

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CHURCH CHOIRS:

AN EXAMINATION OF RELEVANCY IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN CHURCHES

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By

Leon F. Boss

Lynchburg, Virginia

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## ABSTRACT

### CHURCH CHOIRS:

#### AN EXAMINATION OF RELEVANCY IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN CHURCHES

Leon F. Boss

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

Mentor: Dr. Charlie Davidson

With the rapid development of musical expressions of today's culture, new church starts, and the changing culture, it begs the question, "Are choirs needed?" The purpose of this paper is to show through biblical, historical and cultural evidence that the church choir is relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American Church.

The research will offer direction, guidance and insight for those who are considering beginning a church choir; maintaining a church choir or considering discontinuing the church choir. The research will show that the choir is more than a method of ministry; the choir is a musical expression to God, an intricate part of worship, and foundational to corporate worship in principle.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Statement of Limitations.....	3
Theoretical Basis.....	3
Statement of Methodology.....	4
Literature Review.....	6
CHAPTER II. BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF THE CHURCH CHOIR. ....	15
Examining Biblical Evidence.....	15
Examining Historical Evidence.....	23
CHAPTER III. THE CULTURE OF 21 <sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AMERICA.....	31
Defining Post-Modernism.....	31
Understanding the Culture of America.....	36
CHAPTER IV. THE TREND OF CHURCH CHOIRS IN THE 21ST CENTURY.....	42
Questionnaire Survey.....	44
Factors Contributing to the Decline of the Choir.....	47
CHAPTER V. FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES.....	54
Paradigm Shift.....	61
Worship Leading Choir Paradigm.....	63
Outward Signs.....	63
Inward Signs.....	68
Contributions and Benefits of the Choir.....	71
CHAPTER VI. ESTABLISHING CHOIRS THAT ARE RELEVANT.....	74
Establishing a New Choir.....	74
Renewing the Established Choir.....	81
The Future of the Choir.....	96
CONCLUSION.....	108
APPENDIX A.....	115
APPENDIX B.....	118
BIBILIOGRAPHY.....	122
VITA.....	126

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A buzz word often used in today's worship music is relevance. The word *relevance* is used to make decisions regarding types of music and styles of worship leading. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines relevance as "closely connected or appropriate to the matter at hand."<sup>1</sup> To be understood in today's culture, one needs to be practical and able to apply his or her thoughts and mannerisms in an understandable way. Today's churches are scrambling in an effort to be relevant, especially with the use of church choirs. There has been a paradigm shift when it comes to the church choir being used in a worship service. A number of churches who have used choirs for decades are now discontinuing their use. Recently, a large church in Irmo, South Carolina did away with its adult choir in favor of a praise team and worship band. In Tennessee, another large church which had hundreds in their adult choir discontinued the adult choir ministry in favor of a praise team and worship band. This scenario of removing the adult choir and using a praise team and worship bands can be found across denominational lines and throughout America. The leadership in the churches mentioned above, and others throughout America, have determined that choirs and the style of music choirs presented were no longer relevant to postmodern America. New churches are being started and growing without the presence of a church choir. The use of church choirs in worship is a serious issue, in that it affects the involvement of church members who want to use their musical gifts in worship. It also impacts the preparation and education of future worship leaders, also known as ministers of music.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. "Relevance."

### **Statement of the Problem**

The question that needs to be asked and answered “Is the church choir relevant in the 21st century American church? The purpose of this paper is to reach a definitive conclusion that the church choir is relevant in today’s American church. In determining the relevancy of the church choir two problems need to be addressed: (1) the style of music as relates to the culture; (2) the availability of resources such as vocal singers, the quality of musicianship, and time. Two specific terminologies that will be used are traditional choir and worshiping choir. The traditional choir model is one that of performing choral music that is sung to God in behalf of the congregation. The traditional choir is formal in appearance and the style of music ranges from the choral classic standard to the modern choral arrangements. The worshiping choir model is one that uses music that is more God focused or upward focused. The worshiping choir is less formal in approach and often uses praise and worship songs as specials which include congregational participation. The distinction between the traditional and worshiping choir will be discussed in detail as it relates to culture and relevancy in today’s American church.

When it comes to describing the styles of worship services, three styles will be mentioned: (1) the traditional service which is predominately hymn-driven with a form of liturgy. The traditional service uses choirs, with instrumental accompaniment such as an organ, piano and sometimes a small instrumental group or orchestra; (2) the blended service includes worship songs, hymns, choirs, orchestra and small vocal ensembles known as praise teams. Instrumental accompaniment includes organ, piano, an orchestra or a small rhythm section and is less liturgical in form; (3) the contemporary service predominately uses a band, vocal singers, and performs the most recent praise and worship songs with an occasional hymn. Usually, there

is not a choir in the contemporary service. If there is a choir, it would be more of a choir that backs up the vocal singers and band.

### **Statement of Limitations**

In determining the relevancy of church choirs, styles of worship will be discussed. The issues dealing with contemporary worship verses blended worship or traditional worship is not the focus of the paper nor will they be discussed. Choirs can be used in any type of service. The discussions will remain focused on the relevancy, purposes, and usage of the church choir. The research consists of opinions made by ministers of music, worship leaders, and bi vocational music leaders only. Therefore, the opinion pastors and other clergy were not included.

### **Theoretical Basis**

There is biblical and historical evidence that supports the use of choirs in worship. Biblically, choirs have been a part of the worship experience as far back as the Temple worship. First Chronicles 15:16 says, “David also ordered the Levite leaders to appoint a choir of Levites who were singers and musicians to sing joyful songs to the accompaniment of harps, lyres and cymbals.” Later, in the same chapter, David appoints a Levite named Kenaniah as the choir leader. The purpose of the choir was to lead the people in worship before the Ark of the Lord. First Chronicles 23:30 says “The Levites (4,000 of them) each morning and evening stood before the Lord to sing songs of thanks and praise to him.” In *Called to Worship*, Whaley says, “the choiring priest would belt out lyrics of praise, accompanied by musical instruments that the aged king had crafted himself.”<sup>2</sup> Second Chronicles 5:13 says that when the Ark was brought into the

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<sup>2</sup> Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of our Response to God’s Calling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 152.



Temple Solomon built, “The trumpeters and the singers performed together in unison to praise and give thanks to the Lord.” In Nehemiah 12, there is further evidence of the use of a worship choir: “I led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs to give thanks...the two choirs that were giving thanks then proceeded to the temple of God, where they took their places... they played and sang loudly under the direction of Jezrah the choir director.”<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the choir in the Old Testament was to minister to God and the people at the dedication of the Jerusalem wall. Later, the choir moved to the Temple of God to continue ministering to God and the people.

Historically, choirs can be found dating from the medieval period through the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods. As in other genres of music, choral music underwent a period of experimentation and development during the 20th century. While few well-known composers focused primarily on choral music, most significant composers of the early 20th century produced some fine examples that have entered the repertoire. Choral music saw resurgence in church choirs, through different styles of music such as gospel, black gospel, evangelical music, and contemporary music. In the early 21st century, church choirs are still being used, yet the emergence of praise and worship music has led to a style of worship known as contemporary music and worship.

### **Statement of Methodology**

To determine the use of choirs in worship, chapter 2 will focus on the biblical and historical evidence of choirs in worship. Evidence from the Old Testament and the support for music in worship from the New Testament will be given. Historical evidence of the use of choirs will be given beginning with the early church and through the present day. Historical evidence

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<sup>3</sup> Nehemiah 12: 31, 40, 42.

will show how choirs adapted to culture and the music of that culture. Chapter 3 will look at post-modernism and how the style of post-modern music has impacted church music.

Understanding post-modern music will help in selecting music that is relevant for those participating in choir ministries. Understanding the culture will influence the use of music and choirs. Chapter 4 will look at trends of church choirs in the 21st century. Data will be given showing the attendance of church members and its relationship to choir membership. Issues that are contributing to the decline and the usage of church choirs will also be discussed. A survey was taken and answers to the survey will be given in regard to the choir of the present day culture and the future of the choir.

Chapter 5 is the research portion of the paper. The chapter will discuss the relevancy of the choir in the 21st century American church as it relates to the culture, style of music, the amount of time required of individuals, and implications for the music leadership. The purpose and function of the choir will be addressed bringing clarity to the usage of choirs in worship. A look at the shifting paradigm from traditional choirs to worshipping choirs will be discussed. As culture changes so does the music. Choirs must adapt to the changes in culture and music, otherwise the choir will risk becoming dated and ineffective in ministering to the people. Chapter 6 is an expansion of the research in chapter 5, which includes formulating ideas in developing a new choir, the renewing of an established choir and the future of the church choir. Examples will be given on how to start a new choir for the small to medium size church and for the contemporary church. Recommendations will also be given on how to revive the established choir. The renewed choir involves the size of the choir, music capabilities, organization, planning and spiritual teaching in the areas of personal worship and worship leading. The future

of the choir will have an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit and the role of the pastor and ministerial leadership as they relate to the use of choirs in worship.

The conclusion will show that there has been a flawed ideology in determining the use of church choirs in the worship service. The theory that church choirs are no longer relevant due to the culture cannot be validated. God created everything for His pleasure and people were created to have fellowship with God and worship Him. Therefore, the use of music in worship and the choir is God's idea. The conclusion will bring together everything discussed and will show that the choir is relevant in the 21st century American church and continues to be a vital part of the worshipping church.

### **Literature Review**

The following is a review of the main literature used to determine the relevancy of choirs in worship for the 21st Century American Church.

Bakke, Ray. *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987.

Ron Bakke focuses on the importance of understanding the culture and community in which a person ministers. Specifically, Bakke refers to the urban and inner city culture. Bakke's observations and teachings help prepare the minister not only to preach but to provide worship experiences relevant to the culture. Principles can be drawn from Bakke's book to determine the relevancy of the use of choirs in worship.

Callahan, Kennon L. *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strong, Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 2010.

Kennon Callahan includes a chapter dedicated to the use of choirs in worship. Callahan looks at the conflict of time, availability of resources, and the space required for a worship choir.

Callahan effectively discusses the placement of choirs off center stage rather than being directly behind the pulpit.

Cherry, Constance M. *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.

Constance Cherry's book includes building a structure for worship. Cherry specifically mentions the "emerging church as a church more interested in developing discipleship. Cherry discusses the use of choirs and puts an emphasis on the leading of the Holy Spirit in determining the structure of worship. Cherry's book clarifies that not all choirs fit every church. However, it does not mean that the choir as a whole is no longer relevant.

Engle, Paul E. and Randall E. Engle. *Serving in your Church Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Paul and Randall Engle take a historical as well as contemporary look into worship services and the use of choirs and anthems. The people are encouraged to use their minds to process the meaning of the anthems. Engle's specifically mentions the importance of musical excellence and understanding the text so that the message can be understood. Good insights are given so that the choir leader can have a better understanding of the importance of the message the choir provides.

Ferguson, John. "Church Choirs Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." *Reformed Liturgy and Music*. no.19 (June 1985).

John Ferguson's article gives a brief historical background of the use of choirs in worship. Ferguson emphasizes the uniqueness of today's choirs which are made up of volunteers. Most church choirs will have less than fifty members thus, informing the choir leader that music selections should be in the realm of the choir's capability as well as relating to the culture.

Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan K. Bolger. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2005.

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger discuss the rise of the emerging church and how community can be created within the post-modern culture. Gibbs' book discusses the concepts of post-modernism and the influence it has on the church. Music can be adapted and be relative to the post-modern community. The book does not mention choirs specifically. However, choirs can be creatively used in worship in a post-modern community as long as there is understanding of the cultural language, terminology, and style of music.

Grout, Donald Jay. *A History of Western Music*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1973.

Donald Grout's book gives a detailed historical look at church music and worship. Grout's discussion on the development of worship styles and forms include the development of choirs beginning in the early church. Grout's analysis reveals a pattern in which the choir is seen going through numerous transformations and adaptations through all of the major periods of history up to the 20th century. However, the 21st century has not yet been written. If adaptation can take place for the choir for almost 2,000 years, then adaptation of choirs as it relates to culture can take place in the 21st century.

Harland, Mike. *Seven Words of Worship: The Key to a Lifetime of Experiencing God*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.

Mike Harland's book brings to light an important factor concerning the relevance of choirs in worship: the role of the pastor. Harland gives biblical support to his understanding of the pastor as the true worship leader and the one who gives Godly direction to the church and ministerial staff. Through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the pastor will most likely determine the use of choirs in worship. Therefore, it is important that the music leader and the pastor have the same mind, heart, and expectations when it comes to having a choir in worship.

Hustad, Don. *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal*. Carol Stream, IL: Hope Pub., 1993.

Don Hustad's book shows the specific characteristics of the post-modern era which are valuable to understanding the culture as it relates to church music and choirs. Hustad emphasizes that choral singing is different from congregational singing. Hustad gives a discussion of Hebrew worship and the singing of the psalms. A renewal in worship has taken place within the past thirty years and the choral music has changed with the musical styles.

Jones, Paul S. *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006.

Paul Jones's book addresses a number of issues facing church music and worship. Jones's book emphasizes pure praise and worship to God. Jones gives biblical examples as a defense for his understanding of what worship today should look like. Jones gives a discussion against the use of contemporary or pop music, citing that pop music is self-centered. Jones brings a good awareness and, in a sense, a warning of the danger of adapting church music for self rather than for God's glory. It would be good to heed Jones's concerns, for the choir of the present and the future must be on guard against drawing attention to self rather than God. However, one should be open to the use of today's style of music, for God can use any style to bring glory to Himself and minister to the people.

Kauflin, Bob. *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*. Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2008.

Bob Kauflin's book focuses on the responsibility of worship leaders to lead the congregation to an encounter with God. Therefore, every worship leader, which includes choir members, must encounter God themselves. Kauflin focuses on the leading and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Kauflin, Bob. "Choirs in Worship." *Worshipmatters.com*. <http://www.worshipmatters.com/2008/06/26/choirs-in-worship>.

Bob Kauflin's article looks at the several types of choirs that can be used in the worship service. Kauflin emphasizes the importance of excellence not just musically, but spiritually. Kauflin's article offers insights in the development of a new choir and talks about the pros and cons of using a choir in worship.

Liesch, Barry *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2008.

Barry Liesch's book discusses the culture of the post-modern era. In the book, discussion is given on the experiential nature of the culture. Therefore, the church should offer a wide variety of worship styles and music which involves the use of church choirs. The use of choirs offers more involvement for people to use their musical gifts.

Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Music of the Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

Herbert Lockyer researches music used in the worship of God throughout the Old and New Testament. Lockyer uses scripture to support his research. In the Old Testament, Lockyer discusses in detail how the choir was used in worship and the purpose of the choir in Hebrew worship.

Miller, Dave. *Singing and New Testament Worship: Are Solos, Choirs and Vocal Bands Scriptural?* Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1994.

Dave Miller researches music and worship in the New Testament. Miller uses scripture and historical evidence to conclude that the use of choirs as well as other forms of singing is supported by scripture. Choirs as well as other forms of music which include the congregation should focus on God's glory and giving Him all the praise and honor.

Moore, Dwayne. *Pure Praise: A Heart Focused Bible Study on Worship*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing Company, 2009.

Dwayne Moore's book is a study for worship leaders which includes choirs in the area of private and corporate worship. The book focuses on methods and concepts that will aid the choir members in their spiritual growth of worshipping God. As the choir members grow in their private worship, their corporate worship will become more authentic. The study is designed to last nine weeks, and it is an excellent teaching tool for the rehearsal time.

Morgenthaler, Sally. *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.

Sally Morgenthaler emphasizes that choir music must be relevant and understandable in today's culture. Morgenthaler advocates changing the choral sound from the traditional choral sound to a more modern sound that fits the style of the music. In today's culture, non-believers and new believers have not grown up in the choral tradition. Therefore, the traditional choral sound and music will be foreign to them.

Nolan, Rory. *The Worshiping Artist: Equipping You and Your Ministry Team to Lead Others in Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.

Rory Nolan emphasizes the pure ascription of praise and worship to God. Suggestions are offered for both private and corporate worship such as focusing on the attributes of God. Nolan brings awareness that God is the initiator in worship. The book offers opportunity for teaching spiritual truths in rehearsal and applying private worship practices.

Olson, David T. *The American Church in Crisis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

David Olson predicts and gives a detailed discussion on surveys of the population growth, population shifts, and the decline of membership in the church through the year 2020. Though choirs are not mentioned specifically, the results are important in that the membership involvement in the church will directly affect the choir membership involvement. The information is helpful as the church leadership looks at the present and future trends in



determining the use of the choir in worship. Active choir membership involvement will depend on the number of active church members involved.

Redman, Rod. *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Rod Redman discusses the influence of post-modern music in the church. Through music, a worship renewal began to take place in the 1960s. The style of light pop and rock music began to surface through youth music and youth musicals. The rhythms and sounds of the music resembled that of the music playing on the radio stations. The music and text allowed the believer to experience God in a new way. The youth music was the first time choirs began to make adaptation to the culture in the late 20th century.

Schaller, Lyle E. *The Rural Church: Learning From Three Decades of Change*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1988.

Lyle Schaller gives an in-depth look at rural America and the population shift to urban and suburban areas. Rural villages located in close proximity to suburban areas have seen a growth in church membership. However, rural villages that are not close to the suburban areas have seen a decline in both population and church attendance. The information is helpful to those who lead the worship service in understanding the resources that are available when it comes to using a choir in the worship service. The resources include choir members, purchasing of music, and the style of music.

USDA, *Understanding Rural America*. United States Department of Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 710. February 1995. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/understd.htm>.

The USDA report gives extensive information on the population settlement in rural America. The report is divided regionally and includes the economic status of the regions and the population. The report also gives the main industry of those regions. The report reveals that rural America is extremely diverse, unlike the more uniform and agriculture times of the early 20<sup>th</sup>

century. Therefore, knowing the culture will help determine the type of church ministry as well as worship music, which includes the use of choirs.

Veith, Gene Edward Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994.

Gene Veith gives a detailed look at the postmodern era and how today's culture thinks and acts. The choir in worship is not mentioned. However, Veith makes the point that today's culture is looking for some kind of truth even though their lifestyle may reflect differently. It is important to speak the language of the culture. Therefore, if choirs are used in worship, the music must be in the language of the culture without distorting the message.

Webber, Robert. *Worship Old and New*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Robert Webber's book gives some insight into the use of a new choir. While choirs traditionally have been placed directly behind the pulpit on the platform, Webber suggests moving the choir off center either to the left or right. The new placement of the choir will give the choir a more participatory look rather than a performance look.

Wells, David F. *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.

David Wells looks at the post-modern issues facing America as well as the world. The large shifts in populations toward the cities have created their own environment. The growth of cities in America is not just within America, but from all around the world. Therefore, numerous world views take place in each environment which includes the language of music. The church cannot run from the culture. However, the church can go to the culture and share the gospel of Christ which includes worship style, use of instrumentation, and the use of choirs. In his book, David Wells suggests the use of choirs will not work in certain cultures or environment. It does not mean that the choir as a whole is irrelevant; it simply means a choir does not fit every church

environment.

Whaley, Vernon M. *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Our Response to God's Call*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009.

Vernon Whaley looks at the Scripture as the foundation for worship and the music for worship. Specifically, Whaley looks at those who were in leadership and how the worship of the Old Testament serves as a model for worship in today's culture. The use of the choir and choral forms of music must have God as the object of their worship.

Williamson, Dave. "God Singers: A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21st Century." (Manuscript, 2010).

Dave Williamson looks at developing choirs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main emphasis of the book is moving the choir from the traditional approach of worship to a worshipping choir. Suggestions are given and concepts are explored to begin a new choir or rework an established choir, especially in the area of spiritual teachings on worship.

Wilson, Jr. Eli. *Equipping the Church Choir for Ministry: A Resource for Church Music Leaders and Choir Members*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008.

Eli Wilson discusses the mechanics of the choir with scriptural support. Wilson discusses the organization, the planning, the preparation and the rehearsal of the choir. Emphasis is given to musical excellence and the importance of quality rehearsal time as it prepares the choir for the worship of God both musically and spiritually.

WordIQ.com. "Postmodern Music." [http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Postmodern\\_music](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Postmodern_music).

"Postmodern Music" is an article that gives descriptive details and a definition of postmodern music. Names of musicians and musical artists are mentioned as key people who influenced postmodern music. The article tracks the progression and development of postmodern music. A logical conclusion can be drawn from the article that postmodern music has a direct effect on church music of the 60s and 70s and is still influencing church music today.

## CHAPTER II

## BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF THE CHURCH CHOIR

**Biblical Evidence**

In discussing the relevancy of the church choir, one must first come to understand its meaning. The English word choir comes from the Greek “*choros* via the Latin *chorus*.”<sup>4</sup> The choir can be traced back to the ancient Greek tragedies and comedies. The purpose of the choir in secular Greek was to serve as a commentary, a representative of the people. As the religious choir developed in the Temple worship and throughout history of the church, its definition became simple: “A body of church singers as opposed to secular singers”<sup>5</sup>

The Old Testament reveals the importance of music in the Hebrew worship of God, also known as Yahweh. The most important form of music in the Hebrew worship was the song. Moses was the author of a number of songs that captured the memory of the mighty acts of God. Only three of the songs have been preserved in Scripture: “(1) the song of Moses; The Red Sea Song (Exodus 15:1-18), (2) Moses’ Psalms (Ps. 90) and (3) A Farewell Song (Duet.32:1-43)”<sup>6</sup> Hannah lifted up a song of praise in the dedication of her son Samuel. When David and the Israelite army returned from destroying the Philistines, women came out from all the towns singing and dancing with tambourines and cymbals (1 Samuel 18:6, 7). Yet, these were not choirs, but large groups of people celebrating and worshiping God through music. When did the

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<sup>4</sup> John Ferguson, “Church Choirs Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 19, no.3 (June 1985): 138.

