

MUSIC PHILOSOPHY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (ARP) OF COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

First Presbyterian Church (ARP) of Columbia, South Carolina is a congregation of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Our denomination's Directory for Public Worship (Draft 2006) provides general principles for public worship in our congregation, and specifically (in Chapter V section 5) in relationship to praise, in the following words:

5. PSALMS, HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night.
to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.¹¹²

a. The Word of God appoints that musical offerings, both vocal and instrumental, be made to God as part of His worship.¹¹³ Musical offerings are made to God at His command, ¹¹⁴ for His own glory,¹¹⁵ and for the help, consolation, joy, and edification of His people.¹¹⁶

Though some are particularly equipped for singing, for playing musical instruments, and for training and leading in the musical offerings to God, ¹¹⁷ yet it is the privilege and duty of all to join in the praises and to sing to the Lord.¹¹⁸

b. Because God has enabled some of His people in special ways for making music,¹¹⁹ it is fitting that the musical offerings of individuals or groups within the congregation be included within the public worship of God. As members of the body join their hearts with the minister in making corporate prayers to God, so they should join their hearts with singers and musicians for the offering of music in the worship of God.

c. As the minister must guard his heart to see that he preaches only for the glory of God and the good of His people, so musicians must guard their hearts to see that their music be offered to the glory of God and the edification of His people.¹²⁰ Music intended solely for entertainment or human pleasure has no place in a worship service, though such music may have great value in other settings.

d. The Psalms of the Holy Scripture ought to be used regularly in the public worship of God. This collection of thanksgivings, lamentations, confessions, petitions, and praises formed the book of praise for Israel,¹²¹ and became in part the basis of praise in the New Testament Church.¹²² They should be sung frequently, whether by one, by several, or by all the people of God. They also may be prayed, read, or chanted by one, in unison, or responsively.¹²³

e. Other hymns and spiritual songs may also be used, provided that their content is in agreement with the Word of God. The Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, and the doctrinal standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, should guide us in the use and composition of such other hymns and spiritual songs.

f. All music used in the worship service shall be under the authority of the minister and the session.¹²⁴

- 112. Ps. 92:1-4 (ESV).
- 113. Ps. 33:1-3; see I Chron. 25 and II Chron. 29:25-30.
- 114. II Chron. 29:25, Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16.
- 115. Ps. 96:1-9.
- 116. Ps. 57, 147:1-3; I Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16-17; II Thess. 2:15-17.
- 117. I Chron. 15:22, I Cor. 14:26.
- 118. Ps. 150:6.
- 119. I Chron. 15:16-24, I Cor. 14:26.
- 120. I Cor. 10:31, 14:26.
- 121. II Chron. 29:25-30.
- 122. Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, James 5:13.
- 123. See above, V.B.2.d.
- 124. FOG I.A.2, X.B.1.a, XI.B.2.k-l. (F.O.G. = Form of Government)

The specific application of these principles to our life as a particular church is here expressed in terms of a statement of a concise statement of belief and an exposition of the practice to which we aspire as God's people.

GENERAL STATEMENT OF BELIEF

We believe that:

- (i) All of our music should be submitted to the Lordship of Christ;
- (ii) All musical activities in which we engage are aspects of our whole-of-life worship;
- (iii) All music employed in our church life should be thoughtful and excellent; and
- (iv) All of the contexts in which music is used in the life of our fellowship should be taken into account in its selection and employment. There should be opportunities for appropriate diversity in our music in corporate worship and for a variety of styles outside that context (such as at retreats, conferences, classes, meetings, etc.).

STATEMENT INTERPRETATION

First Presbyterian Church recognizes that the New Testament has relatively little to say about a specific order of liturgy, and gives us only possible glimpses of the worship content and style of praise among the first Christians (e.g. in the possible quotations from early hymns in such passages as Phil. 2:5-11), or specifically about the style or instrumentation in musical accompaniment. Nevertheless, we believe that Scripture as a whole provides us with fundamental principles and guidelines that govern our worship. These principles give rise to the following convictions.

The worship music at the First Presbyterian Church (ARP) of Columbia, South Carolina should be centered on God (Pss. 22:22; 100:1ff, *et passim* in the Book of Psalms), and offered to him as praise (Ps. 48:1ff) for himself, for his work in creation, providence and redemption (Rev. 4:8, 11; 5:9-10), and for his presence with his people (Ps. 46:5, 7, 11; Matt. 18:20; 2 Cor. 13:14). It should accompany and enable God's people in the proclamation of the riches of the gospel, in offering prayer and thanksgiving (Pss. 92:1ff; 103:1ff; 107:1ff), and also give appropriate expression to our lamentations (Pss. 42:5; 102:1ff), confessions of sin, and cries for mercy (Pss. 51:1ff).

In our worship, our music should be a vehicle for the expression of every aspect of the gospel. We are called to edify (1 Cor. 14:26), admonish and teach one another in the body of Christ (Col. 3:16). Scripture not only affirms that sung praise is a God-given vehicle for doing this, but also contains principles, directives and examples that should guide our use of music in worship. Furthermore, Scripture itself provides us with the best

text for psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, the inspiration for compositions of our own, and teaching which will inform and guide instrumental arrangements and accompaniment (Ps. 119:54; 2 Tim. 3:16). While the New Testament gives no specific directives as to instrumentation, both the classical meaning of the Greek term “psalm” (to pluck, play a stringed instrument), and the references to musical instrumentation in the description of the worship of heaven (Rev. 5:8) suggest that the legitimacy of a variety of instrumentation in the sanctuary worship of the Old Testament period (Pss. 149:1,3; 150:1,3-5) is also true for worship expressing New Testament faith.

Since the church’s calling is to proclaim the excellencies of the God who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 3:9), the worship music at the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina should always have as its “chief end . . . to glorify God and enjoy him” (Pss. 86:9-12; 108:1-5). The church is committed to this litmus test for our choice of words in praise, musical accompaniment, arrangement, and participants (Ps. 87:7).

This vision of worship should find expression in the manner in which we pursue excellence (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 8:1) in carefully chosen, skillfully led praise (1 Chron. 15:22; Ps. 33:1-3), and therefore adequately rehearsed music, performed by talented musicians within our fellowship (2 Chron. 34:12) all of whom share this common goal of glorifying and enjoying God (Ps. 24:3-4). All of our musical offerings should therefore be expressions of a biblically-grounded theology (Psa. 119:171, and chosen with God-honoring purpose suited to each particular service of worship and to the differing contexts of the various gatherings of the church.

While all of music is under the Lordship of Christ (Heb. 2:10-12) and is offered to the glory of God through the help of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18-20), our musical praise should be particularly focused in congregational singing, listening and learning (Ps. 111:1; 149:1). This appropriately reflects the fact that biblical song not only articulates worship, praise and prayer to God, but also frequently addresses others in the congregation (Eph. 5:19) and is also often concerned with the believer’s own situation (Ps. 13:1ff) and while never self-centered is, on occasion, self-addressed (Ps. 42:5).

As in all of our worship, within these parameters our musically-accompanied worship should seek to reflect all the affections to which faith gives rise, touching all points in the spectrum of emotions delineated in Scripture, not least of which are the joy of being a Christian (Pss. 47:1; 67:4), and a thankful, grateful spirit (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).