both the heart and mind toward God, we seek to play music that has well known associations to God honoring hymns and songs. While this does not exclude the use of songs that do not have strong associations to Christian lyrics (much classical music falls into this category for example) it is generally advisable to use songs associated with Christian content. It is also inadvisable to use secular songs that have been adapted with Christian lyrics if the association with the secular context is such that it overpowers the alternative Christian message.

Question: What instruments *can be used* in corporate worship? (Or, can we use drums, electric guitars and bongos?)

The BCO gives excellent guidance when it states that "The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given His Church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be

4. John 4:21-24

5. 2 Sam. 6:5, I Kings 10:12, 1 Chronicles 16:5, 1 Chronicles 25:1, Neh. 12:27, Psalm 150 (and many others), Rev. 5:6-10.

forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, that all things be done decently and in order⁶ ..."

It is important to note that while neither drums, bongos or electric guitars are mentioned in scripture, neither are the piano or French horn. Nonetheless, the Bible mentions all types of instruments (strings, percussion, and wind⁷) in the context of corporate worship and they are thus acceptable for worshipping God.

When deciding what instruments are acceptable for CCC we must take into account the associations that may exist in the congregation between the instruments themselves and the cultural context in which they are most often used. It is very difficult to maintain a wise balance in this regard since generational, cultural and ethnic factors come into play.

Electric guitars may, for example, cause some elder members to associate more with Elvis Presley and the Beatles than with songs of reverence and praise. Pianos and organs may, in themselves, cause some younger members to associate more with elevators and shopping malls than with songs of reverence and praise. It is important to understand that no musical instrument is intrinsically more noble or worshipful than others which implies that the cultural background of the congregation is a relevant factor in determining musical style.

Question: What instruments *should* CCC use for corporate worship?

Like many modern congregations, the local body at CCC represents a variety of generations, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Since the musical style of a particular culture or generation is not intrinsically superior to any other, we strive to maintain a mix of musical styles. We recommend that the music of the church expand to include a greater use of Psalmody on the one hand while at the same time expanding to include a greater use of modern hymns on the other. Given the cultural makeup of CCC we recommend little use of percussion. In all cases, the songs must be true and strive to stir the heart towards the praise of God.

We recommend appropriate use of guitar, piano, keyboard, and any other instrument if such music is consistent with the principles found in scriptures, the BCO, the WCF and within these guidelines.

6. BCO 47-6

7. Bells, flutes, cymbals, harp, horns (trumpets), lyre, rams horn, sistrum (rattler),