<sup>5</sup> William Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1972), 157.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Music of the Bible*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 14.

choir come into its creation, purpose, and function? It began with King David and continued with King Solomon.

King David was the person who changed the nature of worship and gave instructions for duties within Temple worship. The sacrificial Temple worship was led by trained and ordained directors, singers, and instrumentalist from the Tribe of Levi. The Levites appointed singers from the families of “Asaph the ‘gatherer,’ Korah the ‘bald,’ Hermand the ‘faithful,’ Ethan the ‘longed lived,’ Jeduthun the ‘pointer,’ and others to perform the music of Temple worship.”<sup>7</sup> Asaph penned at least a dozen canonical psalms (Psalms 50, 73-83), and Asaph was the chief musician appointed by David. Jeduthun and Heman were among those chosen to expressively give thanks to the Lord (1 Chronicles 16:41). The singers and choirs were led by a director who understood music. 1 Chronicles 15:22 says, “And Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it.” In addition to weekly worship practices in the Temple, David appointed a team of priests to serve as musicians before the Ark of God. “Each morning and evening as offerings burned at the altar, the choir would descant to the sounds of trumps, chimes, and gongs and music would be forever tied to the worship of the Almighty.”<sup>8</sup> 1 Chronicles 25 says:

David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men who performed this service: <sup>2</sup> from the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah and Asarelah. The sons of Asaph were under the supervision of Asaph, who prophesied under the king's supervision. <sup>3</sup> As for Jeduthun, from his sons Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah and Mattithiah, six in all, under the supervision of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the LORD. <sup>4</sup> As for Heman, from his sons: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shubael and Jerimoth; Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti and Romamti-Ezer;

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<sup>7</sup> Roger N. Deschiner, *Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Whaley. 151.

Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir and Mahazioth.<sup>5</sup> All these were sons of Heman the king's seer. They were given him through the promises of God to exalt him. God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king.<sup>7</sup> Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD—they numbered 288.<sup>8</sup> Young and old alike, teacher as well as students, cast lots for their duties.

While the choir is not specifically mentioned, the Scriptures do indicate the importance of preparation for all musicians which include singers. 1 Chronicles 25:6 indicates that the Levites were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the Temple of the Lord, and for the ministry in the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. “The Levites were ever mindful of the fact that they were preparing for an audience of one who is never receptive to mediocrity.”<sup>9</sup> Herbert Lockyer in his book *All the Music of the Bible* says, “The essential purpose of instrumental music was to underlie a song thought, to make the sung word more easily understood.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, David assigned 4,000 Levites to play musical instruments. King David put into motion what public worship would look like in the Temple.

The fact that an emphasis was placed on the temple singing being directed and accompanied by trained and skilled musicians indicates that part of the reason for having a choir was to offer particularly beautiful singing to the Lord; singing that was beyond the capability of the congregation itself. The Scriptures indicate that the Levites were musicians set apart for the ministry through music in the Temple seven days a week: “Those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the Temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night” (1 Chronicles 16:37).

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<sup>9</sup> Eli Wilson Jr. *Equipping the Church Choir for Ministry: A Resource for Church Music Leaders and Choir Members* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008), 60.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Music of the Bible: An Exploration of Musical Expression in Scripture and Church Hymnody* (Peabody, MA : Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 6.

Not only were there week day responsibilities, but week night responsibilities as well. When the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Jerusalem, the Scriptures state that after the celebrations had ended, “David left Asaph and his associates before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord to minister there regularly, according to each day’s requirement” (1 Chronicles 16:37). What were the requirements of the musicians? Eli Wilson Jr. provides some insight on the requirements by quoting William Mc Elrath when he says:

There were three main worship services each day. Each service required a different set of music. On the Sabbath, they were longer and required much more music. Three times a year there were great festivals that required still more special music and sometimes even larger choirs. Each of the three daily worship services included music that the Levites had to both play and sing for memory. Music for the Monday worship services was different from the music for the Tuesday services and the music for the Tuesday services from the Wednesday services and so on.”<sup>11</sup>

The culture of the Old Testament days allowed the time for preparation for Temple worship. Extended amount of time had to be allowed for rehearsal as well as good organization with a purpose in mind.

When the Ark was brought to the Temple Solomon had built, the scriptures tell us “The trumpeters and singers performed together in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord” (2 Chronicles 5:13). While the Scriptures do not specifically use the term “choir,” it has been interpreted that the singers were in some form a choir due to the large number of instrumental players. If the instruments purpose is to underlie the song, then a large choir of at least a hundred or more would have to be assembled so that the words could be understood. Jehoshaphat appointed singers to “walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. In 2 Chronicles 20:21, at Hezekiah’s rededication of the Temple “The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played (2 Chronicles 29:28).

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<sup>11</sup> Wilson. 60.

Finally, one sees the choir specifically mentioned in Nehemiah at the dedication of the wall Jerusalem. Nehemiah records:

I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall,<sup>39</sup> over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped.<sup>40</sup> The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; the choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.  
Nehemiah 12:31, 38-40

In the last part of verse forty when it says “long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers,” Nehemiah is recalling the time when David had directors and singers. From this, it can be concluded that they were choirs much like the choirs Nehemiah refers to at the Wall dedication. This gives sufficient reason to believe that the singers in the time of David were in fact choirs with choir directors. Nehemiah 12:42 says, “the singers Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer... played and sang loudly under the direction of Jezrahiah the choir director.” The choir’s primary purpose in Old Testament times was to praise God and give Him thanks. The director and the choir were enthusiastic in worshiping God.

The book of Psalms has been called the hymnal of Israel. Many of the Psalms were in an early anthem repertoire for the choirs or a combination of choirs and congregational singing. Thirty-two of the Psalms are specifically called “songs.” “The Psalms were sung in regular sequence following the morning and evening sacrifices on specified days of the week and were accompanied by instruments which occasionally may have interrupted the singing with an



interlude, possibly indicated by the word ‘Selah’.”<sup>12</sup> Since the early Christian church, the Psalms have been a part of worship, including praise, petition and thanksgiving. An example of praise is seen in Psalm 147:1: “Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God, for He is gracious, and a song of Praise is fitting.” An example of Thanksgiving can be seen in Psalm 105:1: “O give thanks to the Lord, call on His name, and make known His deeds among the people.” An example of petition can be seen in Psalm 142:1, 2: “With my voice I cry to the Lord; with my voice I make supplication to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before Him.” The Psalms contain an abundance of references to songs and singing with the emphasis on glorifying God. “The Psalms also demonstrate that singing and songs are part of everyday life.”<sup>13</sup> In the book of Psalms, there is clear evidence of the usage of choirs. The phrase “for the choir director” appears fifty-five times.”<sup>14</sup> Some of the phrases also known as superscriptions refer to the Leader. “The term leader is often translated as choir director based on the assumption that these psalms were sung in a worship setting.”<sup>15</sup> If there are assigned choir directors, then it is obvious there are choirs to lead and direct. Some superscription examples are:

- Psalm 51, for the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone into Bathsheba.
- Psalm 56, for the choir director, according to *Jonath elem rehokim*. A Mikhtam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.
- Psalm 57, for the choir director; set to *Al-tashheth*. A Mikhtam for David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.

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<sup>12</sup> Don Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993), 137.

<sup>13</sup> Don Cusic, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music: Pop, Rock and Worship* (Denver, CO: Greenwood Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Marvin Tate, Harold Wayne Ballard, and W. Dennis Tucker, *An Introduction to Wisdom and Literature and the Psalms* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Tate, Ballard, Tucker. 40.

The Psalms were presented in at least four different modes: 1) presented as a psalm that was sung by one person, 2) presented as a psalm in which a choir answered the solo's chant, 3) presented as an antiphonal psalm sung by two choirs in alternation, and 4) presented as a litany which included a repeated refrain. It can be concluded that the Psalms were put to music. One example from many can be found in Psalm 144:9, 10: "I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you." The poetry of the Psalms has patterns of meter and rhythm of successive syllables. The Psalms were used in a recitative-style musical performance during the Temple worship. "Typically, within the Temple, the Temple choir sang on the people's behalf. Some of the Psalms were sung by two groups. Psalm 24 for example, was sung by two choirs, the recurring phrases facilitating response to the previous verses."<sup>16</sup> The following example is taken from the first four verses of Psalm 24:

Choir 1: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,  
 Choir 2: the world, and all who live in it;  
 Choir 1: For he founded it upon the seas  
 Choir 2: and established it upon the waters.  
 Choir 1: Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?  
 Choir 2: Who may stand in his holy place?  
 Choir 1: He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
 Choir 2: who does not lift up his soul to an idol?

"To preserve any coherent sense of meaning, alternations need to take place verse by verse, not half verse."<sup>17</sup> In the study of Psalmody, it becomes clear the Psalms are the foundation on which church music is based upon. Worship music can include soloists and choirs. Choral music can be relevant with full expressions of praise to God. Biblical choirs were used in special events.

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<sup>16</sup> Lockyer. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Westemeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), 20.

There were directors of music and skilled theologians and musicians who wrote the songs of the people of God.

In New Testament worship, the song is still at the heart of Hebrew worship. In Luke 1:46-55, after the angel appeared to Mary, the virgin sings a song of praise which has come to be known as the “Magnificat,” which is a Latin term meaning “to magnify.” The only suggestion of a possible choir is the announcement of the birth of Christ found in Luke 2:10-14, known as the “Gloria in Excelsis” or “Song of Angels.” Thomas Carlyle, a seventeenth century English historian says, “Music is well said to be the speech of the angels.”<sup>18</sup> However, the New Testament scriptures do not give specific details of a choir and few details are given on the use of choir music in the first century church. However, the apostle Paul gives some insight in the use of music in the early church. In Ephesians 5:18-19, he says, “Be filled with the spirit, speaking to one another in Psalm, and hymns, and spiritual song, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. James 5:13 says, “Is any one cheerful? Let him sing Psalms” (NKJV). There is little doubt that music played a vital role in the New Testament worship. But what about the choir? Did the choir become irrelevant in the first century church? Unlike the Temple worship, the early church was heavily persecuted for their faith, therefore making it impossible to openly and freely worship Christ and having choirs or groups of singers to lead in worship. However, the New Testament does give a picture of a heavenly choir.

In the Book of Revelation, it is revealed to John what worship would be like. Revelation 14: 1-3 says:

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<sup>18</sup> Lockyer, 120.

Then I saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion and with him were 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.<sup>2</sup> And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of mighty ocean waves or the rolling of loud thunder. It was like the sound of many harpists playing together.<sup>3</sup> This great choir sang a wonderful new song in front of the throne of God and before the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. No one could learn this song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

Other translations mention "singers" or they "sang" when it comes to the choir.

Regardless of the number of people, it certainly is clear that the use of choirs and music is a vital part of worship in heaven. If the choir and music is that important in heaven then it should be important on earth.

### **Historical Evidence of the Church Choir**

As the first century church progressed, the choir became less prominent. The early worship music of the Christian church was congregational, and non-professional. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (110 A.D.) wrote: "Now all of you together become a choir so that being harmoniously in concord and receiving the key note from God in unison you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father."<sup>19</sup> Congregational singing was an important part of the early church, which is recorded in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26. The form of congregational singing adopted a synagogue practice from the Temple worship. The Hebrew Psalms were "sung in alternation between a soloist and the congregation."<sup>20</sup> As Christianity spread westward, the Bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose (374 A.D. to 397A.D.), was the first to introduce antiphonal psalmody to the West. As the liturgy developed, the Psalms and hymns became entrusted to the choir instead of the congregation. A short verse was sung by a soloist and repeated by a choir before a prayer or short sentence and repeated again by the choir at the end of the reading. By the early 1500s, the Roman Mass had developed as a form worship, which included what is known

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<sup>19</sup> Dave Miller, *Singing and New Testament Worship: Are Solos, Choirs, and Vocal Bands Scriptural?* (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1994), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1973), 17.

as the choral mass. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Gregorian chant came into being. “There were three main types of chant, the reciting of formulas, the meismatic songs, and the refrains sung by choirs and congregation.”<sup>21</sup> The history of the early church reveals that choirs were used, along with other musical expressions.

Choirs continued to develop during the first 1,500 years of the church. The music took many forms in writing styles and text during that period. With the introduction of polyphony, the nature of the choir began to change. The polyphonic sections were sung by soloist with the choir continuing to sing the chant in unison. By the fifteenth century, the choral singing had expanded from the one line Gregorian to chant to two or more singers on a part. Choral polyphony became the norm with choirs that were small, usually no larger than twenty-four singers. During the Renaissance, the printing of music was established. “Most choirs continued to use large hand written choir books.”<sup>22</sup> In the Medieval period, the earliest notated music of Western Europe is the Gregorian chant, along with a few other types of chant which were later subsumed (or sometimes suppressed) by the Catholic Church. This tradition of a cappella choir singing lasted sometime between the times of St. Ambrose (4th century) and Gregory the Great (6th century).

During the Renaissance, sacred choral music was the principal type of formal or serious music in Western Europe. Many of the great composers of the time composed hundreds of masses, motets and other works for choral singing – mostly a cappella, though there is some dispute over the role of instruments during certain periods and in certain areas. In the Renaissance during the time of Martin Luther, the writing of choral music was not intended for the congregation, but for the choir. Congregational music was largely eliminated in part to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 176.

prevent the interdiction of heretical hymns in worship. A common method was to alternate stanzas of the chorale sung with stanzas sung by the congregation, usually without accompaniment until the early 1600s. Composers for the chorale settings during the early Reformation period aimed at preserving the words and melody of the chorale.

The choir consisted of trained clergy. Theologically, the church retained too much of the Old Testament heritage which included the revival of priest singing. “It is believed that St. Gregory (590 A.D.-605 A.D.) founded or possibly reorganized the *Schola Cantorum* as the papal center for teaching and propagating the official church song.”<sup>23</sup> Before the Reformation of the church in the 1600s, the choir was made up of men only, which included priest and monks. “The pre-reformation choirs worshiped on the peoples behalf, while the laity observed worship from behind closed iron gates leading to the nave of the church.”<sup>24</sup> However, during the Reformation, John Calvin abolished church choirs and they have never returned to play a significant role in Calvinist worship. Calvin’s purpose was to restore the congregational singing and to put less significance on singing by the choir. Martin Luther’s love for historic church music retained the choir and allowed the choir to sing main parts of the service and to lead the congregational hymns.

As Lutheran services evolved, the choir’s role of importance increased. “Sunday worship included a cantata for choir, soloist and instruments, usually based upon the Hymn-of the Day which was a hymn whose text was especially appropriate in response to appointed lessons.”<sup>25</sup> By the sixteenth century, compositions for choirs took the place of the people’s participation. After

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<sup>23</sup> Hustad. 176.

<sup>24</sup> Paul E. Engle and Randall E. Engle. *Serving in your Church Ministry*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2002), The Choir.

<sup>25</sup> Ferguson. 139.

the Reformation, church choirs were being reestablished especially in the Roman Catholic Church. The purpose of the choir shifted from doing the worship to assisting the congregational singing.

During the Baroque period, the choirs were still in strong use. “Many of the composers in this period wrote sacred music for huge aggregations of singers.”<sup>26</sup> During the Baroque period, writing styles, such as the concerto, which often has as many as eight parts, and the Oratorio, which was similar to the opera, used smaller groups of singers for the choir. The Baroque period produced composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Fredrick Handel.

During the eighteenth century, the new world in America was growing. Settlers were arriving in America seeking religious liberty. Revivalism became an important force in all religious life. In the early 18th Century, choirs begin to appear in larger American churches. “Choir singers were trained in singing schools established by churches who were concerned about the poor quality of their congregational singing.”<sup>27</sup> The school met in the evening and was taught by talented musical amateurs that traveled from town to town. In the early 18th century, organs and choirs, located in a rear balcony, began to appear in larger American churches.

During the mid-eighteenth century the use of choirs is seen in the development of the By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the choir revivalist worship was used in several places in the worship service as seen on pg.31 worship service, which included a short prayer, reading of Scripture, followed by another prayer, then congregational singing, preaching, and singing again with a choir. In 1873, preacher and evangelist Dwight L. Moody, with Ira D. Sanky, began their revivalist campaigns. The Moody –Sanky campaigns came to be known as planned revivalism. The revival services

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<sup>26</sup> Grout. 320.

<sup>27</sup> Hustad. 213.

included a choir. The service began with a full half hour of congregational singing. The gospel songs used by Sanky often were introduced as a solo or choir selection. The nineteenth century revivalist worship had developed with the use of the choir in several places of worship, as seen in the following worship order:

Hymns and other music (often called a song service, including choral and/or solo pieces)  
 Prayer (brief)  
 Welcome and announcements  
 Special Music (choir, solo or small group)  
 Offering  
 Solo  
 Sermon  
 Invitation (often lengthy, with hymns)  
 Dismissal (choral Benediction)<sup>28</sup>

The revivalist churches in America favored gospel songs with hymns. The choir literature developed beyond the hymn boundaries in the style of extended hymns or abbreviated anthems. By the nineteenth century, the formal Evangelical had emerged, “with a kinship with Lutheranism or liturgy of the Word.”<sup>29</sup> The order of service called for a more highly developed ritual and the choral selections were usually from recent periods of history. In either case, the choir in American churches began to grow and the choir became more involved in the worship service.

The revivalist evangelism continued into the twentieth century. A new revivalist team developed called Torrey and Alexander. Reuben A. Torrey was the first superintendent of Moody Bible Institute and a trained seminary preacher. Charles Alexander, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, brought the gospel choir. Alexander specialized in leading mass choirs and congregations. An event called The Festival of Song was equally led by the congregation, choir,

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<sup>28</sup>Hustad, 221.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 222.



and soloist, lasting as long as three hours. It was during this time of the revival movement that a revival choir was established. The revival choir was expected to share the prophetic-evangelistic ministry of the evangelist. “Its materials were simple – four part settings of hymns, gospel songs, and chorus choir selections emphasizing the basic gospel and Christian Life experiences.”<sup>30</sup> The choir was seated behind the pulpit with the evangelist.

By the mid-20th century, Billy Graham began to lead evangelistic crusades. The crusades used large choirs made up of combined churches. A platform model emerged out of the revival meetings. The choir was located behind the pulpit with the piano on one side and the organ on the other side of the pulpit. Regardless of church size, new worship centers that were built from the 1950s to the early 1980s followed the revival platform model. In today’s culture, churches are still using the same model. However, there are many churches using the more formal split choir chancels, where the choir is divided into two sections across from one another.

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, church choirs across denominational lines had been made up of paid professionals or people well-trained in the art of singing. Today, most choirs are made up of entirely volunteer singers, with a paid music professional leading the choir in churches that can afford paid ministerial staff. “The large choir of fifty to a hundred singers is an exception in the American Churches.”<sup>31</sup> The volunteer choir has been the essential music force in the American Church. Often, if not in most cases, the volunteer choir does not have a strong individual to lead them in music excellence. Therefore, a paid ministerial staff positions is used so that the music is performed well by the choir.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>31</sup> Ferguson. 140.

During the 1960s and 1970s, music in America was changing. Rhythm seemed to drive the music, while music expression was supported by instruments such as the electronic keyboard, electric guitar, bass guitar drums, and acoustical guitar. Choirs across America were singing anthems and hymns that did not resemble or relate to the culture around them. Steadily, the youth choir came into great numbers during the mid 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. The music was rhythm driven, and the text was relational to the needs of youth as well as evangelistic. The youth choirs were accompanied by a rhythm section or band or accompanied by music that had a band driven track. The adult choirs were still singing anthems of a liturgical nature with organ and piano accompaniment. If the choir was to survive during this period, then changes had to be made in the choral repertoire. Church choirs, particularly among the evangelistic and Pentecostal denominational line, begin singing anthems that had strong rhythm, relative text, and were accompanied by a variety of instruments, such as a rhythm section or even a small orchestral ensemble. The change in choir repertoire has not come without tension. American choral repertoire has been influenced by the Anglican tradition and the new wave of music seen in the 1960s and 1970s was rejected by many.

In the 21st century, the American church choir is faced with a new wave of music called praise and worship songs. The praise and worship song focuses on the glory of God and the relationship between God and the believer. Praise and worship songs are designed to be more experiential with God in the corporate worship service. It has been often called “heartfelt music.” The praise and worship song has been called “contemporary music” because it relates to the most recent needs of the culture and community. Elmer Towns states, “We must understand culture to understand worship”<sup>32</sup> If people work hard to understand the culture of their communities, and

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<sup>32</sup> Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 31.

their country, then they would be able to better understand how the church choir can be used in worship, its function, and the type of repertoire needed that will glorify God and relate to the people. The church cannot run away from culture. For every person won to the kingdom, that person will bring his or her culture with them into the church.

CHAPTER III  
THE CULTURE OF 21ST CENTURY AMERICA

**Defining Post-Modernism**

The overall culture that has defined 20th and 21st century America has been called the post-modern era. To understand the meaning of post-modernism, it is best to understand its roots, which begin with modernity. By the early 21st century, modernity was reaching its peak. During the 20th century, there was an explosion of technology and information. Modernization was driven by the large growth of urbanizations. In America, there was a significant population movement from rural to urban areas. The cities “create their own psychological environments because they draw into their precincts and into close contact with one another people with very different world views.”<sup>33</sup> Modern telecommunications had brought the entire world into every household.

Three elements define modernity:

- 1.) Emphasis on the autonomy of the individual. The result is that modernity is often characterized by a general repudiation of tradition and authority.
- 2.) Modern thought tends toward a strong confidence in the powers of reason in general and the rationality of the specific individual.
- 3.) Reason is usually taken to be pure in an objective way.<sup>34</sup>

Modernity changed the values and meaning of our lives in the context of modernization. During the 21st century, contemporary relativism emerged which suggested that everyone creates his or her own meaning and every meaning is equally valid. Moral values are created by self.

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<sup>33</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2007), 940.

“According to existentialism, there is no inherent meaning or purpose in life.”<sup>35</sup> Existentialism is now a part of the culture and is the philosophical basis of post-modernism.

Most scholars tend to believe that the transition from modernity to post-modernism began in the 1960s. By 1968, student demonstrations against the Vietnam War and demonstrations in Europe suggest that the rebellion was more against modern civilizations, technology, capitalism, and rational planning. The goal was to dismantle the modern world. Modernists value boundaries and presence, and they are interested in depth and form. Post-modernists value interconnection, absence, and surface, and they are anti-form. Modernists value truths, while postmodernists do not believe in absolute truth. Postmodernists believe in tolerance and all thoughts of what is truth are acceptable. Expanding upon the post-modern era, Donald Hustad brings clarity by listing five facts of the present day culture:

1. This is an age of individualism and narcissism. Persons typically assume the responsibility to declare what is truth and what is valued in every area of life, including theology and art, without regard for the opinion of experts, either historic or contemporary. As a result, pop culture is not only the preferred standard, it devotees recognize it as the only standard.
2. This is an age of consumerism. Materialism may be the prevailing God of culture, and people expect to be able to make choices, both in home décor and in church music.
3. This is an age of electronics, of computers, television, videos and high powered sound systems. Television has produced a more-emotional/intuitive, less rational culture, dependent on images rather than on the printed word.
4. This is an age in which the prevailing popular music has over a period of thirty years, become increasingly primitive. Rock music is at least the symbol of protest and rebellion, so society has been dominated by individuals who determine our culture.
5. This is an age of spiritual hunger, whose satisfaction is expected to be realized in some sort of memorable experience, whether in non-Christian mysticism, New Age Consciousness (which centers self) or in charismatic-style worship.<sup>36</sup>

Hustad’s insights embody the post-modern era. An encouraging aspect of Hustad’s opinions is the spiritual hunger of today’s culture. As Christians and church musicians, understanding the

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<sup>35</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 37.

<sup>36</sup> Hustad, 280-281.

culture will help in providing music that relates and determine the use of choirs through the music of culture.

Perhaps the biggest influence of the post-modern society is the use of technology and the desire of the experiential rather than substantial. The internet has launched a new era of connection and information. However, the internet allows people to live with or without an identity. Millions of people surf the internet everyday looking for something spiritual or relational.

The need to experience something meaningful or desirable has led to an explosion of outlet stores, fast food restaurants, and means of education. While the church has the most eternal and meaningful life to offer through Jesus Christ, the church has fallen into the market approach of Christianity, including its music and worship. How does all of this relate to the usage of choirs in America? It depends on the culture and the postmodern influence in three areas of society: 1.) rural, 2) urban, and 3.) suburban.

At the beginning of the 20th century, rural America was the center of American life. Most of the population lived in rural areas, with agriculture being the main industry. In the early 1900s, a typical rural community consisted of a small town or village with numerous small farms. Today, the rural community has significantly changed. “While farming remains important as a source of jobs and income in many rural areas and is still the single largest user of land, it is no longer the dominant rural industry.”<sup>37</sup> The farming population had dropped from thirty percent in 1920 to just two percent today. Therefore, the rural areas have become more diverse.

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<sup>37</sup> USDA, *Understanding Rural America*. United States Department of Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 710. (February 1995) <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/understd.htm>. (accessed January 15, 2011).

In a USDA report, the rural diversity was listed in county types. The report identified farming counties with their concentration in the Great Plains. The report identified rural manufacturing counties with a concentration in the southeast. Growth in the service sector has become a dominant force within the past two decades giving a new population term “service economy.” “The service sector includes transportation and public utilities, wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate, and agriculture services.”<sup>38</sup> There is no regular pattern for the service counties; they are scattered across the nation. Rural areas are attracting retirees especially in warm climate areas. The retirement-destination counties can be found mainly in the south and west. The use of land in a growing population is a big concern. Therefore, the report identifies the use of Federal Land Counties. The Federal Government determines who has the right to use and benefit from Federal Lands, how those lands can be used, and who pays for those land’s benefits. The Federal Land Counties employment is mainly among the service and government sectors and is located primarily in the West, including Alaska. Finally, the report identifies what is called the Persisted Poverty counties that are primarily concentrated in the Southeast, Appalachia and Southwest. In all the locations previously mentioned, there is a church, and the culture will have an influence on the style of music and the use of choirs.

In the 20th century, rural society has changed greatly in its diversity and has been enhanced with transportation and communications, such as the television with multiple station broadcasting twenty-four hours a day and the use of the internet. A major population shift took place with people moving out of the rural areas and moving into the cities and suburban areas. The question that needs to be asked, has the church followed the same pattern of decline in membership, attendance? Lyle Schaller in his book, *The Rural Church: Learning from three*

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<sup>38</sup> USDA. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/understd.htm>.

*Decades of Change*, indicates it has not followed the same pattern. “The rural church has not reacted to the urbanization of rural society to the extent that the school and selected other institutions organizations have”<sup>39</sup> While Schaller concedes in his research that churches in open country and small villages in rural areas have declined, the large villages in rural areas have increased due to the close proximity to suburban areas.

The information that has been discussed is relevant in understanding the makeup and culture of rural America and determining the use of choirs in the worship service. There was a time in 20th century America when the rural church used choral music predominantly in the worship service. Today, rural America is diverse in its culture and one form of music no longer applies to all.

Modernization has influenced the growth of urbanization in the early 20th century, which is the result of a mass migration from the rural to the cities. An urban area is characterized by higher population density in comparison to areas surrounding it. “Many urban regions are formed of scores of towns and cities converging.”<sup>40</sup> David Wells in his book *God in the Wasteland* says, “In western countries, 94 percent of the population now live in cities of 50,000 or more.”<sup>41</sup> In America, mass migrations to the cities are not just from the rural areas, but from people all around the world who are coming to America. During the early 20th century, there was a significant immigration from Asia, Central and South America, bringing with them different worldviews, and culture of living which includes the music they listen too. While the cosmopolitan look of the cities seem glamorous, the large influx and variety of cultures has left a

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<sup>39</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *The Rural Church: Learning from Three Decades of Change* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1988), 24.

<sup>40</sup> Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 14.

<sup>41</sup> Wells, 8.



people group that have a low income, poor school systems, violence, homelessness, and a significant breakdown of the family which are unique challenges for the family and the church.

### **Understanding the Culture in America**

The decision to use choirs or not to use choirs as a part of worship will depend on the culture. Ray Bakke says, “To be effective, we must have a clear idea of our aims in urban ministry—the people we want to reach and the ways we will try to reach them.”<sup>42</sup> If a church desires to use a choir as part of their worship as well as outreach, the choir must reflect the culture it is ministering to. Urban areas are characterized by a high population density with a variety of ethnic identities. There are urban areas that have a strong black gospel influence. In Columbia, SC, there are two large African-American Churches with large choirs: Brookland Baptist and Bible Way Church. Surprisingly, Brookland Baptist uses more of the anthem style choral music and is liturgical in form, while the Bible Way Church is entirely southern gospel and somewhat charismatic. Both are relevant and connect with the people to whom they minister. The use of choirs in urban areas in the Deep South is not uncommon and reflects the culture as it relates to the forty year old and up age group. The younger generation, twenty to forty year olds, seem to gravitate more to a style of worship that uses a worship band and vocal team. In New York City, the use of choirs is scattered due to the wide variety of cultures, methods of transportation, and available property. While there are a few churches that have a choirs like the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, most churches in New York City use a worship band, small groups of singers, one person leading the congregation and no choirs at all. In fact, a number of churches in cities across the America are known as the Organic House Church. The Organic House Church looks at the “simplicity of Christianity as the church assembles for basic worship,

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<sup>42</sup> Bakke, 127.

teaching, and fellowship without programs, buildings, expensive musical instruments, budgets, and elaborate building infrastructure.”<sup>43</sup> The use of choirs makes it impractical for the house church. Does this mean that the choir is no longer relevant? It depends on the culture. Every urban area in America has a variety of cultures. Therefore, the use of choirs will depend on the culture of that urban area. Dwayne Lee, state music leader for the Ohio Baptist State Convention says “you need to determine if your culture and context advocates that choirs would be an effective part of your ministry. They need to understand that they are a vital part of corporate worship and their main focus is to lead the congregation to the throne of God.” Designing worship with the use of a choir will depend upon the history, the personality, and culture of the people.

After World War II, Americans began to move out of the cities, and began forming what is now call suburban America. By the year 2000, America had become a predominantly suburban nation. J. John Palen says, “Today more Americans live, work, go to schools and colleges, and do their shopping and recreation in suburbs than in the cities.”<sup>44</sup> The suburban life has often been described as a place to raise kids or where people settle down and start a family. “In other words, suburbia is the context and the setting for the fulfillment of people’s hopes and dreams.”<sup>45</sup> Suburban America is made up of mostly the middle class to the wealthy looking to escape the challenges of urban life. People who live in suburbia have aspirations for a certain kind of life. People want to experience a safe place, a place where friendships and community can develop, and a place where wealth can be obtained.

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<sup>43</sup> Elmer Towns, Warren Bird, and Ed Stetzer, 274.

<sup>44</sup> Alert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

It is within the suburbs that the greatest shift of the use of choirs in worship has occurred. From the 1950s until the mid-1980s, the church choir along with congregational singing was the predominate method of music ministry. The adult choir would provide special and inspirational music nearly fifty-two weeks out of the year along with orchestras, vocal ensembles, and solo singing. The choral anthem was the main form of the music along with hymn singing and some new worship songs. In the mid to late 1970s and continuing into the 1990s, music for choirs began to shift slowly at first from the anthem form or gospel choral form, to what is now known as the contemporary form, with songs that are known as praise and worship songs. As the numbers of praise and worship songs increased, choral writing began adapting to the new style of music. The text of the music began to shift to an emphasis on praising God for who He is, and reflecting on God's love for people and how He meets their needs. By the year 2000, the term *experiential* became a catch phrase in identifying the kind of worship that would be relevant to the people.

In this chapter, a brief look at post-modernism and the culture of America has been discussed as it relates to the church. How has post-modern music affected the church? What is postmodern music? Post-modern music can be defined in two categories: 1) as a musical style and 2) as a musical condition. As a musical style, post-modern music contains characteristics from different genres; post-modern music is a change in the fundamental idea of what music is supposed to be "about." "As the period wore on, the idea that "music is mainly about itself", became more and more firmly entrenched."<sup>46</sup> Modern music saw the basic subject of art being the most pure elements of musical technique. Post-modernism sees the basic subject of art being

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<sup>46</sup> Word iQ.com, *Postmodern Music*. [http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Postmodern\\_music](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Postmodern_music) (accessed January 23, 2011).

the stream of media, manufactured objects, and genre materials. Post-modern music views the role of art to be commenting on the consumer society and its products

Postmodern music styles begin to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s. Jazz, rhythm, blues and early rock were taking shape and were reproduced through recordings and radio. In the 1970s dance music and disc jockeys begin to form at urban parties, which in time influenced America. In the 1990s, hip hop and rap became a musical expression especially among African Americans. At the turn of the 21st century, country music with its folk style became a prominent industry as it moved toward more of a pop style yet keeping some form and style of folk, and story line music. Some of the musical artists that made significant contributions to post-modern music are the following: 1) Classical/Jazz- Luciano Berio, John Cage, Phillip Glass; 2) Rock/Pop- The Beatles, Pink Floyd, Frank Zappa; 3) Hip Hop/Rap/ DJ – King Tubby, Kurtis Blow, DJ Herc; 4) Country Music – Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, and Shania Twain.

As a musical condition, post-modern music is simply the state of music in post-modernity. Post-modern music does not have any one particular style or characteristic, postmodern music is valued as both a commodity and a symbolic indicator of identity. Post-modern music is the present day period where music has become valued primarily as a commodity in the culture. “In postmodern music, however, the commodity being sold by record companies and pop stars is not the fundamentals of the music, but the cultural image surrounding the music, which reverberates through film, television, and other media.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that post-modern music is as much as a condition of the culture as it is a musical expression.

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<sup>47</sup> WordiQ.com, *The Post Modern Musical Condition*. [http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Postmodern\\_music](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Postmodern_music), (accessed January 23, 2011).

The influences of post-modern music can be seen in the church as early as the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1969, Chuck Girard, a leading secular musician and lead singer in the group “Hondells,” had a conversion experience at Calvary Chapel Church. From his conversion experience, Girard formed a group called “Love Song” which consisted of vocals, drums, guitars, and synthesizers. The style of music Girard and other groups were using spread to the youth of the church in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Youth choirs began to spring up accompanied by a rhythm section. Early musicals began to appear in the mid-1960s designed for youth choirs and a pop band accompaniment. “Youth music projects such as ‘Good News’ (1967) and ‘Tell It Like It Is’ (1969) and ‘Celebrate Life’ (1973) by Buryl Red and Ragan Courtney were message-oriented and featured songs of testimony, encouragement and a challenge to commitment.”<sup>48</sup> The youth musical became a driving force of new songs and instrumentation that reflected the music culture of the community. Youth choirs were large, sometimes larger than the adult choirs. Later in the 1970s, Bill and Gloria Gaither made a significant impact with a musical for adults called “Alleluia.” It was accompanied by an orchestra; yet, the music style was more rhythmic and used the drums, guitar, and synthesizer. Adult choir music became more rhythmic, with text that was more relevant to the culture of the time. Contemporary groups such as “Truth,” “2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Acts,” “The Gaither Vocal Band” and “New Song” strictly used the rhythm-driven concept with additional instruments such as brass, and saxophone lending the music to a cross-section of contemporary, light jazz and pop. However, even with the influence of post-modern music, many churches stayed with the anthem period selection of music.

In a recent article, “The Changing World of Church Music,” Greg Schemer says, “Many church leaders were initially suspicious of the more relativistic tendencies of secular Post-

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<sup>48</sup> Rod Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), Revivalist Worship Music.

Modernism, but now realize that Post-Modernism is here to stay and that we must become fluent in this new culture.”<sup>49</sup> With the use of the internet and digital music that can be downloaded in an instant, the impact is even greater. Generations have grown up in the post-modern era. Music has expanded to new age music and alternative music. Christian rap, hip hop, and country gospel are becoming more prevalent. Local malls and restaurants are filled with background music reflecting the post-modern area. New churches, called “the emerging church.” are growing with a style of worship that uses a worship band, vocalist and no choirs. The emerging church has a strong appeal to the younger generation (20 to 30 year olds). Does this mean church choir is no longer relevant? Perhaps a look at current trends will shed some light on the subject.

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<sup>49</sup> Greg Scheer, The Changing World of Church Music. *Pastors.com*, no. 289 (December 13, 2006) <http://www.pastors.com/blogs/ministrytoolbox/archive/2006/12/13/The-changing-world-of-church-music.aspx> (accessed February 1, 2011).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TREND OF CHURCH CHOIRS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Choir involvement often relates to the size of a church. The key is to have a choir that matches the size of the space. In his book *Twelve Keys of an Efficient Church*, Kennon Callahan says, “The music needs to carry the space. This does not mean that a small choir needs to sing louder. It does mean that we create a choir that has the ability to ‘hold it’s on’ in the worship service.”<sup>50</sup> However, the attendance of church members often reflects that involvement of choir members.

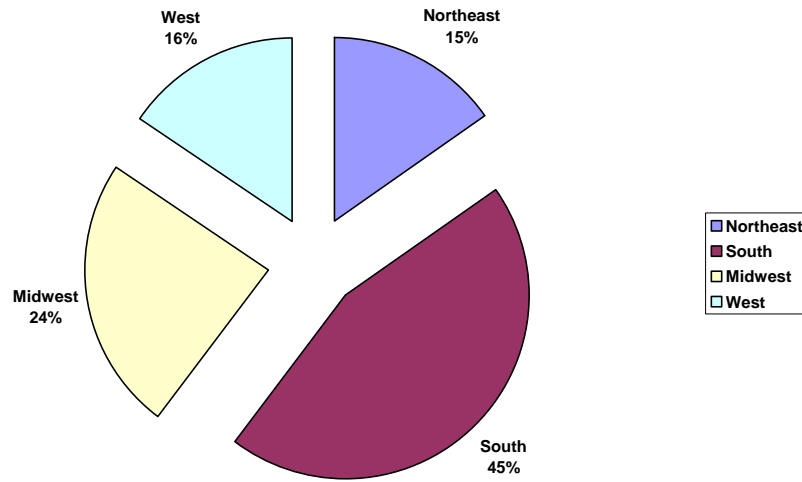
In 2009, a ground breaking book *The American Church in Crisis* by David T. Olson was published. Olson’s book contains research based on a national database of over 200,000 churches and reveals that the overall population growth rate far outpaces the church’s rate of growth. In fact, the book reveals a steady decline in church attendance. Olson’s survey reveals that in “2000, 9.5 million people attended mainline worship services on any given weekend. By 2005, the number had declined to 8.8 million. In 2000, 3.4 percent of the American public attended a mainline church on any given weekend. By 2005, that number had declined to 3 percent.”<sup>51</sup> Olson indicates that by 2010, mainline churches will have declined by 14 percent over the past decade. If the current trend continues, the church faces not only further decline, but a shift in regional attendance patterns. Olson’s book gives an interesting prediction for the next decade as seen in the following graphs reported by the American Research Project:

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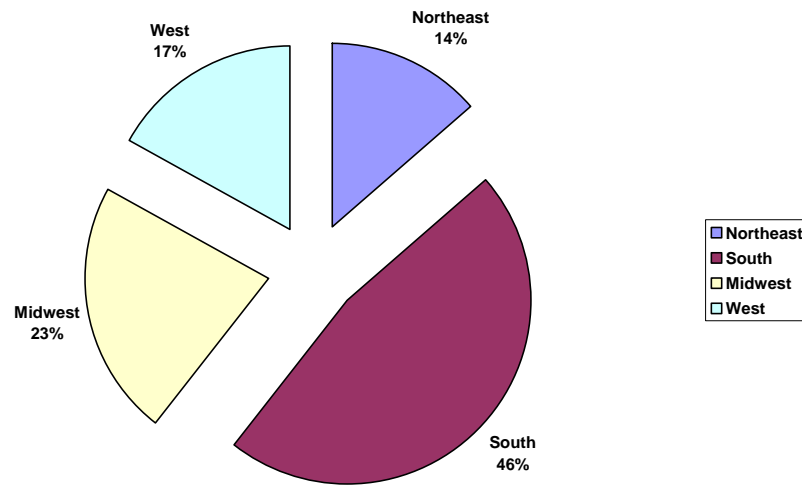
<sup>50</sup> Kennon Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strong, Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 93.

<sup>51</sup> David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2009). under What Is Happening to the Mainline Protestant Churches?

**2010 Regional Attendance Percentage**



**2020 Regional Attendance Percentage**





There will be a slight shift in attendance with the South and West gaining in attendance while the Midwest and Northeast decline in attendance. Another factor affecting the mainline churches is external culture. There is a growing change in multi-ethnic influence. “The Hispanic birthrate is almost double the Anglo birthrate. Combined with the Asian and Hispanic immigration, it is certain that the America will become more multiethnic with every passing year.”<sup>52</sup> All of the factors mentioned above play a significant role in the relevancy of church choirs. The church leadership will need to determine if a choir is relevant by the availability of people within the church, resources, and culture of its community.

### **Questionnaire Survey**

A survey was sent to fifty music leaders consisting of the Southern Baptist Convention State music leaders, and the district offices of the United Methodist church choir directors and choir directors from the Presbyterian Church and the Pentecostal church. The surveys came from the states of New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Georgia, and South Carolina. Some of the questions asked in the survey were:

1. Can you supply data that shows membership of choirs during the past five years?
2. In your opinion, is the church choir relevant in today’s culture? Yes/No. Please explain.
3. What do you think the choir will look like during the next ten to twenty years? Include the look (or presentation), style of music, and involvement.

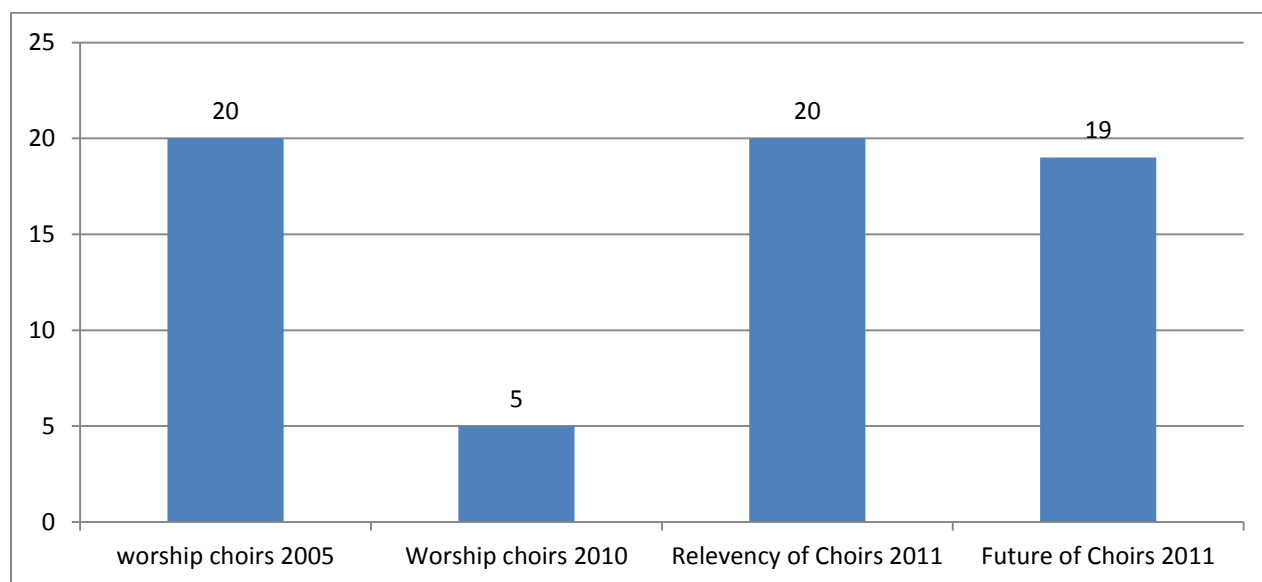
Out of the fifty surveys sent, twenty responded. It must be noted that many who responded did not have accurate records of choir membership from the past five years. However, reasonable conclusions can be determined. A Worship Choir Chart has been developed to show the response

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<sup>52</sup> Olson.

in the areas of choir attendance, the relevancy of choirs in today culture and the future of the choirs.

Worship Choir Chart 2011



The numbers in the worship choir chart do not reflect percentages. Rather, they reflect the number of people responding to the survey. Out of the twenty who responded to the trend of worship choir attendance from 2005 to 2010, fifteen indicated a decline; four indicated maintaining choirs at a consistent level and one indicated a slight increase. The South Carolina Baptist Sate Convention Music Department reports an “eleven percent drop in choir attendance since 2005.” In Alabama, 100 ministers of music responded on the use of choirs indicating 85 percent of those that responded said they were using choir every Sunday, but had seen a decline. Marvin Owens, who is the Wyoming Southern Baptist State Convention Music Leader, reports that the church profile on choir attendance is too inconsistent and the data would be of no value. However, Dwayne Lee, State Music Leader for the Ohio Baptist State Convention, reports a three percent increase over the past five years. Individuals like Laurie Schroeder, Lay Associate Minister at Buffalo United Methodist Church, report a decline of choir membership, while

Kristin Walukas, Music Ministry Coordinator Lake Street United Methodist Church, Eau Claire, WI reports that their choir has maintained a consistent level of attendance and is a strong ministry. Therefore, it can be determined that the small amount of data overall shows a decline, but does not show an extinction of the choir. Rather, it can be concluded that the choir is being used as an important part of worship.

In response to the relevancy of choirs in worship, all who responded strongly believed that choirs are relevant in today's culture. Ward Gailey believes that "the church choir is absolutely relevant as long as choral music remains relevant." Dr. Ken Gabrielse says, "Choirs are relevant as seen in shows such as The Sing Off, Glee and High School Musical." Mary Ellen agrees that choirs are relevant, but suggest that the "choir attitude and profile has to change to stay relevant." Keith Hibbs indicates that "choirs are relevant in every style of worship, but the choir being used may not look or sound exactly like the choirs in Baptist churches of the 1970's." It can be conclude that the response to the relevancy of choirs in today's culture is positive and will be examined further in chapter 5.

The final two columns in the worship chart indicate the response to the future of the worship choir. Nineteen out of twenty believe that choirs will be used in in some form or fashion. Dwayne Lee mentioned in his response to the survey that the choirs will most likely "go by the wayside for the most part. Your larger churches may not be affected but by and large the majority of churches across the United States will not have choirs." While Lee's comment should be taken into consideration, the results are not consistent with previous responses. It was in Lee's own state that an increase in choir membership was reported. The majority of people believe the choir is relevant. Further information about the survey can be found in Appendix A.

### **Factors Contributing to the Decline of the Choir**

The trend of the choir seems to be in decline due to four main factors: 1) Decline in overall church membership, 2) availability of capable volunteers from the church membership, 3) cost of maintaining a choir, and 4) the culture of the community. The first factor is the decline of church membership. The fewer members one has to draw from in a congregation, the smaller the choir. In addition, the smaller the choirs, the smaller the availability of musical talent, which will lead to simplifying the music the choirs provide. In addition, to have an effective music group, there needs to be an effective music minister. Most of the churches in America are small churches and have a difficult time in financially supporting a part-time or full-time music leader; whereas, the larger churches can afford a part-time or full-time music leader. Whoever the music leader is, they must have musical ability to lead the choir effectively and have the spiritual foresight to minister through the music.

The second factor in the decline of choirs is the availability of effective directors and leadership both professionally and volunteer. Music ministers are caught in between leading traditional, blended, and contemporary worship. Recently, in the South Carolina Baptist Courier state paper, a church advertised for a worship leader looking to lead a traditional, blended, contemporary, and Gen-X worship service. In most cases this translates into the worship minister having stronger leadership with one style over another. No one individual can possibly lead all four services effectively. "Like any other group, the church choir takes on the personality and attitude of its leader."<sup>53</sup> The trend in the 21st century is to have a worship leader that is more flexible and comfortable with more than one style. If a person is classically trained and asked to do a blended worship service which includes hymns, praise songs, and small orchestra, that

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<sup>53</sup> Wilson, Jr., 3.

individual will most likely be able to effectively lead that service. However, if the same person is asked to lead a service which includes a band made up of guitars, drums, keyboards, and a small vocal ensemble, that individual would have difficulty communicating the type of sound expressions needed in a contemporary service. The opposite can be true as well. Therefore, the choir leader must be someone who is preferably trained in their specific talents and gifts and serve in a church that matches those talents and gifts. If a church desires to continue with choirs, then they need to find someone who is called and gifted in that area.

A common complaint by those in music leadership is the lack of choir members' commitment. While there may be some truth to the lack of commitment in today's culture, it may be more relational coming from the music leader. If the rehearsal time is not challenging and rehearsals are thoughtless and predictable with little spiritual insight, the end result will yield a lethargic response from the membership. When it comes to the smaller church, where the leadership is volunteer, the choir membership may decline when little thought is put into the preparation for worship. "The choir rehearsal session is one of the most meaningful and important times of the week for both the music leader and the choir member. The rehearsal provides time for worship preparation. That preparation takes place through study, fellowship, prayer and practice. The choir rehearsal session is a spiritual growth opportunity for its participants."<sup>54</sup> Regardless of the size of a choir, good planning and preparation is the key to an effective rehearsal. There are ways to enhance the choir membership involvement, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

A third factor that church choirs are facing is the rising cost of music and maintenance of the choir ministry. Many churches are still using choir robes, which have to be cleaned and

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 92-3.

stored properly. While many welcome the use of robes and the uniform look they present, more churches are moving away from their usage. One of the reasons is the cost of new robes or replacing robes. A choir of forty members can easily spend as much as \$5,000.00 for robes. A second reason is simply convenience. In today's culture where time is valued and responsibilities have increased, a robe adds one more thing a person is responsible for on Sunday mornings. A third contention is the desire for individuality. While the uniformity of the robes looks better, many feel more freedom in worship without the constraints and being responsible for robe upkeep.

The cost of music and shipping has significantly increased during the past ten years. If a choir of forty wants to purchase a single selection, the cost would be approximately \$85.00 when shipping is added. A cost for a collection of ten songs or a musical will run a choir of forty members approximately \$340.00. This does not include orchestration parts or purchasing of sound tracks and DVD sound tracks. The cost of storing the music in efficient choral boxes adds to the expense not only in the dollar amount, but in keeping the music library up to date and organized. Therefore, time, money, preparation and leadership can lead a choir ministry to pursue excellence or the lack of any could render the choir ineffective.

The fourth factor in the decline of choirs is the influence of the contemporary worship. What is a contemporary worship? The word contemporary is derived from the root word *con* and *tempus*, or "with the times." A common understanding of the word is something that is current and usually cutting edge. "Contemporary worship music has come to mean a musical style that originates in contemporary popular culture rather than in the church culture."<sup>55</sup> Praise and worship is the most common term for the genre of contemporary music, or pop style music. Pop

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<sup>55</sup> Greg Sheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 12.

music is the common denominator in today's musical world. Taking on a light form of pop music, praise and worship music is a common denominator among the people in the church. Like pop music, praise and worship engages people emotionally, leading to an expanded worship expression. In the 20th century, worship forms were driven by choral music, piano, and the organ. By the turn of the 21st century, rhythm drives the music in the contemporary music with guitars, drums, keyboards, and synthesizers. A small vocal group plays and sings with a worship band. The size of the vocal group can be anywhere from two people to as many as six. Most contemporary worship services do not have a choir. If a choir exists, it will not look like the traditional choir of the past thirty years. Rather, the choir would be off to the side, usually small and sing three-part, sometimes four-part, music. The worship choir in a contemporary service will rarely do a special selection on their own. Rather, the choir is there to support the vocal singers and the congregation. The worship music is done by memory with the aid of a large flat screen or projector monitor.

There has been a strong effort on the part of publishers to adapt praise and worship music to a choral form. Many of the worship songs are difficult to sing, especially for basses. The style of music calls for close harmony, male vocals written in unison and in a high register for the voice. However, the choral arrangements are usually done in a blended form of worship and occasionally in a traditional service. There is room for a worship choir in the contemporary worship. It depends on the leadership of the church and its basic belief in what God is leading them to do.

Another possible factor of the choir membership decline to consider is the influence of the Emerging Church. What is the emerging church? "Emerging churches are mission focused communities arising from within postmodern culture and consisting of followers of Jesus who

are seeking to be faithful in their place”<sup>56</sup> An emerging church can be a new church that connects with the language of the culture or an older church going through a dismantling process of ideas that no longer are viable in a postmodern culture. “Emerging churches remove modern practices of Christianity, not the faith itself.”<sup>57</sup> The emerging church focuses more on “kingdom theology, the inner life, friendship, community justice, earth keeping, inclusivity, and inspirational leadership.”<sup>58</sup> Music in the emerging church is rhythmic, driving, and known as heart felt music. However, the songs are not always the primary influence; rather, the music serves as support for prayers, times of silence, and meditation. “The emerging worship experience begins in an entirely different place from most contemporary services: not with what people feel their needs are to be, but with whom God is, who they are, and who they were created to become.”<sup>59</sup> For new emerging church starts, the use of a choir is not always practical. Depending upon the size of a new church seeking to connect with the language of its community, a small group of instrumentalists, such as guitars keyboard and drums, can be adequate along with a few vocal singers known today as a praise band. The praise band would be more practical instead of trying to enlist 12 to 20 singers for a choir. Smaller groups can work faster while a larger group such as a choir will take more time and more resources, such as purchasing music and a place to rehearse. This does not mean that the choir is no longer relevant. It simply means being more practical in the beginning of a church start.

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<sup>56</sup> Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2005), under Cultural Differences.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blue Print for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 237.



When it comes to established and older churches an evaluation should take place on the use of choirs. As the emerging churches come out of older established churches, seeking to speak the language of their culture, the leadership needs to evaluate the style of music the choirs sing, the resources that are available, and upkeep which includes cost. Choirs that traditionally do special music events such as Easter and Christmas pageants may need to evaluate their purpose and effectiveness in reaching the community and assimilating people into the church.

The emerging church has been linked to what is known as the contemporary church. However, Rev. Mark Brouwer, former pastor of Bridgwood Church in Savage, Minnesota and current Director of Training for Faithful and True Ministries in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, makes an interesting observation based on his personal experience in the emerging church. Brouwer says, "Most contemporary modern churches have a worship that is much like a music concert, with the congregation functioning like an audience, singing and clapping along- at least on the songs they know. Emerging churches look for ways of helping people participate and shape the worship experiences."<sup>60</sup> It is within the goal of helping people to participate and shape their worship that one finds the relevancy of a church choir. A choir does not have to be discontinued just because it seems that it is no longer relevant. If the established churches want to continue a church choir in today's culture, then a review is needed of the purpose of the choir. If an emerging church desires to establish a church choir, then it should look at their current music and community and develop a ministry for people that have the gifts and spiritual influence to lead worship and bring a new dynamic of praise and worship to the emerging church.

It can be concluded that the trend of the use of choirs has been decreasing over the past ten years. The decline of attendance in the church, fewer people to draw from, finances, and

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<sup>60</sup> Mark Brouwer, "The Emerging Church" *The Banner* (January 1, 2006) <http://www.thebanner.org/features/article/?id=541> (accessed February 8, 2011).

contemporary worship are all influences in the decline of the choir. However, the decline does not mean the choirs are no longer relevant. In fact, the choir can be just as relevant as the praise and worship band. The choir needs to be renewed and redefined to be relevant in today's culture.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

The church has been a singing church since the first century. In the Old Testament, “the Levitical choirs were commanded to sing and common worshippers were expected to join the song.”<sup>61</sup> Numerous Psalms called on the community to sing songs to the Lord: “O sing to the Lord a new song, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.” (Ps.96:1-2) In the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote to the church urging them to sing: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves and making music to the Lord in your hearts.” (Eph. 5:19) Church choirs have been around for several millennia. They have taken on various responsibilities, musical forms, size, and styles. If choirs are to be relevant in the 21st century American Church, the author of this paper wanted to examine the purpose and function of the choir. As part of that examination, the survey that was sent asked the following question: “Briefly give your philosophy of the purpose and usage of the church choir in worship:” Here are some of the responses:

“Choirs allow you to involve more people in the music ministry; they give people a place to connect.” Bob Wood.

“Choirs facilitate worship with our sung prayers, meditations and anthems of praise. The choirs serve as the pastor’s vision for worship.” Rebecca Jensen

“The church choir in worship simply adds a layer to the worship experience.” Jim Evans

“The church choir facilitates the service. It leads the congregation musically.” Ward Gailey

“The purpose of the church choir is to praise God in song and inspire the congregation by expressing the theme of the worship service in another way that can add depth to the message.” Kristin Walukas.

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<sup>61</sup> Cherry, 154.

“Enhance the worship service by singing responses, anthems, etc., that help set the tone of the service and magnify the topic of the sermon or scripture.” Mary Ellen Clinard

The opinions stated offer insight to the understanding or misunderstanding of the purpose of the church choir. Is the church choir’s purpose to serve the pastors vision? Is the purpose of the choir to involve more people and give a place to connect? One can conclude that the opinions stated can be a part of the choir, but they do not state a strong purpose, rather expressing more of a function than a purpose. Other comments were more specific, and they are closer to the Biblical understanding which is to bring glory to God and minister to the people:

“The choir main focus is to lead the congregation to the throne of God.” Dwayne Lee

“Choirs should help lead people into a genuine, worshipful encounter with God.”  
Marvin Owen.

“To honor God by preparing and prompting His people in corporate and individual expressions of adoration to our Redeemer.” Dan Williams

“The worship choir has one primary purpose, and that is to minister to the Lord.”<sup>62</sup>

Based upon the biblical evidence of 2 Chronicles 29:11, the purpose of the choirs is to bring glory to God and minister to Him. If the purpose of the choir is to bring glory to God and worship in spirit and truth, how is that accomplished? Ron Man, Director of the Department of Worship and Creative Arts for Greater Europe Mission, says, “Choir members must understand that, in order to effectively lead in worship, they must come prepared spiritually as well as musically. They must come to their place of service having walked with and worshipped God throughout the week that they might be ready to invite others to join in corporate expressions of adoration.”<sup>63</sup> If choirs are to be Spirit-filled and engaged in today’s culture, four prerequisites must first take place. First, the choir must be made up of Spirit-filled believers practicing their

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<sup>62</sup> Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Devotional Warm-Ups for the Church Choir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1985), 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ron Man, “The Emerging Church” *The Banner* (January 1, 2006) <http://www.thebanner.org/features/article/?id=541>. (accessed February 9, 2011)

own personal worship daily. Second, the choir must become God-focused and totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. Third, the choir members (as well as all of God's people) should ask the Holy Spirit to examine their hearts and reveal anything hidden that would hinder the flow of His Spirit. Psalm 19 states, "How can I know all the sins in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults. Keep me from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of great guilt and innocent of great sin." Fourth, the choir must believe God's Word is absolute truth and relevant to daily living. Without these simple prerequisites in place, it does not really matter what kind of music, and musical groups may be in a service, it will not move people to God and God Himself will not listen. Leading in the "worship of God is impossible without the enabling of the Holy Spirit."<sup>64</sup> Choir members must spend time alone in their private worship of God and be dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

If the purpose of the choir is to minister to God and bring Him glory, then the function of the choir is to be worship prompters. There is biblical evidence found in 2 Chronicles 29:11; "The LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him and to lead the people in worship and present offerings to him" "The choir certainly fits the role of 'prompter' designated by Kierkegaard for those up front (with God as the 'audience' and the congregation as the 'performers'); choir members can use their special gifts in a powerful way in inviting and leading God's people in worship."<sup>65</sup> The congregation is the primary musical group of the church. Therefore, the function of the choir is to support and undergird the singing and ministry

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<sup>64</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2008), 156.

<sup>65</sup> Ron Man, "The Choir as a Worship Leader." *Experiencing Worship* (July 24, 2010), <http://www.experiencingworship.com/articles/general/2001-7-The-Choir-As-p5.html>. (accessed February 9, 2011).

of song while lifting the congregation in a unified chorus of praise and adoration to God. In the opinion of this author, the purpose and function the choir is to glorify God and lead a multi-generation of believers to worship God in spirit and in truth.

In the early church, a cantor was often used to lead in a song or melody and the congregation or the choir would respond which is also known as antiphonal singing. In today's culture, many Roman Catholic Churches use the antiphonal singing with classical and some modern selections. Can the choir be relevant in today's culture with this form of singing? The answer is yes! Recently, this author led a song called "Victory Chant" which was set to strong rhythmic drive with drums and guitars. The song was simple: this author sang the first phrase, and then the choir and congregation echoed the same phrase. The morning the song was presented, the choir was strong in attendance and produced a strong enthusiastic sound and energy enhancing the congregational singing. The sound the choir produced was as strong as any vocal ensemble amplified by electronics. The difference is twice as many voices and a wide range of people and personalities all glorified God's name. The song itself was relevant to the culture and the congregation experienced the joy of responding and glorifying God. The following is an example of a few verses relevant to antiphonal singing from "Victory Chant" that would fit most congregations:

#### Victory Chant

Leader: Hail Jesus you're My King

Choir/Congregation: Hail Jesus you're my King

L. Your life frees me to sing

C/C Your life frees me to sing

L. I will praise you all my days.

C/C I will praise you all my days

L: you're perfect in all your ways

C/C: you're perfect in all your ways

L. Hail, hail, Lion of Judah  
 C/C: Hail, hail, Lion of Judah  
 L: How powerful you are  
 C/C how powerful you are  
 L: Hail, hail, Lion of Judah  
 C/C: Hail, hail, Lion of Judah  
 L” How wonderful you are  
 C/C: how wonderful you are

The song focuses on the freedom people have in God through Jesus Christ. The song brings glory to God by acknowledging how perfect, how powerful, and how wonderful God is. The song shapes the worship experience and the choir serves in leading God directed worship.

Additional findings of relevancy are musical functions of the choir which include music specials or what are known as anthems. During the 20th century and in previous periods of the church, the anthem became just as important as the sermon. Depending on the style of music, the anthem could be a strong selection of inspiration or become aesthetically pleasing in its musical performance. In the current changing culture, the worship service is more focused on the experiential and ushering in God’s presence. The anthem was often selected to sing at one particular place in the service making the order of service less flexible. Many churches today have changed the way the choir presents the anthem, to the point of changing the word “anthem” and moving the choir to sing at different places in the order of service. As the choir sings the anthem (or song or special music) “the congregation is asked to participate, not with voice, but with the mind.”<sup>66</sup> The special music selections can be pieces that bring total glory to God, or be selections that are presented to God on behalf of the congregation. When using a choir in an anthem selection, it is important to remember that the congregation needs to understand what they are singing and communicating. It is more difficult to have clear diction for twenty to forty

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<sup>66</sup> Paul E. Engle and Randall E. Engle. *Serving in your Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2002), under The Choir.

singers than it is for a group of four using microphones. However, it can be done with some work, depending on the vocal abilities of the choir. The words for anthem selection can be printed in the bulletins or projected on the screen.

The musical preparation of the choir is crucial in being effective worship prompters. The choir can become irrelevant if the sound is poor and there is little preparation. Hymn singing as well as the new worship and praise songs must be rehearsed and well prepared, so that the musical tones and harmony are pleasing to hear. Poor singing by the choir will quickly make the choir irrelevant.

When new worship songs are introduced, the choir should lead in teaching the song. The choir could sing the new song as a special. Then the following Sunday, the choir includes the congregation. A simple technique is to have the choir sing the song or the first verse of a new hymn or worship song one time, then the people join in for the second or third time, depending on how many verses there are in the hymn or worship song. The new worship song or hymn can be repeated the following Sundays.

Perhaps one of the most neglected functions of the choir is the expressiveness of the choir. Just as a mirror gives an honest reflection of oneself, so it is with the choir. The congregation sees and hears the choir and will most likely reflect the choir's countenance. Facial expression can enhance worship especially when those expressions communicate one's feeling of deep faith and the truths of a song. Therefore, the choir must be genuine in its gratitude and authentic praise to God. In addition, musical expression is also important. Regardless of the size of the choir, every choir needs to have good articulation and do justice to the text being sung. Preparedness both spiritually and musically is the key to being an effective choir in the worship of God and leading of the congregation.



If the choir is to be effective and relevant in worship leading, then the style of music becomes critical. As mentioned earlier, culture will affect the style of music. A survey released by the Barna Group reveals that “nearly half of all Protestant churches (46%) offer at least one service featuring traditional worship music – hymns and other tunes utilizing a choir an organ or congregational singing of that music. Just as prolific is the number of churches (43%) using ‘blended’ music – a combination of two or more different music styles within the same service.”<sup>67</sup> The survey reveals that the styles of music used in church services vary tremendously. The reports reveal that the uses of choirs, while in decline as previously seen, are still in use. The style of music by the choir or congregation depends on the cultural influences of the community. As people are won to Christ, they bring with them the very culture they exist in, which includes musical style.

The choir can be relevant in most styles of worship service. However, the choir must have the musical ability to effectively lead in worship. Where there is only congregation participation and little need of special music, choirs can be used to support the congregational singing. Whether gospel, traditional, or contemporary songs, congregational singing is usually not complex. Singing becomes problematic for the choir when rhythmic music, and musical writing of the voices becomes complex. Therefore, when considering adding a choir or presently working with a choir, style must be considered.

An issue facing the relevancy of choirs is time. “Time has become our most precious asset. We value our time more than ever before.”<sup>68</sup> People seem to like being busy and productive. It is the level of being busy that eats away at people’s time. Soccer, homework, band

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<sup>67</sup> “Focus On ‘Worship Wars’ Hides The Real Issues Regarding Connection to God.” *The Barna Group* (November 19, 2002), <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/85-focus-on-qworship-warsq-hides-the-real-issues-regarding-connection-to-god?q=choir> (accessed February 19, 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Callahan. 148. Kindle e-book

practice, club meetings, meetings to plan, car pools and even choir practice make up a brief list of what Americans do every day. What is needed for the choir ministry as well as the church is to develop the philosophy “out of complexity, find simplicity.”<sup>69</sup> The choir should meet at a similar time when other church activities are going on such as prayer meetings and various children meetings. Streamlining the time with other ministries will help with child care and families arriving and leaving at the same time. Another effective means of the use of time is the pace of productivity of rehearsal which will be discussed in the next chapter. Selection of music should correspond with the musical level of the choir.

### **Paradigm Shift**

Thus far the evidence and findings that have been discussed in regard to the relevancy of the choir can only lead to one outcome; a paradigm shift in the way choirs are developed and used in today’s worship service. There are some issues the choir will need to overcome. Reviewing Hustad’s facts in the present day culture, this is the age of individualism and people expect to be able to make choices. For this reason, the strict uniformity look of robes or choral dress could be perceived as institutional and impersonal, both from the choir members’ perspective and a congregation that has a mix of believers and non-believers. Choral music that does not relate to what people are accustomed to hearing will create a cross-culture clash. This does not mean choir cannot be used. “It simply means that both the choir directors and members are going to have to make some important decisions regarding choral practice if they want to be effective in a mixed believer environment.”<sup>70</sup> Churches that are growing and reaching people for

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<sup>69</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples*. (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 236.

Christ will have a congregation of believers seeking God. The choir needs to provide music in a way that a broken world can understand.

As a rule, the choir's weekly contribution to the worship service is usually limited to performing one anthem, maybe two, and adding fullness to the congregation. However, there is a cross-culture of music in the church, and choirs which are made up mostly of untrained, musical voices do not have the capacity to bring to life cross-culture music in the same way a praise team of vocalists who are trained and are diverse musically. This may be a one of several reasons choirs are discontinued in the worship service. However, choirs can be used to teach and lead worship in a congregation with the appropriate training and making adjustments in the choir ministry. It may very well be the time for teaching institutions to take a hard look at present day music and make adjustment in teaching ministers of music and worship to work with the present day music and choirs. Much of the choral music is still rooted in the European classical traditions and is being taught along with the traditional choral sound. The tradition is not bad in itself; it just does not work well with the present day music. "Much can be accomplished during rehearsal time to update the choir's basic choral sound."<sup>71</sup> Fortunately, there are more composers, arrangers, and publishers providing music that is relevant in the 21st century.

Dave Williamson, in his book, *God Singers: A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21st Century*, has developed a chart and concepts of traditional choirs and the worship choir. Williamson's purpose for the chart is not to make a comparison of traditional choirs verses worship choirs. Rather, it is a unique look at effectiveness of both choirs in today's culture. The chart allows the reader to make personal interpretations of his or her own choir ministry and look at areas of possible reworking's or improvements. Since this discussion is on the relevancy of

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<sup>71</sup> Morgenthaler, 237.

choirs in today's culture, a further examination is necessary on Williamson's Worship Leading Choir Paradigms and come to some conclusions on its application for today's choir. Listed below is the Worship leading Paradigms Chart:

### Worship Leading Choir Paradigms

#### Outward Signs

Traditional Choir	Worship Leading Choir
Sings horizontally to the people	Sings vertically to the Lord
Practical role: Spiritual Entertainers	Practical role: Lead Worshipers
Performs for Jesus	Worships for Jesus
Celebrates the Gift of music	Celebrates the Giver
Hopes to hear "You sang great"	Hopes to hear "God is Great"
Has a minor impact	Has a major impact
Engenders emotion for the moment	Engenders significance for eternity

#### Inward Signs

Traditional Choir	Worship Leading Choir
Partners in singing	Partners in worship and ministry
Acquaintances	Family
Competitors	Fellow servants
Basically Bored	Primarily Passionate
Director: Music professor	Director: pastor, coach, cheerleader
Searches for talented members	Searches for faithful members

72

#### Outward Signs

The outward signs are things that people can see and experience when the choir sings. The traditional choir can be defined as a choir that provides anthem music weekly in the worship service that is more of the choral traditional classics or modern choral arrangements. The traditional choir usually opens up the service with a call to worship and one anthem selection that is sung at a specific place in the order of service (usually but not always before the sermon.). The traditional choir dresses in robes or some uniform clothing. The traditional choir supports

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<sup>72</sup> Dave Williamson, *God Singers: A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Manuscript, 2010), 56.

the congregational singing and remains on the platform for the entire service. The traditional choir overall has a formal look and approach to the worship service.

The worship choir can be defined as a choir that provides anthem music, but not necessarily weekly, and is more of the choral contemporary style of music known as pop music, southern gospel, or black gospel. The worship choir may or may not open up the service with a call to worship. Rather, the worship choir may open up the service with a praise song or chorus that is participatory with the congregation or teach a new worship song. The worship choir dress is informal and casual. Like the traditional choir, the worship choir supports the congregational singing. The worship choir may be located behind the pulpit or off to one side and usually comes down from the platform and sits in the congregation before the sermon.

The traditional choir normally sings horizontally to the people. The horizontal can be defined as singing anthem music that sung on behalf of God as the people listen to the message of the song. An example is the choral classic “How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place” by Johannes Brahms. The choral music writing is rich with depth and choral sounds. The lyrics are:

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts!  
 For my soul, it longeth, yea fainteth,  
 for the courts of the Lord.  
 My soul and body crieth out, yea for the living God.  
 How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts!  
 Blest are they that dwell within thy house,  
 they praise thy name evermore.  
 How lovely is thy dwelling place!

The lyrics invoke thoughts of heaven and the desire to be with the living God. Though one verse gives praise to God, the thoughts are about God’s dwelling place. The listener is encouraged to think about that place. However, the song is delivered on behalf of the congregation to God and is not evoking pure praise to God. This in itself is not bad and is useful; it is just one example of traditional choral singing. The music is accompanied by organ, piano, or an orchestra. There is

numerous linear four part singing with running counter melodies. Those who have grown up in the church or have been a part of traditional choral singing will relate better than the person who has grown up in a nontraditional post-modern culture. The draw backs are the awkward use of the King James words such as “thy,” “longeth,” and “yea fainteth,” and “crieth out.” Musically, there are long running counter melodies and harmony making the understanding more difficult for the post-modern culture. The anthem is a well written piece, but will not have much success with the younger post-modern generation that has not been accustomed to this style of music.

The worship choir will provide anthem music that is more vertical that focuses on God’s glory. This has become known as worshipping God in an upward direction. In the opinion of Dwayne Moore,” An upward direction is worship that is totally focused on God and brings glory to him.”<sup>73</sup> The worship choir anthem can be defined as singing directly to God and encouraging the people to focus on God and being in His presence. An example of a worship choir anthem is Hosanna (Praise is Rising) the lyrics are:

Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You  
 We turn to You  
 Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You  
 We long for You  
 ‘Cause when we see You, we find strength to face the day  
 In Your presence, all our fears are washed away  
 Washed away

Hosanna, Hosanna.  
 You are the God who saves us,  
 worthy of all our praises  
 Hosanna, Hosanna.  
 Come have Your way among us  
 We welcome You here Lord Jesus

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<sup>73</sup> Dwayne Moore, *Pure Praise: A heart-Focused Bible Study on Worship*. (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing Inc., 2009), 17.

Hear the sound of hearts returning to You  
 We turn to You  
 In Your kingdom broken lives are renewed  
 You make us new  
 'Cause when we see You, we find strength to face the day  
 In Your presence, all our fears are washed away  
 Washed away

The anthem invokes seeking God and turning to God. The term “you,” is used eleven times. The word “your” is used four times. The phrase “We welcome you here Lord Jesus” invokes the invitation of God’s presence. The phrase “We turn to you” refers to repentance. Without repentance, true worship of God cannot take place. The music is rhythmically driven, simplistic four-part singing accompanied by a band, small orchestral or full orchestra. The anthem is vertical and God-focused. The new believer or current believers that have grown up in the past twenty years will connect more with the style of the pop music genre due to the culture they have been brought up in. The melody of the anthem is catchy and will be remembered as the people leave the worship service.

Williamson’s interpretation of the traditional choir is that of being practical or spiritual entertainers. The concept may be contentious and challenged by many. However, Williamson seems to be saying that the traditional choir has a tendency to focus more on what pleases a congregation, how the anthem makes them feel, and how well the choir performed. The worship choir’s practical role is to be worship leaders prompting the congregation to worship God. The worship focus is to glorify God and engage a multi-generation of believers to worship God in spirit and truth.

The traditional choir will have a tendency to perform for Jesus. The emphasis on the quality and performance of the music is the priority. Performing one’s best for Jesus is a noble and honorable thought. The music that is provided in worship should be the best of one’s

abilities. However, when performance overcomes the worship of Jesus, then it is just performance. The worship choir puts less emphasis on performance and more emphasis on the worship of Jesus. The problem for the worship choir is not to become slack in its musical preparation. Poor singing will cause a disconnect and the choir will become irrelevant.

The traditional choir will tend to celebrate the gift of music. The quality and degree of the difficulty of the music writing becomes the standard. The text will remain important, but the style of music writing will most likely avoid anything that resembles pop, gospel, or black gospel writing. The traditional choir will remain true to the traditions of choral singing. The worship choir celebrates the giver. Music that celebrates implies and focuses on God as the standard more so than the quality of musical writing. More attention is paid to the text.

At the conclusion of a service, the traditional choir hopes to hear “you sang great” A compliment for a song well done is appropriate at the conclusion of a service. The people of God should be encouraging at all times and show their deep appreciation for those who serve in the choir ministry. The problem that a traditional choir (or any choir) faces is when so much attention is focused on the music, the choir members will look for feedback and compliments on a regular basis rather than on what God did with the selection. The worship choir’s focus is to hear how great God is, how God was glorified, and how God ministered to the people through the anthem.

Williamson’s concept that traditional choirs have a minor impact is a subjective observation. When it comes to spiritual understanding and responses it is difficult to judge a person’s reaction on what they are hearing. One will never really know what is going on in the heart of a person, nor the impact an anthem may have on individual lives after they leave the service. In the opinion of Williamson, “If the choir performs to provide an entertaining diversion



in the lives of people who attend a worship service, that's all its existence will accomplish."<sup>74</sup>

Williamson implies that if the focus is more on the music and how well the music is done it will have a minor impact in people's lives. The worship choir concept is to lead people to an encounter with God and is less performance oriented. Therefore, the worship choir will have a major impact in the lives of the congregation.

Williamson indicates that the traditional choir engenders emotion for the moment. Music that is so well done and impressive causes the individual to think how awesome that performance was rather than how awesome God is. The worship choir engenders the importance of eternity and a relationship with God where people needs can be met and new meaning to life is discovered. However, if the worship choir is not careful, it too can engender emotions for the moment through the energy and vitality of the music.

### **Inward Signs**

The second part of Williamsons' worship paradigm chart is the inward signs. The inward signs refer to the things that only the choir members are aware of yet influences the outward signs. When it comes to the inward signs, the chart indicates that in a traditional choir, members would see themselves as partners, committed to each other in making the best musical contribution. Partnership in an organization is necessary and helpful. The depth of the partnership is what makes the difference in the quality of the partnership. The worship choir moves to developing a closer partnership through prayer groups and ministry to one another. Therefore, the worship choir members are partners in worship and ministry. Members see the choir as a ministry that goes beyond the worship service. The traditional choir member develops an acquaintance relationship within the choir. The traditional choir does not take the time to

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<sup>74</sup> Williamson. 176.

develop relationships beyond the rehearsal. The worship leading choir develops a family relationship that is caring, and nurturing takes place within the choir. The worship choir will take time for special outings such as retreats, a dinner night out, movie night, or attending Christian concerts. The worship choir members may plan things to do on their own, in essence becoming a family with a calling and purpose.

Williamson indicates that the traditional choir tends to have competitors for things such as solos, and ensemble groups. The attitude is one of “what’s in it for me.” The traditional choir with its focus on performing tends to lead into competitiveness among some of the talented members which can lead to jealousy over solos not granted. Williamson is suggesting that the worship choir, with its focus on worship and ministry, will lead the members to be fellow servants. The attitude should be that it does not matter who leads in worship or sings solos as long as God gets the glory for it. It should be pointed out that the worship choir is not immune to competitiveness within the choir. Teaching and encouragement from the director on servanthood will help diffuse any competitiveness within the ministry.

Williamson indicates that the traditional choir is basically bored “during the rehearsal, while other people get their parts right.”<sup>75</sup> If a rehearsal is totally focused on the music week after week, performance based, with little inspiration or times with God, then the time can become boring and tiring. Rehearsing volunteer people to sing properly and effectively will always take time. Williamson seems to suggest that the worship choir is passionate about the music because the music focuses more on God and the worship of God rather than performance. The director is ultimately responsible for reminding the choir members why they are there and

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<sup>75</sup> Williamson, 168.

for creating moments of inspiration. The worship choir has a tendency to spend more time in praying and devotional time.

The traditional choir will have a director who mainly directs the choir and is efficient in musical teaching. Often the director can be a music professor, (but not always) with a high degree of training and capable of directing various styles of music. As a choir director who at one time traditionally directed choirs, this writer spent most of his time in music teaching and musical preparation for the choir's anthem. He saw his role as a music director first, then as a minister. Therefore, the choirs directed in the past develop the same concepts. Growing, however, in his understanding of music and worship, this writer no longer sees his role as director first; rather, as a minister first, seeing that the choir needs nurturing and caring and music that glorifies God and ministers to the people within the choir ministry. The worship leading choir can also be led by a professor or a person with a high degree of musical training. The difference is the worship choir director becomes more ministry focused among its members, and has a pastor leading concept for the members as well as the worship services. The director of the worship choir offers teaching that will help the choir member be effective worship leaders. The director in the worship choir will be one who praises his people even when notes are wrong.

Williamson makes an interesting observation, in that traditional choirs search for talented members and the worship choir searches for faithful members. The question arises, which is more important for a choir to be relevant, talent or faithfulness? In the opinion of Williamson, "I am not against talent in any way. Still, faithfulness must go hand in hand with talent (as must servanthood) or talent is useless, and in fact, is worse than useless, it is disruptive."<sup>76</sup> The key is balance. If one has a traditional choir with an emphasis on talented

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 57.

singers, then one runs the risk of having people who sing and want to be a part of group for personal honor and recognition. Talented singers are hard to teach faithfulness in that they read music well, and rehearsals are not that important. If one has a worship choir totally focused on faithfulness, one could end up with a choir that is simplistic musically and vocally sounding poor. Talent and faithfulness go hand in hand.

Williamson's worship paradigm chart offers the choir and choir director valuable concepts in moving choirs to become better worship leaders and develop a relevant choir ministry in the 21st century. Many of the concepts can be debated and undoubtedly be disagreed with. One must keep in mind that the paradigm chart is not an absolute model to follow. The paradigm chart gives the opportunity for the choir to take a look at their own ministry and see if there are changes that need to be made to improve worship leading and becoming more relevant in a changing culture. Change is usually difficult for most people and the church is usually slower than most to make changes. The surrounding culture is changing and the choir will have to make changes so that they can effectively communicate the truth of the gospel. Pastors, ministers of music, worship leaders, and volunteers must seek the counsel of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit before any changes or additions are made concerning the choir.

### **Contributions and Benefits of the Church Choir**

There are other contributions that make the choir relevant in today's culture. Choral music can inspire, bless, soothe, and encourage the listener to move toward God. Choral music can enhance or magnify the message. Choral music can help the congregation remember biblical concepts. The presence of the choir, especially in a small church, can encourage attendance and participation. In a small church, the choir may be made up of twelve to fifteen people. At some

point, the choir comes down into the congregation which encourages the pastor. For some people the worship music is a main factor to coming to worship. Often choir member's families attend as a result of a family member singing in the choir.

There are benefits by being involved in the choir ministry. The choral music inspires and blesses the singers. Participation in the choir creates fellowship and camaraderie among the singers. People can develop new relationships and have a sense of working together for a common purpose. There are social benefits such as communicating to the members when someone is ill, or has a need that needs to be met and prayer concerns for other members. People develop friendships and will meet to go on outings or to lunch or develop new relationships with the other couples. When the choir sings on a regular basis, (not necessarily weekly) they feel they belong to the church and are doing an important service for God. The choir practice gives the singers regular vocal practice and their vocal skills increase. When rehearsals are done effectively, a person who is tired or had a long week will usually feel refreshed as the result of singing, being with other believers, prayer, and worship.

Another benefit is discipleship. Discipleship can take place during rehearsal with teaching a book study on worship, missions or personal evangelism. The key is making a specific time to set aside moments for teaching or study. The contributions and benefits make the choir relevant in today's culture for two reasons: 1) it is God's design and 2) it is experiential. God created everything for a purpose and people's voices are to praise Him through every means available, which includes the choir. Today's culture seeks things that are experiential and the worship choir offers the opportunity for a number of people to experience God, and grow musically and spiritually together.

In this chapter, the author of this paper has found that a choir can be effectively used in any type or form of worship service. The paradigm shifts discussed can apply to traditional, non-traditional and contemporary choirs. When the paradigm shifts are implemented, it will lead to a choir renewal and a renewal in the worship service.

## CHAPTER VI

### ESTABLISHING CHOIRS THAT ARE RELEVANT

God's church, the Body of Christ, is a living breathing organism rich in traditions and spirituality. In the opinion of Scheer, "Living traditions, just like living organisms, either adapt to their environment or die."<sup>77</sup> In order for the choir to survive and be relevant, the choir must also adapt. Renewing the choir involves renewing its purpose, function, organization, planning, music, and spiritual emphasis. Renewing the choir can be the starting of a new choir or the renewing of an established choir. The issue in starting a choir is that many see the choir as irrelevant to the surrounding culture. For some, choirs bring up the image of formality to some degree, a uniform look with robes and music that is antiquated. The issue for an established choir is how to move a choir spiritually and musically to be relevant in the culture to which it ministers. In this chapter, the author of this paper offers concepts and principles on how choirs can be relevant, exciting, and engaging in today's culture and what the choir of the future may look like. Whether it is a new choir or renewing an established choir, the number one prerequisite is prayer. Prayer may sound simplistic, but in reality it is not. It is important to pray and listen for the heart of God and be inclusive of everyone that will be involved, especially the pastor and ministerial staff.

#### **Establishing a New Choir**

In order to establish a relevant new choir, the author of this paper offers seven simple steps for those who are seeking to establish a worship choir. The first and the most important

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<sup>77</sup> Scheer, 181.

step in beginning a new choir is prayer. God intended prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in a number of situations and not our solutions. Strong evidence of the importance of prayer is found in Luke 6:12; “One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.” If the Son of God saw it necessary to spend a significant amount of time to pray to the Father, then those making crucial decision in the use of choirs and music should do no less. Prayer directs our total dependence on God. Philippians 4:6 says, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, and pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” It is impossible to proceed effectively and spiritually without God’s guidance. In establishing a new choir, the goal is not musical excellence and proficiency by itself, but an “undistracting excellence” (John Piper’s phrase) that draws attention to the One who is being worshiped.<sup>78</sup> In establishing a new choir, the music leadership should meet and pray with the senior pastor, teaching pastors, elders and others in music leadership to determine the beginnings of choir. Ultimately, the pastor is the one who decides the use of a new choir in the worship service and how it relates to the purpose and goals of the ministry of the church.

The second step is to meet with music the leadership to establish the purpose and function of the choir. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the choir is to bring glory to God and engage a multi-generation of believers to worship God in spirit and truth. The purpose may be more specific depending on the culture of the community and the church. The choir’s function is to be worship prompters leading people to an encounter with God and lend support to the congregational singing. The choir must never see its role as performance or to impress people. A new choir can bring opportunities for people to use their musical gifts, provide music variety, and added worship expression.

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<sup>78</sup> Bob Kaufflin, “Choirs in Worship” *Worshipmatters.com*. <http://www.worshipmatters.com/2008/06/26/choirs-in-worship/> (accessed February 21, 2011).



Another consideration is the type of choir. There are three types of choirs to consider when beginning a new choir: 1) the melody choir which basically sings the melody throughout the song; 2) the harmony choir which adds two-part singing and sometimes three-part singing, bringing more musical depth to the music; and 3) the trained choir which are people who have music-reading abilities and can bring full expressions of musical styles. The three types of choirs can be developed individually or as a combination of all three.

The third step in establishing a new choir is determining when the choir will meet and how often the choir will sing. It is usually best to meet and rehearse when families are also meeting at the church. There are many possibilities in determining when the choir will sing such as singing only for seasonal events like Easter or Christmas, singing once a month, or singing for a community event, or singing just twice a month. Consider singing less at first, and letting the congregation and choir members get use to the schedule and worship involvement. Time is valuable to people in today's culture and over planning could adversely affect the development of a new worship choir.

The fourth step to consider is the placement of the choir. Traditionally, the choir has been in the center of the platform behind the pulpit. However, today's thinking for new choirs is to place the choir off center. Webber suggests that "in the new worship space, seating is more frequently to the side rather than in the front of the congregation because side seating facilitates involvement with the congregation, whereas front seating implies performance."<sup>79</sup> Webber's integration of choir placement is subjective at best. There are many choirs that are behind the pulpit that bring a great sense of worship that is focused on God and not the choir. However, having the choir off center may put less emphasis on watching them, especially if the choir is not

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 145.

seated permanently on the platform for the entire service. In a number of churches, the screen is center stage projecting words to songs, Scriptures, and sermon video illustrations. Having the choir to one side of the stage will help the congregation focus on the words and text during congregational singing. “The choir needs to be seen as well as heard, to lead worship effectively”<sup>80</sup> However, the stage platform and space will most likely dictate where the choir is to be placed.

Other considerations for beginning a new choir are the placement of microphones, adequate monitors, and lining up a rehearsal accompanist. Will the choir use folders or perform the songs by memory with the aid of monitor screen? When developing a new choir, one must begin to develop memorizing skills in the first rehearsal. Provide a monitor screen for the choir and the people on the platform that will aid in performing music by memory. Perhaps the most important consideration is the style of music. “The postmodern generation greatly values direct experiences.”<sup>81</sup> The selection of choir music should be theologically strong, having lyrics with sound doctrine and musical style to which a post-modern generation can relate. In some churches the style may be blended worship music with hymns and praise songs while other churches may be totally contemporary or totally traditional. There are many styles such as gospel, black gospel, contemporary and country gospel.

The fifth step is to find music resources that will be relevant to the culture. With the internet, music can be downloaded, cutting the cost of printing and shipping. Some excellent music resources are LifewayWorship.com, and PraiseCharts.com. Lifeway Worship offers a free membership and has the largest collection of hymns and worship songs available for download.

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<sup>80</sup> Williamson, 144.

<sup>81</sup> Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2008), 21.

Each song and part can be downloaded individually, transposed, or made into one's own worship medley. PraiseCharts.com offers a free membership with a large listing of worship and praise songs with some hymns. Both sites mentioned offer songs that can be transposed. Many of the songs found on both sites can be used as an anthem for the new choir. The decision on style of worship music will depend on the culture and the church's location. One should never select choir music simply because it has great appeal or extremely popular. Music should be selected because it brings glory to God and enables the people to worship and experience God's presence. "If music is planned simply as a performance piece, for the choir, the choir and their director have both failed in their role as worship leaders."<sup>82</sup> Whatever style of music is chosen, the text should be biblically sound, glorifying God and edifying the church.

The sixth step is to set an informal meeting in which the vision of the new choir ministry will be unveiled. The two best times to schedule a meeting is late Sunday afternoon before church events take place or on the night the rehearsals will take place. Recruiting, talking, and praying should begin one month before the scheduled meeting. The goal is to get as many potential choir members as possible. The purpose of the meeting is to tell them about the vision for the choir ministry. At the conclusion of the vision casting, one should let the people know the kick-off date for the beginning of the worship choir.

The seventh step is to have a celebrative kick-off meeting with the prospective new choir members. The meeting of the choir should take place in a celebrative atmosphere, perhaps accompanied by a complementary dinner. After the meal, the leadership should pass out the vision or an organizational document or pamphlet of what will be required of the worship choir. The vision and organizational document should be specific and concrete. People will more likely

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<sup>82</sup> David F. Donathan, *How Does Your Choir Grow?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1995), 16.

get involved in something when they know exactly what is expected rather than something vague. The following are some highlights from a document developed by the author of this paper for the Dutch Fork Baptist Church Ballentine, SC worship choir. Hopefully, this illustrates the concept for developing a new choir or the renewing of an established choir.

Dutch Fork Baptist Church Worship Choir Ministry  
Proclaiming His Glory through Music!  
August 25<sup>th</sup> 2010

Our Purpose

The Worship Choir Ministry is a ministry that glorifies God, and engages a multi-generation of believers to worship God in spirit and in truth.

To worship God in Spirit is to:

Become totally God-focused and the way you get to know God is through prayer.  
Become dependent on the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26-27 tells us that when we don't know how to pray or what to pray for, the Spirit does!  
Know that God is our audience. Every time we lift our voices in worship (whether it's musical or spoken) it is to God and His glory.  
Have a lifestyle of serving God which is an act of worship.  
Provide music that not only glorifies God, but edifies the church.

To worship God in truth is to:

Live truthfully for God every day. Truth is equated with sincerity, transparency and honesty.

Truthfully examine our hearts and motives every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and reveal anything that would hinder the flow of His Spirit in you. Psalm 19:12-13 says, *"How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults. Keep me from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin."*

Believe God's Word is absolute truth and relevant to daily living and as a worshiper to recognize that when we hear or read the Word of God, we encounter God Himself.

Our Responsibility – Worship Prompters

When you become involved in the worship ministry, you are called to stand in God's presence and minister to God and lead the people in worship. 2 Chronicles 29:11 says, *"Do not neglect your duties any longer! The Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him and to lead the people in worship and make offerings to him."* In order to be effective in worship leading, we need to be prepared spiritually, musically and corporately.

Spiritually we need to include:

Private worship times, Bible reading, and interludes of worship during the day.

Times of confession

Prayer

Personal worship and listening to worship CDs

Musically we need to:

Worship choir - Rehearse weekly on Wednesday nights from 6:45pm to 7:55pm in the Worship Center.

Instrumentalist – Rehearse weekly from 8:00pm-8:45pm.

Music is rehearsed 6 weeks in advanced (with the exception of some seasonal music.)

Note what 1 Chronicles 25:7 says; *“They and their families were all trained in making music before the lord, and each of them, 288 in all, was an accomplished musician.”* We must be well prepared musically in leading people in the worship of God\_Prompting others to worship God is an overwhelming yet joyful responsibility!

Be consistent in rehearsal attendance with a goal of 3 out of 4 rehearsals a month.

Listen to the practice CDs when given out. Check the Planning Center Online for updates, music listening, and the order of service; especially those who may miss a rehearsal and want to know what has been prepared for the Sunday worship.

[www.planningcenteronline.com](http://www.planningcenteronline.com)

Email upcoming absences to [leonboss53@yahoo.com](mailto:leonboss53@yahoo.com) or call the music office 781-2532

As a family of worship leaders/prompters we need to: Pray for one another in rehearsal and fellowship with one another. Be a Spirit-filled, available vessel! Be on time on Sunday mornings 10:15am in the choir room. Be consistent in Sunday morning attendance with a goal of three out of four Sundays a month. During the service, worship the Lord!

The above example is not an absolute template to begin a new choir. It provides suggestions that might be used in creating the organization of the choir ministry that will be relevant and God-focused. At the first organizational meeting of the new choir, the people should complete sheets that include names, phone numbers, and the email addresses.

Finally, a numerical goal should not be imposed in determining whether the beginning of a new choir is successful. A choir that is comprised of sixteen singers can be just as relevant as a choir of 100. Obviously, that depends on the size of the congregation and the size of the facility. Small churches running 100 to 150 in worship can have an enthusiastic choir of fifteen to twenty singers.

Depending upon the size of the choir, a choir ministry team may be required to handle the internal ministry. Three critical teams that can effectively assist the minister of music or worship leader are: 1) The Creative Team that is comprised of two people who will assist in planning of fellowships, special programs, calendaring, and evaluating the music and worship service; 2) The Communication Team that is comprised of two people who will assist in the promotion of the choir ministry, recruitment, and special programs; and 3) The Community Team that is comprised of two people who will assist in caring of the choir ministry such as contacting absentee's by phone or email, sending get well cards, keeping up with prayer needs, and assigning folders as needed. Because availability of time is an issue in today's culture, the worship teams should only be created out of necessity and should only meet as needed. As the choir ministry grows, additional leadership may be added.

The worship choir supports and undergirds the congregational singing as part of its function. The new choir can undergird a small vocal group of three to four singers with a band or small instrumental group. The new choir can alternate the worship services between a worship band or a small vocal ensemble group when leading worship. The addition of new choir in a contemporary setting or small church setting will add a whole new dimension to the worship service. It would be wonderful to see a new group of everyday people who have overcome hurts, heartaches, and tragedies; singing and giving testimony that they have overcome the world through Christ.

### **Renewing the Established Choir**

The established church choir has seen an overall decline in involvement during the past ten years. Many factors have contributed to the decline. There seems to be an agreement among professionals and church leaders that the culture has contributed to the decline. There are

churches today cancelling the choir completely in the name of relevance. Before the choir is cast out completely, there are some ways of renewing the established choir.

Choirs today across all denominations need a radical transformation in dealing with the inward spiritual health of the choir and becoming a worshiping choir. As a musician, this author has spent years trying to perfect the choir musically and unfortunately wanting the choir to be impressive so that worship is enhanced. Little time was spent on teaching biblical worship. For the volunteer person who has grown up in post-modern America and being surrounded by all forms of truth and individualism, rehearsing just the music is no longer fulfilling or meaningful. People ages 20 to 40 are looking for something much deeper and experiential. Therefore, when renewing the established choir, a radical first step must be taken: discontinuing the choir temporarily.

The idea of discontinuing a choir temporarily may seem radical but actually is happening. In this author's present church upon first being hired as an interim music and worship leader, months were spent trying to get the eight to ten existing choir members to lead effectively in worship, with little results. After sharing the idea of canceling the choir in order to reestablish it, there was full support. Beginning in 2010, the choir at Dutch Fork Baptist Church was canceled for two months. During that time there was a major cleaning out of music, choir rolls, old resources, and new resources were purchased. The two months allowed the music leadership to rework guidelines for involvement and putting a new emphasis on worship, caring, and reviewing the expectation that the choir had to sing something every week. It allowed the time to take a spiritual inventory and to plan spiritual teaching and growth as well as providing music that is complimentary to the musical level of the choir and relevant to the culture. In February 2010, the rehearsal time was launched with an earlier starting time, along with a banquet set up

and vision casting. Eighteen enrolled that evening, which was a 95% increase in choir membership involvement. In March 2010, the reestablished worship choir led in worship with new music that was easy and relevant. The important thing to emphasize is that there were two months of promotion, prayer, and reminding people that if they were to be in the choir ministry, it was because God led them to be involved. If one is in the worship choir ministry, he or she is called by God to serve Him with their talents and gifts.

Dr. Ron Upton, adjunct professor at Liberty University and Minister of Music and Worship at Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, FL. shared in the fall of 2010 that he had discontinued the choir temporarily and started over. Dr. Upton saw a tremendous response in his choir not just from attendance but in spiritual growth. In reality, this is not a bad concept. The Scripture says that people are to daily renew their minds, which means getting rid of thoughts that do not belong there and patterns of wrong thinking. If a church choir has musically done the same style of music and same style of worship leading for the past ten to twenty years, then the choir may need renewal if it is to remain effective and relevant.

If the leadership of a traditional choir or even a choir more contemporary in nature is being led to move to some of the new paradigms mentioned earlier, the disbanding of the choir temporary will give an opportunity for a total reorganization. In fact, a better way to explain it to people is to tell them that a reorganization or redesign is in the works and that the pastors, elders, and worship leaders are all involved on how to proceed. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that if reorganization is necessary, then the church leadership should be informed of the vision God has given and be in agreement. How long should the choir disband will depend on the number of changes needed. As an example, a choir could disband from the end of April with a goal of launching the choir after Labor Day in September. The month of May is usually a busy



month with school graduations and school spring programs. During the summer months, people travel, take vacations, and attendance is usually down, which makes an excellent time for reorganization.

During the months when the choir is out, planning should take place. The first consideration is to determine a clear purpose and function statement. Once the statement has been prayerfully selected, the second consideration is to determine the requirements for being involved in the choir ministry. An example has already been mentioned in establishing a new choir. Much of the same principles can be applied in the renewing of the established choir.

The third consideration in the renewing of the established choir (and for a new choir) is the content of the musical text and style. If the choir has a history of doing quality choral music, then a review of the present music library should take place. One should carefully examine selections sung during the past year and see if the style of music communicates effectively to the congregation and brings glory of to God. One should also observe the text, what it says and to whom it is addressed. Kathleen Chapman, author of *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship*, gives excellent criteria when it comes to selecting worship songs or anthems. Chapman suggests, “Look for songs that don’t have a lot of “me,” “us,” “we,” “our,” or “I,” in them. They are love songs or praise songs that thank and praise God, but worship songs are about God only.”<sup>83</sup> The criteria that Chapman suggests point to a pure focus on God. It is the same criteria that should be used in selecting music for the worship choir to sing in addition to selecting congregational songs. A good place to start is to focus on God and His attributes “Every attribute of God reveals

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<sup>83</sup> Kathleen Chapman, *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 91.

something significant about which he is.”<sup>84</sup> The names and the works of God are excellent in bringing a greater focus of God in worship. In the opinion of Rory Noland, “By focusing on the attributes of God, we insure that our worship will be God-centered instead of me centered.”<sup>85</sup> Through greater sensitivity in selecting choir music, renewal of the established choir can take place among the choir members and the congregation. Other suggestions in selecting choir music are the theological strengths, sound doctrine, and the truth of the text.

The selection of the style of music may be more challenging. While there are numerous styles of music, there are three main styles that permeate the church culture: Black gospel, Rock and the modern worship choir. Black gospel is found in urban areas predominantly (but not exclusively) in the southern U.S.A. “The pronunciation of words are different such as “Joy” (Jwah); “Lord” (Lahd); “Earth” (Uthh); “heart” (hath) and “Sing” (sang).”<sup>86</sup> The Black gospel choir does not follow the classic choral vocabulary. Other characteristics of Black Gospel music are the syncopation which occurs where it normally is expected; slides and scoops; and a very distinct vibrato. Rock choir music is made up of altered rhythms with no vibrato. The music is usually performed by younger sounding voices. The harmony in Rock choir music is usually two parts. A distinct feature in Rock choir music is the lick, “which is the embellishment of the melodic line with the secondary notes, usually following the main melody note.”<sup>87</sup> Rock choir music is conversational and is known as singing as one speaks. The modern worship choir takes on a sound that invokes a blend of both the Black gospel and Rock choir. The modern worship

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<sup>84</sup> Rory Noland, *The Worshiping Artist: Equipping You and Your Ministry Team to Lead Others in Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 39.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>86</sup> Williamson, 269.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

choir style is also known as pop music sound. There is four part singing (SATB) in the modern worship choir. The modern worship choir has vibrato, but not to the extent of the Black gospel choir. The worship modern choir has some use of straight tones and has the elements of a rhythmic groove, much like the Rock choir. The types of choirs mentioned will help a music leader listen and determine the style of music. If the music leader is in an urban area, made up of predominately African Americans, the modern worship style will most likely not connect with the singers or the congregation. If a worship leader is in a suburb or rural area and attempts Black gospel music, most likely it will not connect with the people. Therefore, some knowledge of music styles is needed in the renewing of the choir.

For the music leader that wants to renew the choir and have it to be more relevant in the worship service, changing the style of choral music could be challenging. Today's contemporary choral music is often seen by many as substandard to the choral classics or traditional choral sounding music. There are strong advocates against the popular style of music. Calvin M. Johansson in his book *Discipling Music Ministry* says, "When the main criterion for choosing the music used in worship is pleasure, then the music specifically crafted for that purpose becomes the logical choice. Enthusiasm for pop music, especially rock has had devastating results."<sup>88</sup> Johansson warns of the danger of pop music that is "self-pleasing focused," referring to interpretations of the music that "speaks to me," or "moves me," or "ministers to me." Johansson's distaste for pop music is seen as spiritual immaturity. Johansson believes pop music is not a mature form of music, "but merely an easy come, easy go type of immediate musical gratification."<sup>89</sup> Johansson makes a valid point in that much of the pop music is self-centered

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<sup>88</sup> Calvin M. Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry: Twenty-First Century Directions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 50.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

and can be misused in worship. This is due to the experiential nature of our culture influencing the church. But to suggest that all pop and rock music is bad for the choir ignores what God is doing through today's cultural music. Johansson indicated that in an informal survey taken of religious traditional stores showed an increased percentage of choral music sales were of the pop genre, as much as up to seventy percent. The choral form of music has been moving toward the pop genre and will continue to do so. The challenge for the directors and musicians is to pray and select music that brings glory to God. When choral music brings total pure ascription of praise to God, then people enter in His presence and the attributes of God become available to the believer. The pop or contemporary style of choral music can minister to the people on behalf of God, bring healing to the soul through lyrics that focus on God, and are within scriptural thoughts. The pop or contemporary style of choral music can edify the church, challenging the church to be a witness for Christ and being one in Christ. While there are choral music classics of the past that have stood the test of time, choral music has moved to the pop genre. Therefore, the entire genre of pop music should not be thrown out. There are a number of good quality choral pieces with strong lyrics available for the choir. There are choral selections available for the choir that requires less vocal talent and singing skills. However, Hustad makes a good point in that "choral music is a different quality of singing than that of the congregation"<sup>90</sup> If a choir has a good level of musicality, then the change of choral music style should be gradual in the renewing process. Resources for the pop genre of choral music can be found in Appendix B.

After the preparation and selection of music is done, planning the rehearsal will determine how the choir will be renewed. The choir rehearsal is where everything musically and spiritually comes together. It provides time for worship preparation. "The church choir rehearsal

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<sup>90</sup> Hustad, 422.

is the ‘potter’s clay’ portion of the music ministry.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the rehearsal should be well thought out and not routine. Whether one is full-time, part-time, bi-vocational, or a volunteer music leader, the following discussion on rehearsal planning can be helpful in the renewing of the choir.

One should establish a consistent time for rehearsal and style of rehearsal. With time being an issue for most people, one should begin with an early starting time. If the rehearsal falls on a weekday, then starting at 7:00 P.M. may be best, depending on the work schedule of members. If rehearsal falls on a Sunday, early afternoon around 5:00 P.M. may work well. Once a rehearsal time and day has been established, one should stick with it and give it some time to work. The content of the rehearsal will depend on the type of music and pace of rehearsal. The rehearsal should keep going and avoid getting bogged down with a particular selection. The director must be positive at all times and always praise the members for their faithful service.

Select the music repertoire carefully. Know the abilities of the choir. Do not overload them with difficult music, for that would be demoralizing. Begin with simple music for the first month of rehearsal. For the choir that is small, a simple switching out of new worship songs and hymns will offer variety for the choir. There are resources available to help the small choir become musically challenging and keep a freshness of learning music in rehearsal. Some resources are listed in Appendix B.

In the planning of the rehearsal, one should allow what could be called “ministry time.” Ministry time is when everyone participates in a time of sharing, prayer and devotional study. At DFBC, time is very short so the ministry time is at the end which can take up to fifteen minutes. Others will find the ministry time is better at the beginning of rehearsal. During this time, people

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<sup>91</sup> Wilson, Jr., 94.

are arriving, greeting each other and informally chatting with one another. The early ministry time offers people a chance to unwind and become focused on the task at hand by being spiritually encouraged. A devotion could be shared, or a praise time of testimony, or extracting a text out of song and applying a lesson to the Christian life. There are numerous ways to handle the ministry time. However, it is important that time is given for spiritual nurturing. Spiritual nurturing will affirm “the value of each choir member, creating and developing enduring relationships among choir members, equipping the choir for ministry rather than just performance, perceiving the choir as a ministry rather than a program.”<sup>92</sup> The ministry to the choir is just as important as the ministry of the choir.

In planning the rehearsal, one should plan ahead and not wait until the last minute. Time should be taken to create a weekly rehearsal plan or agenda plan, and a weekly agenda made available to the choir members at the rehearsal. This will give the members a look at the rehearsal schedule and give the music leader an accountability schedule. The plan should include a schedule of songs to be rehearsed for choir specials, the music for worship songs and the order of service. The following is an example of a planned rehearsal:

Music Notes  
Dutch Fork Baptist Church

Welcome.....	6:45pm
Vocal warm-ups.....	6:50pm
All creatures of Our God and King.... Sunday morning.....	6:55pm
Not To Us... February 20 <sup>th</sup> .....	7:05pm
He Hideth My Soul....March 6 <sup>th</sup> .....	7:15pm
Your Name.... March 20 <sup>th</sup> .....	7:25pm
I Will Rise... Easter Worship Celebration. April 17 <sup>th</sup> .....	7:30pm
Review Worship Service.....	7:40pm
Ministry time.....	7:50pm
Dismiss.....	8:00pm

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<sup>92</sup> George Yurick, “Choir Nurturing,” *Creator Magazine*. (2008), <http://www.creatormagazine.com/dnn/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx> (accessed February 25, 2011).

The special selections for the choir are bi-weekly and rehearsed in ten minute intervals which decreases the choir's pressure to have something ready every week and allows more time for preparation musically and spiritually. Other considerations are devotions, birthdays, anniversaries, and highlighting choir members. The idea is to create an exciting, uplifting, and creative rehearsal.

There are numerous ways to conduct a rehearsal. Each music leader must find what will work best for their situation. However there are some basic guidelines in the rehearsal session that should be used in the renewing of the choir:

- Begin or end with a devotion by the music leader.
- Begin the singing portion of the rehearsal with a vocal warm up period
- Have material ready for the choir
- Start on time
- Try not to spend an inordinate amount of time on any one song.
- Try to rehearse all the music that will be incorporated into Sunday's worship experience.
- Incorporate humor into your teaching style
- Dismiss rehearsal on time
- Develop guidelines that are scripturally based<sup>93</sup>

In the rehearsal session, one should keep in mind that the choir members are volunteers, called by God to use their gifts and talents for His glory. If a choir member has to be out, the order of service and listening music should be made available by posting them online or a having a recording of the music on CDs. Most of the choir members have internet access and through the church's website or a pay website, the order of service and recorded music can be posted. In this author's present church, posting listening music on the website is not possible. Therefore, an online site called The Planning Center Online was purchased. For a small monthly fee, one can post the rehearsal schedule, order of service, email all of the choir members and post the

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<sup>93</sup> Wilson Jr., 94-5.

listening music. The use of the internet has been a significant help for those who cannot attend rehearsal on a regular basis. This will encourage members to stay involved and be free from the possible guilt of missing a rehearsal. Choir members should not feel that they have let someone down. Rather, they should feel they lift up the name of Jesus on Sunday mornings even when they have to miss.

With the renewing of the choir, one should set a high standard. “Do all you can to see that the choir consistently sings at its best possible level. If necessary, postpone an ill-prepared anthem. The choir will come to appreciate consistent standards for quality, particularly if expectations are clearly defined.”<sup>94</sup> Through careful planning and preparation, the church choir regardless of size can be renewed which will strengthen the worship experience. The renewed choir does not have to provide a special selection every week, nor should it. Giving God glory, ministering to the congregation, and supporting the congregation in song can lead people into God’s presence without doing a special selection every week.

The glue that puts together all the necessary elements to renew the choir is the spiritual growth of the choir. “Individuals in the choir must be systematically taught their role. They are best learned as the music director carefully shepherds the choir into maturing patterns of worship and leadership and as the director expects each member to practice them regularly and well.”<sup>95</sup> Within every rehearsal and apart from rehearsal, spiritual opportunities for growth should take place. The spiritual growth that should be first and foremost is the teaching on worship. “The church music leader must be intentional about teaching a biblical perspective of music’s purpose

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<sup>94</sup> Brent Assink, “Seven Tips for Choir Directors,” *Reformed Worship*, no.13 (2009) [http://reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article\\_id=235](http://reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=235) (accessed February 28, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> Johansson, 199.



and function within the church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>96</sup> With careful planning, certain times of study can take place and brought into the rehearsal time. In the opinion of Dwayne Moore, author of *Pure Praise*, “Worship is a lifestyle. It involves everything we do and think and are. It means loving God with every breath we take and every move we make.”<sup>97</sup> Part of the spiritual teaching for the renewed choir is encouraging private worship.

Private worship goes beyond what has been called a “quiet time.” Private worship involves making oneself increasingly present to God, with a specified time to worship God privately and offer oneself completely. “God is the one who initiates worship. He reveals himself to us and we respond accordingly.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the goal of every choir member is to connect with God every day. “We must wait before him, giving him every opportunity to speak.”<sup>99</sup> To better understand private worship, the following is a list of some ideas that can be put into practice:

1. Adoration –verbally praising God, writing our thoughts about God  
Singing worships songs and hymns. Offering thanks for answered prayer.
2. Reading through the book of Psalms. Read then out loud, meditate on an attribute of God.
3. Offer yourself completely to God.
4. Rebuke sin as an act of worship.
5. Worship daily even when circumstances come against you.
6. Remember that obedience is an act of worship
7. Pursue holiness
8. Put into practice physical acts of worship such as the raising of hands, kneeling in prayer or bowing before the Lord in worship.

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<sup>96</sup> Wilson, Jr., 38.

<sup>97</sup> Moore, 13.

<sup>98</sup> Noland, 23.

<sup>99</sup> Moore, 72.

True worship of God is always transformational. “The vitality and genuineness of corporate worship is to a large degree dependent upon the vitality of our individual private worship.”<sup>100</sup>

While private worship should occur in a specified place and at a specific time, one can worship privately elsewhere. One should take a few minutes alone each day in what are called “worship interludes” to deepen one’s faith in God. Riding in a car with worship music on or listening to a Christian radio station will enhance the worship experience. Praying over a to-do list can enable a person to begin his or her day with the joy of the Lord. When the choir begins to practice private worship, the music leader will begin to see a transformation in the choir’s spiritual growth, and attitude, and they will look forward toward to the corporate worship experiences.

In addition to encouraging the choir to put into practice private worship, a study once a year on worship would be encouraging and life changing. The music leader should offer a study on worship and allow time for discussions in rehearsal. There should be enough time so there is at least a fifteen minute review of the past week’s study of worship. It would be best for the music leader to give a summary of the past week’s reading then asking key questions for discussion. In a recent worship study, one of choir ladies shared the study with her ten year old daughter. Another choir lady who is going through a divorce learned that worship is a choice and she had to choose between living with the hurt and pain or worship God through the pain. She chose worship, and it radically changed her life. Planned spiritual teaching on worship is vital to the choir’s renewal.

Knowing and connecting with people effectively will enhance the renewing of the choir by making each member just as important as the next member. A music leader has to get beyond just knowing the person on the surface level and get to know the people and the things that

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<sup>100</sup> Jerry Bridges, *I Exalt You, O God: Encountering His Greatness in your Private Worship*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 10.

interest them. There will be people who experience loneliness in the midst of a group of people. The music leader can help create a sense of community or family in the renewed choir. In the opinion of Larry Crabb, “The impulses that energized Jesus’ life on earth are actually in us. That’s part of what it means to be alive in Christ.”<sup>101</sup> The renewed choir becomes that community and family that heals and believes in the forgiveness of the gospel. The renewed choir becomes a community where people are accepted for who they are. The renewal choir has the same vision of worshiping God and encourages one another in their strengths and not their weaknesses. There is a balance of mutual strengths beyond the music, such as compassion which invokes sharing and caring; hope which invokes encouragement, confidence and assurance; and wisdom which invokes discernment. There are no hierarchical layers or detailed organization structures. The spirit of competitiveness has no place in the renewed choir. Everyone is of equal importance and the organization is kept simple, yet functional.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a renewed choir is a choir that is called by God. People who are called by God to service in the choir hear God “inviting them to be helpful with some specific concrete mission.”<sup>102</sup> Being involved in the choir goes beyond the using of talents; it is the calling and response to follow God’s leadership in proclaiming His glory. In the Old Testament, the Levites were called to a specialized ministry. In Exodus 23:25-26, God said:

“Worship the Lord your God and His blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.”

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<sup>101</sup> Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and our Relationships* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 1997), 36.

<sup>102</sup> Callahan, 84.

In addition to being called God's people, the Levites were called to live a life of worship and obedience. The Levites knew "that being was more important than doing."<sup>103</sup> The results were benefits given by God due to their obedience. The choir that has been in existence for a long period of time can easily become motivated by doing worship instead of being worshipers. Therefore, the call on the life of the choir member is first to be the people of God. Afterwards follows the call of service for those coming into the choir ministry. The Levites were focused on their assignments and doing them well. Nowhere in Scripture is there evidence of their skills or gifts being compared to each other. The Levites carried out their assignments with a spirit of unity. The person called into the choir ministry will work with a strong sense of purpose and unity.

The discussion thus far in this chapter gives evidence that the choir is relevant in today's culture. Churches that can sustain or start a choir are usually of good sizes with attendance of 200 or more people. However, the average church size is around a hundred people. Is a choir relevant in the small church? With the lack of available resources such as people who are somewhat musical, money, and the current culture, most small churches struggle with choirs. Yet many will try because they feel they are not a church unless they have a choir. The small church cannot compete with the medium to large church. Therefore, the choir can be relevant in that it supports the congregational singing. Instead of having the choir sing anthem music, one should let the congregational singing become special. Simple worship songs or hymn melodies can be led by a choir with the congregation joining. Renewing the small choir that may consist of twelve people would be a spiritual boost for the congregation. The choir can be relevant by focusing on short intensive rehearsals for a special selection. Short-term, well planned, well-

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<sup>103</sup> Wilson, Jr., 42.

rehearsed choirs contribute to the overall worship experience. Therefore, the choir does not have to be present every week, “In the small strong congregations, their sense of community and belonging encourages a natural primary focus on congregational singing. As the whole congregation sings, people are moved by the singing and led to the sense of the presence of God.”<sup>104</sup> Just because a congregation is small does not mean the choir is not relevant. The choir can be used in a number of creative ways as long as the leadership is led to use a choir in worship.

### **The Future of Choirs**

The future of the choir may very well rest upon the spiritual discernment of the true worship leader: the pastor. Singers and choirs play a crucial part in leading people to express their hearts in worship. Commonly, it has been interpreted that the music leader is the worship leader. In the opinion of Mike Harland, author of *Seven Words of Worship*, “God created singers and musicians to be lead worshippers, but the pastor is the true worship leader.”<sup>105</sup> How did Harland come to this conclusion? It seems that the Old Testament gives some insight dating back to the time of David.

David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem to bring the ark of the Lord to the place he had prepared for it. Then David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their relatives as singers and to have them raise their voices with joy accompanied by musical instruments, harps, lyres and cymbals (1Chron. 15:3, 6)

In the above Scripture, David is directing and planning the worship service. Though the singers and musicians were in charge of leading the people, David was the architect.

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<sup>104</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Strong, Small Congregation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000), 166.

<sup>105</sup> Mike Harland, *Seven Words of Worship: The Key to a Lifetime of Experiencing God*. (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group. 2008), 163.

At that time, Solomon assembled at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all tribal heads, the ancestral chiefs of the Israelites in order to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the Lord up from the city of David... Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the entire congregation of Israel... When Solomon finished praying, fire descended from the heavens and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. (2 Chron. 5:2; 6:12; 7:1)

Solomon instructs the people concerning the Ark of the Covenant and leads and participates in cooperate prayer. Using these Scriptures as a model, it could be argued that the true worship leader is the one who presides over the entire worship event. Old Testament history shows that the King presided over spiritual events. In today's culture, it is the pastor who presides over the worship event. "Every part of the worship service must be under the pastor's authority and direction."<sup>106</sup> The pastor is the one who is charged by God with the overall caring of the people, including those who are in charge of the music. Therefore, the pastor and the minister of music must work in unity and spiritual direction, especially when it concerns the use of a choir. There will be pastors who are led by the Spirit that will not include choirs in the worship service. There will be pastors who are led by the Spirit that will have a worship choir, but on a limited basis. Then, there are pastors who will be led by the Spirit who will have a choir every week. The minister of music who is called by God to lead choirs in worship will need to connect with a pastor who has the same leading and vision.

The challenge for the church choir of the future is to claim anew its purpose and function in the worship service. Barry Liesch, in his book *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, indicates a new trend toward a variety of worship services and that people are moving away from attending a contemporary service or traditional service. "Pastors report that different style services appeal to the divergent cultures represented in their congregations and reach out to a wider variety of non-churched individuals."<sup>107</sup> In the opinion of Liesch, "We

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<sup>106</sup> Harland. 164.

<sup>107</sup> Liesch. 27.

should encourage as broad a range of age groups as possible in each style of worship.

Maintaining intergenerational interaction in all services is crucial.<sup>108</sup> The diversity in the types of services allows a great opportunity for the choir to be relevant and useful in a worship service. The early 21st century is experiencing rapid change and the choir should see itself as an ongoing ever-renewing process. The changing process of the use of choirs should follow the Holy Spirit's lead and the culture in which the church finds itself.

The choir is already undergoing change with musical style. While there is still a large repertoire of music from the great historical periods and writings of the 20th century, the music for the choir is now more of the pop style which was discussed earlier. Popular worship songs are now being written in anthem form. However, not all worship songs are strong theologically. Therefore, the choir of the future will require strong lyrics that address theological truth and a musical style that relates to the culture. An excellent example of contemporary writing is Stuart Townsend and Keith Getty's song "In Christ Alone." The lyrics are as follows:

In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
here in the love of Christ I stand

The first verse leads the worshipers to an clear understanding of the hope they have in Christ and the solid foundation upon which their faith stands. The love Christ becomes their strength and comforter. The word "my" indicates the personal relationship the believer has with Christ.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

In Christ alone! who took on flesh  
 Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
 This gift of love and righteousness  
 Scorned by the ones he came to save:  
 Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
 the wrath of God was satisfied  
 for every sin on Him was laid;  
 here in the death of Christ I live.

The second verse tells the story of the birth and crucifixion of Christ. It affirms in the worshiper that through Christ's death on the Cross, one can live eternally with God and live in Christ while here on earth.

There in the ground His body lay  
 Light of the world by darkness slain:  
 Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
 Up from the grave he rose again!  
 And as He stands in victory  
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
 For I am His and He is mine -  
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

The third verse continues the story and affirms in the worshipers that Christ has risen and the sins that enslave them are now forgiven and they are set free from the curse of sin. The verse affirms the believer that will belong to Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
 This is the power of Christ in me;  
 From life's first cry to final breath.  
 Jesus commands my destiny.  
 No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
 Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
 Till He returns or calls me home,

The fourth verse affirms the worshiper in victorious living. The Christian life is directed by Christ, and they belong to Him eternally. The song gives a brief overview of the gospel and brings theological truth about God's plan to reconcile people to Himself through the death and resurrection of Christ. The song ministers more horizontally to the people in a story fashion



which meets the criteria of a worship choir that ministers to people. The musical style is written in a hymn form with complete orchestration or parts written for a worship band accompaniment.

Laura Story's song "Mighty to Save" first came out as a worship song then moved into the choral arrangement form. Story's song is theologically sound, as it addresses the mightiness of God to save people from their sin. The song encourages believers to totally surrender their lives to God and let God's love shine for all to see. The song concludes focusing on God's glory.

Below are some of the lyrics to the song:

Savior He can move the mountains  
 My God is Mighty to save  
 He is Mighty to save  
 Forever  
 Author of salvation  
 He rose and conquered the grave  
 Jesus conquered the grave

So take me as You find me  
 All my fears and failures  
 Fill my life again  
 I give my life to follow  
 Everything I believe in  
 Now I surrender  
 Yes I surrender

Shine your light and let the whole world see  
 we're singing for the glory of the risen King...Jesus

The song moves from proclaiming God's might through salvation to the worshipper's intimate decision to surrender and follow Christ. The song causes the worshipers to participate and experience God rather than just to sing about God. The choir of the future will need to provide music that engages people's minds and hearts and move them closer to God. The experiential nature of the song appeals to the experiential nature of the culture.

In a letter survey, Mark Powers, State Music Director of the South Carolina Baptist State Convention, gives some helpful insights on the future of choirs:

As far as choirs are concerned, I feel that because they are participation oriented and can involve a multitude of folks with wide demographics, style preference, etc., that they will continue to be a viable vehicle for worship leadership and discipleship development. Their form and size and application in worship may evolve into more of a rock era approach from the traditional approach, and the numbers will probably continue to decline, but I think choirs will continue to be useful and enjoyable in lots of our churches

Powers' opinion gives unique insight to the style of music in the future for choirs. The rock era can be interpreted as a variety of rock influences especially to black gospel and pop music genera. Choir membership involvement may not be as large as the choirs used to be; however, the choir will still be relevant.

Dr. Ken Gabrielse, State Music Director of the Oklahoma Baptist State Convention, says, "Because of movements such as 'transformational church,' I believe that we are going to see a renaissance in choir ministries." There is a consensus among music leadership that the choir will be relevant in the future taking on a new musical style. No one can accurately predicate what type of involvement the future choir will have in membership. Dan Kimball believes that choirs will "go back and study ancient choral music and other music that invokes both joy and reverence"<sup>109</sup> However, in light of the previous discussion and evidence, the choir will certainly be more experiential in leading people in worship. God himself is the primary audience; therefore, the choir's first priority is to glorify Him and sing to Him.

In order to be authentic in worship, the choir of the future needs to be proactive, aggressive, and intentional in their worship. The choir's singing, though directed to God, is also meant to build up the church. The day of the choir providing special music every week for the service is gone. While there are a number of churches that have a strong weekly choir specials, time and culture have infiltrated the church to the point where people are more cautious in their service and commitments, avoiding becoming over extended. Therefore, a trend has developed to

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<sup>109</sup> Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship gatherings for New Generations*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 83.

use “seasonal choirs.” The seasonal choirs only meet at certain times and lengths of the year. There is a seasonal choir for nine months of the year during school. During this time, the choir will prepare special selections for most Sundays and provide a worship event, such as Easter or Christmas. When the choir is not providing special music during the nine months, they can enhance the congregational singing. When school is out for the summer, the choir is also out for the summer months. There is also what is called the “special program choirs” that prepare a special worship event, a Christmas event, or an Easter worship event. The special program choir is not a part of the weekly worship service. Then, there is the bi-weekly choir which provides special music twice a month and enhances the congregational singing. Finally, there is the choir that prepares special music once a month and is a part of the weekly worship service enhancing the congregation throughout the year. The trend is a way of adapting to the culture in the area of available time, and taking advantage of short term commitment. In responding to the survey sent to various ministers of music and worship leaders, Laurie Schroeder makes a statement that validates the short term commitment choir for some churches: “We were down to just eight choir members by this past November (2010). However, when we rallied people for short term experiences such as cantata, gospel concert and Christmas Eve service, we had twenty-five people each time to take part.” Schroeder’s church averages 250 in worship, each in which ninety people attend a contemporary service, while the other 160 attend the more traditional service. The seasonal choir working toward special worship events or working toward a special selection could be a way to begin to renew the choir. In Schroeder’s church, the different types of usage for the choir in the worship services will depend upon the leadership of the church and determining the choir’s purpose and function.

The effectiveness of the future choir will depend upon the music leadership. More will be required of the music leader’s understanding the musical diversity and ministering to the choir.

Therefore, it is up to the teaching institutions to provide the specialty of worship teaching and leading. There was a period of time when most church musician received the same type of formal vocal and music directing training. While the very basic teachings of music should remain, such as music history, theory, choral conducting and vocal training, teaching institutions are now discovering that the overall standard for developing minister of music is no longer practical. The diversity of worship music, culture, and styles calls for the teaching institution to provide more education, especially in worship leading, to deal with the diversity in music and culture. If a teaching institution does not provide a diverse education in music and worship, that institution will risk becoming irrelevant with a serious decline in music enrollment. Fortunately, there are institutions working and making these adjustments to the teaching curriculum.

Greenville College in Greenville, Illinois has started a Worship Art emphasis degree requiring twelve credit hours of worship study in preparing Christian men and woman for ministry. In addition, the degree includes the regular formal training in music. Charleston Southern University of Charleston, South Carolina introduced a new music and worship major curriculum for the 2010-2011 school year. Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary has led the way for years in developing a worship degree that works for a variety of styles and culture, while staying true to well established teaching music fundamentals. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas offers a worship concentration at the at the Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels. There are numerous colleges offering studies in American culture which influences the church. There is ample opportunity for the person who is called to the music and worship ministry to learn, grow, and effectively develop choirs for the worship service. .

There is an expression and image the future choir will develop. The use of robes can be useful; however, the choir of the future will most likely not be wearing them. When churches begin new choirs, the cost of robes will most likely be out of reach in favor of other important

ministry funding. The individual look and expression give a more authentic look to the choir instead of everyone looking the same. The choir appears more transparent to the congregation. People will see more of the individual in the choir who is going through the same struggles and irritations of life. The individual look among choir members becomes a powerful testimony to church members and those who are without Christ.

Music will still be purchased by the choir, and folders and storage will most likely take place. However, the use of music and folders in the service will give way to memorizing music, aided by a monitor in the service. Choirs that do their music from memory or with a prompter visually connect better with the congregation and sing better. To accomplish memorizing music effectively, choir members should be given CDs of the music they are to learn as long as clearances or permission is given to do so. Music companies today provide rehearsal tracks for a small fee or by obtaining a licensing agreement. The CD is used for repetition and learning while the choir member is at home or driving in the car. Songs can be put on the church website so that members can download them to an iPod. Planning weeks ahead (a minimum of six weeks) also contributes to the memorizing process. “When rehearsing a song, always break down the song into its component parts. After singing the song all the way through, go back and rehearse all the verses, the chorus, noting any key change, the bridge, and the ending. The rehearsal technique helps the people understand and compartmentalize the parts of the song in their minds.”<sup>110</sup> Another method is teaching by rote without the use of music. The ability to sing music from memory or with a prompter will free up the outward expression of the choir to clap, raise their hands, or just simply be free to worship without the constraints of holding music or wearing a robe.

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<sup>110</sup> Williamson, 242.

The future choir in its relation to position on the stage or platform will change. Newer churches will have choirs that stand to the side either to the left or to the right and will be accompanied by a worship band, small orchestra, or instrumental ensemble. Established churches will most likely keep the choir behind the pulpit. However, choir robes that become old and dated may not be replaced. Without the use of robes, the choir will be able come down at some point in the service for the message time. Listening to a speaker from the front has a better visual connection with the choir members as the pastor speaks and interprets the Word of God.

The relevancy and development of the future choir will depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. Far too often decisions on musical style, the use of praise band verses choirs, and worship planning are often made due to personal preference without serious prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit is always at work-in advance, during and after the events of human history. Though the Holy Spirit may appear to us to act spontaneously, this is because we are often unaware of the spirit’s action until it occurs, for we are not often privy to God’s action in advance.”<sup>111</sup> How can a person be sure of the Holy Spirits leading in determining the use of a choir? The Scripture gives assurances of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 3:14 says, “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” “By faith we are confident of the Spirit’s presence and inspiration.”<sup>112</sup> The Scriptures teach people to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor.5:7). It is by faith that they will know the direction to take in using choirs in a worship service, and confidence can be attained in the decision making process through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26-27 says, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit

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<sup>111</sup> Cherry, 41.

<sup>112</sup> Cherry, 42.

himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." If the leadership of the church has been faithful in prayer and pure motives, then the decision to use choirs in a worship service will be made clear by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Pastors and worship leaders must rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance: "We can get to where we need to with the guidance of the Holy Spirit."<sup>113</sup> The opposite is true in that one cannot get to where he or she needs to go without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. John 16:13 says, "When he, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth." It only makes sense to seek out the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making crucial decisions when it comes to worship. The churches that are strong and vibrant will have a prayerful staff and church, and will be effective to worship with or without choirs because they have been led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives knowledge, understanding, revelation and wisdom. Paul expresses in Ephesians 1:17, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." The more people know of God, and what He wants them to do, the more they will know when it comes to developing, sustaining, or renewing the choir for worship.

In a survey taken concerning the future of church choirs, most had similar opinions. Marvin Owen, Wyoming Southern Baptist State Convention music leader, states; "Choirs will likely be less formal (robes, etc.) and will sing the kinds of music that appeal to contemporary hearts, while still appealing to those who have been Christians and church members for decades. This will necessitate a blending unless the target group is very precise." Keith Hibbs, Alabama State Convention music leader, says, "It will depend on the style of music, and involvement. Less formal in presentation and in musical style – the influence of Brooklyn Tabernacle and

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<sup>113</sup> Stormie Omartin, *The Prayer That Changes Everything: The Hidden Power of Praising God* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 1992), 81-2.

other popular choirs will influence presentation, style of music, and rehearsal techniques.” John Francis, Missouri Baptist State Convention music leader, suggests that “it is a question of the worship ministries being in touch with the worship cry of the people.” Francis makes a point that the worship ministry needs to be in touch with the people, which is the culture. However, ministering to the need of the “worship cry of the people” should be approached with caution. The worship of cry of the people could be the result of personal preference rather than the leading of the Holy Spirit. How does one determine the difference between God’s leading and personal preference? Perhaps the best way to know the worship cry of the people is noticing what God is doing in the entire ministry. Is there an overall movement of God to have a choir that is relevant? Is there a movement of God in the musical expression and style? If so, then perhaps the Holy Spirit is leading the church in a particular direction. However, if the worship cry is from a few people, then it may be more of personal preference. The latter is debatable in that the few may be speaking as the result of the Holy Spirit leading. The key is to follow God prayerfully, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading, and move where God is working.



## CONCLUSION

The debate over whether choirs are relevant or irrelevant is nothing new. In the 1200s in France, choirs begin changing from singing the melody of chant to two, three and even four part music. “One critic commented how harmony sullies worship by introducing lewdness into the church.”<sup>114</sup> In the 1400s when the choirs were singing in Gothic buildings, only the choir was allowed to sing due to the music being too loud for the choir and congregation. John Wycliffe complained “No one can hear the words and all the others are dumb and watch them like fools”<sup>115</sup> Today’s culture is in a sense is no different. With the use of technology, the diversity of a changing culture, and the music industry, the use of choirs has made for an intense debate. A false ideology developed in that church choirs were no longer relevant in today’s culture. In the early and mid-1980s, Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, advocated not using the organ and the choir because one never hears them on the radio or being promoted in any form and fashion. However, today’s choirs are relevant in 21st century America not only in the church but in the secular community. Schools, colleges, and communities are still having choirs as part of their curriculum and entertainment. In 2010, a new reality show called “The Sing-Off” featured a cappella groups and small a cappella choirs. The hit television series “Glee” shows the on goings of a high school show choir. The two shows are different in musical styles and did not feature the classical music style or vocabulary of traditional choral teaching. Rather, the groups sang music relevant to their culture.

The use of choirs in worship has a strong biblical support. The Scriptures reveal the use of choirs in worship, yet, not all churches are designed to use choirs. No longer does one type of

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<sup>114</sup> Towns, 100.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

choir ministry fit all churches and perhaps it never did. God is doing a new work in this generation, yet often people want to hold on to something that has been tried and true and is comfortable. Yet, the world is growing at a rapid pace. Technology and the creation of music are changing rapidly. The church and its music in America must be ready to adapt and change some of its methods in music and worship every seven years, if not sooner.

Choirs have been used by God to glorify His name and to minister to the people. The question one may ask is why? Why are choirs so important? Just like creation was God's idea, and redeeming people from their sin was God's idea, so is music and the choir. Everything created by God brings Him glory. As long as there is music, there will be some form of a choir.

The use of choirs in worship has long been recognized. The song has always been a part of Hebrew worship. After crossing the Red Sea and being delivered from the Egyptians, the prophetess Miriam led a group of Hebrew women in a song of praise. It was King David who appointed the Levites to lead choirs and singers in worship. The Levites produced almost all the music for Temple Worship. "By the fifth century, with the emergence of a highly developed, formal, priestly cult, choirs were given the responsibility of providing music for Christian worship."<sup>116</sup> During the Reformation, Luther sought to use the choir, while Calvin sought to abolish the choir. Yet in America, the choirs became a strong tradition in the secular and Christian world.

The choirs in America became important to most churches even when the quality of singing was poor. Choirs gained momentum in the 19th century through the revival campaigns, which continued into the 20th century. The choir played a major role as an extension of the pulpit's proclamation of the Word of God. As the 20th century came to a close, the role of the

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<sup>116</sup> Hustad, 430.

choir had shifted to be more of a prompter in leading worship and the style of the choral music had shifted from the classical four-part choral music to more of the contemporary sounds of black gospel music, rock, and pop sounds. It is the rapid change of culture, the influence of the post-modern era and culture that has caused a shift in the musical expression and the approach to using choirs in worship.

Much has been said in making the choir relevant in today's culture. But what about those who have been participating in the choir? Why do people sing in a church choir? Teresa Lockhart Stricklen, assistant professor of Homiletics at Pittsburg Theological Seminary eloquently shares why she sings in the choir:

I sing in the choir because the music of praise and reflection grounds me even as it heavens me. Singing in the choir is a spiritual discipline that nurtures my spiritual growth. And the Holy Spirit's gift of joy that percolates through the music playing in the background of my conscious sustains me, no matter what tragedy may befall. I sing in the choir because I know myself to be a member of Christ's body through my participation in a choir. It's in the choir that I experience the surprise of a joyful feast for the multitudes when I give to the Lord the little lunch of a musical voice that I have to share with all, and I hear the amplification of good news ringing through the chapel.<sup>117</sup>

Lockhart gives glory to God, through the power of the Holy Spirit and humbly enjoys the presence of God's people in service for Him. The spiritual discipline makes singing in the choir an opportunity for discipleship and spiritual growth, not for just a select group of people, but for everyone who is called to serve through the choir ministry. Lockhart's experience in singing in the choir can be repeated thousands of times over throughout America making the choir relevant to worship.

Starting a choir, renewing a choir and being involved in a choir ministry is a calling by God. During this author's interim period at Dutch Fork Baptist Church, the church was in the

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<sup>117</sup> Teresa Lockhart Stricklen, "Why I Sing in the Choir," *Call To Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching and the Arts* 41, no.1 (2007): 51-2.

process of renewing the choir. The night the choir launched its new rehearsal time, a young man who became a Christian the previous year walked in and said he sensed God's calling him to be involved in the choir ministry. He had no choir experience, no singing experience, and did not know most of the hymns and worship songs. He said he had the time, because he was recently divorced, but was hoping to work things out. It has been more than a year now and when he is put next to a strong singer, he does very well. But more importantly when he sings, he radiates God's presence joyfully. He never misses except when sick or working. When the choir does not sing on a particular Sunday, he is disappointed and says that singing in the worship choir is the highlight of his week. Today, he is back together with his wife, and his children are the first ones in attendance every week singing in the children's choir. This man knew that first and foremost he was a child of God and was led to worship God in spirit and in truth through music. What would happen to this young family man if the worship choir was not available? He would never be able to make a praise team or vocal ensemble. One thing is certain: the congregation would have missed a blessing seeing a new Christian who has overcome tremendous difficulty smiling and enthusiastically praising God. Francis Foster says, "One grave temptation we all face is to run around answering the calls to service without ministering to the Lord Himself."<sup>118</sup> The primary purpose of all believers is to worship God, and love him with our whole being.

The choir is relevant in the 21st century because it builds a community. The choir members all serve the Lord and work to bring Him glory. The members work toward a common goal of musical and spiritual discipline. There is a strong sense of belonging to one another. Involvement is not dependent on how a person feels but draws strength and encouragement from one another. The results are unconditional commitment to one another and the worship of God in one spirit. Members will find that being involved in the choir is therapeutic, in that rehearsal can

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<sup>118</sup> Wilson, 43.

be times of refreshing and spiritual encouragement. The choir is a role model for teaching children and youth about the faith through music and worship.

The choir of the 21st century can be relevant through the music of the culture. Liking a music selection or style of music does not mean that it is appropriate for the worship service. “When an attempt is made to please everyone by doing a little of this and that, or by trying to select music enjoyed by all, we of necessity degenerate toward the lowest commonality.”<sup>119</sup> The selection of music for the choir should be chosen in the light of Scripture; therefore, textual considerations should be applied. The text should always point people to God who is the subject and object of worship. The text must be able to be understood in both the language of the culture and delivery. Musical considerations should include levels of difficulty, melody, harmony rhythm, and form. A choir may be able to sing more challenging music than the congregation. However, as in the small church, choral selections may need to be simple. In this vein, it is better to sing something simple well rather than to attempt a complex work with poor results. Music should be selected with the capabilities of the choir and instrumentation that is available. The music and text should bring the people into the presence of God. Therefore, one must be careful not to select music that predisposes one to light heartiness, frivolity, rebellion, or sensuality

The choir of the 21st century is relevant as it relates to its purpose and function. The choir must be God-focused and God-centered in its private worship practices and in its corporate worship practices. Psalm 22:22 says, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people.” God is the subject and object of worship. The choir’s purpose is to bring God glory and minister to Him. The function of the choir is to be worship prompters and lend support to the congregational singing.

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<sup>119</sup> Paul S. Jones, *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 277.

In order to be relevant with the choir's purpose and function, the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be included. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, the work becomes meaningless. The choir must be led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John 6:63, "The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Therefore the choir must lead in spirit and truth. "Truthfulness in worship refers to the actions we take, the attitudes of our hearts and the intentions of our mind."<sup>120</sup> Choir members as well as all believers should live truthfully for God each day with biblical teachings and a consistent time of private worship. Authenticity in worship is related to truthfulness.

The choir of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not only relevant in today's culture, but will be relevant in the future. Instead of having the choirs sing every week, better usage of the choir will take place through seasonal times or designated short periods in which the choir sings and leads in worship. Much of the relevancy will depend on the music leadership understanding today's cultural music and how it can be used to bring God's glory in worshiping in spirit and truth. In the opinion of Paul S. Jones, "Modern Pop music, in general does not accomplish this reflecting of God's glory; for only rarely does it set forth man's best or purposely attempted to enlighten, teach, or display truth for the better of society. It is not transcendent."<sup>121</sup> Jones makes a good point if he is referring to pop music in the secular sense, for it truly focuses on self and self desires. Pop music that is adapted for worship can also be self-centered rather than God-centered. However, the text drives the thoughts of worship music, and there are pop styles songs and choral music that do reflect God's glory and give true worship to Him. The choir director or worship leader should work to find and select songs that point people to God. Psalm 96:1, 2 says, "Sing a new song to the LORD! Let the whole earth sing to the LORD! Sing to the LORD; praise his name. Each day

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 286

proclaim the good news that he saves.” Taking the focus of a Scripture verse such as Psalms 96 and putting it to music in the style of the culture for the choir to sing or lead in congregational singing will make choir relevant. If people continue to ignore the fact that culture will continue to influence church music and choral singing, then they run the risk of becoming irrelevant in the church. Musicians and song writers should embrace the opportunity that pop music and other genres of music provide to minister to God’s people and continue to bring glory to His name.

The choir is one of the most unique music groups for worship. King David recognized the power of the choir and music. Set to text that gives pure praise to God, choir music can shape the worship service and move people to worship God. The use of choirs and instruments used in the dedication of the Temple by Solomon powerfully brought the presence of God so that the priests could not continue to minister. What caused God’s presence to become so powerfully displayed? Was it the music, the choir? The instruments? Was it the combination of all the musicians? No, it was the pure praise and God focused worship on God that brought the Shekinah glory. When musicians, choir directors, and the choir work toward the common goal of praising God in worship, then the choir will continue to be relevant and people will see His glory. The choir is a useful, purposeful part of worship. It should never be discontinued just for personal preference. If God so moves to change a musical group such as a choir or praise team, then by all means one should follow God’s direction. Perhaps what is needed in today’s culture is a choir renewal in the church that will lead to music that is relevant to culture, understandable, and a focus that is totally on God, and bringing him glory.

## APPENDIX A

Chapter 3

Mark Powers, State Music Director of South Carolina Baptist State Convention

Keith Hibbs, State Music Director of the Alabama Baptist State Convention

Chapter 4

Mary Ellen Clinard United Methodist Church Urban, Southwest Ohio.

Bob Wood, State Music Director Ohio Baptist State Convention

Rebecca Jensen, Music Director,

Jim Evans, Assistant Director and Composer, Lansing United Methodist Church Lansing, NY

Dwayne Lee, State Music Director of the Ohio Baptist State Convention

Marvin Owens, State Music Director of the Wyoming Southern Baptist State Convention

Kristen Walukas; Music Ministry Coordinator, Lake Street United Methodist Church, Eau Claire, WI.

Ward Gailey, Director of Music, Assistant Professor, Atlanta Metropolitan College.  
Choir Director, Starrsville UMC, Covington, GA.

Chapter 6

Dr. Ken Gabrielse, State Music Director of the Oklahoma Baptist State Convention

John Francis, State Music Director of the Missouri Baptist State Convention

Keith Hibbs

Mark Powers

Marvin Owens

Laurie Schroder, Lay Associate Minister. Buffalo United Methodist Church.



### Questionnaire Survey

I am a student at Liberty Theological Seminary pursuing a Doctorate Degree in Worship. I am writing my thesis on *Church Choirs: A Examination of Relevancy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century American Church*. A portion of the thesis is gathering information and data from across the country and across denominational lines. If you have a few minutes, I would like to include your response in the thesis work. I value your input. Please answer the questions below:

4. Briefly give your philosophy of the purpose and usage of the church choir in worship.
5. In your opinion, is the church choir relevant in today's culture? Yes/No. Please explain
6. What do you think the choir will look like during the next ten to twenty years? Include the look (or presentation), style of music, and involvement.

Part of the research is including data. Do you have data that gives the yearly total of choir membership in your state? If so, I would like to have a print out of choir enrollment during the past ten years.

Thank you for your time. The purpose of the paper is to come to a definitive conclusion that the church choir is relevant in today's American church. Additional thoughts as it pertains to the church choir in worship would be greatly appreciated. God bless you in your work in leading your state in music and worship!

In Christ,

Leon Boss  
Dutch Fork Baptist Church  
Ballentine, South Carolina 29002  
Wk. - 803-781-2532  
H - 803-996-1327  
C - 803-237-0966

**Scripture References**

Exodus 15:1-8	Nehemiah 12:31-38, 40, 42	Luke 1:46-55
Exodus 23:25, 26	Psalm 19: 12, 13	Luke 2:10-14
Deuteronomy 32:1-43	Psalm 24	John 6:63
1 Samuel 18:6, 7	Psalm 51:5	John 16:13
1 Chronicles 15:3, 6, 22	Psalm 56	Romans 8:26, 27
1 Chronicles 16:37, 41	Psalm 57	2 Corinthians 5:1
2 Chronicles 5:2, 13	Psalm 90	Galatians 3:14
2 Chronicles 6:5	Psalm 96:1	Ephesians 5:18, 19
2 Chronicles 7:1	Psalm 144:9	James 5:13
2 Chronicles 20:28	Mark 14:26	Revelation 14:1-3
2 Chronicles 29:11	Mark 26:30	

## APPENDIX B

### WORSHIP CHOIR RESOURCES

The music publishers web sites mentioned below all feature choral music for the traditional, blended, and contemporary church. The web sites provide choral and worship music that is relevant in today's culture and is known to be evangelistic in nature.

[www.lifewayworship.com](http://www.lifewayworship.com)

A free web site for churches with traditional and blended services and contemporary services. Hymns and worship songs can be individually purchased for use in congregational singing or for the small church choir.

[www.lifewaychristianbookstore.com](http://www.lifewaychristianbookstore.com)

A web site for purchasing choir anthems, musical and music collections for all sizes of churches. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

[www.wordmusic.com](http://www.wordmusic.com)

A website for purchasing choral music that is categorized by easy, moderate, and difficult. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

[www.brentwood-bensonmusic.com](http://www.brentwood-bensonmusic.com)

A web site for purchasing choral music with an emphasis on the smaller church. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

[www.lillenas.com](http://www.lillenas.com)

A web site featuring large section of choral music for the medium to small church. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

[www.prismmusic.com](http://www.prismmusic.com)

A web site that features contemporary gospel choral arrangements as well as good choral arrangements that is easy to learn. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

[www.praisegathering.com](http://www.praisegathering.com)

A website that provides choral music for the blended and contemporary church. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

[www.integinc.com](http://www.integinc.com)

A web site that provides the latest in contemporary choral music. The music is somewhat challenging due to some of the men's vocal lines and rhythm, yet an excellent site. The site has a yearly choral plan subscription.

Music can be purchased directly through the web sites mentioned or through a music supply house. Often, the supply house can provide choral music at discount prices. Three examples are listed as follows:

[www.christiansupply.com](http://www.christiansupply.com)

Provides the largest annual music gathering for choral reading and worship music with significant discounts. Represents most choral publishing companies.

[www.kempke.com](http://www.kempke.com)

Provides fast and reliable service with great discounts. Represents most choral publishing companies.

[www.pinelakemusic.com](http://www.pinelakemusic.com)

A smaller company with great service and provides discounts.

There are some resources for the choir leader that will help in planning, organization and spiritual direction. They are:

[www.worshipdirector.org](http://www.worshipdirector.org)

A free web site offering worship planning scheduling and email contacts with choir members and instrumentalists. Excellent site for the church with a limited budget.

[www.planningcenteronline.com](http://www.planningcenteronline.com)

A web site that allows the choir leader to plan rehearsal and the worship service online and make them available to the choir members. Mp3 music of the selected choral pieces, hymns and worship songs can be uploaded to the site for choir members to listen to the selections. The site makes it possible to email choir members and get a response on their attendance for the rehearsals or worship service. There is a minimum monthly fee of \$19.00 depending on the size of the choir and organization. The site makes the work of the choir leader and its members more efficient in preparation for the worship service. It is an excellent site for the volunteer choir director, part-time director or full-time choir leader.

[www.worshipleader.com](http://www.worshipleader.com)

A web site that provides the music leader with current trends, leadership styles, articles on worship, and book and song reviews. One can purchase a digital subscription or a magazine subscription.

[www.purepraiseworshipstudy.com](http://www.purepraiseworshipstudy.com)

A web site dedicated to the spiritual growth of worship leaders, praise teams, and choirs. Dwayne Moore, founder of the site, offers a devotional study called Pure Praise: A Heart-focused Bible Study on Worship.

[www.worshiptogether.com](http://www.worshiptogether.com)

A web site with the latest in songs, resources, and devotionals.

[www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com)

A web site that provides information for copyright issues such as hymns, worship songs, and choral selections.

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

A web site providing a searchable Bible, by means of key words or scripture selection. The site provides over one hundred Bible translations.

The following are collections of anthems, worship songs and hymns arranged for today's culture. The anthems vary from southern gospel to contemporary medleys of hymns and worship songs. The advantage of collections is that one gets more for the money when compared to buying each song individually. The disadvantage is not using all of what is bought. Buying a collection and only using two or three songs is not cost effective. To make a collection cost effective, using seven out of every ten songs will more than pay for itself.

“Let's Sing Series” from Lifeway Worship

Twelve easy songs with several volumes to choose from.

“Ready to Sing Series” from Brentwood-Benson Music

Twelve easy songs with several volumes with each volume specifically written for different styles of music such as gospel, contemporary, and blended worship.

“Blended Worship Series” from Lillenas

Twelve easy songs with several volumes containing worship songs and hymn medleys.

“30 minute Choir book Volume 1 and 2” from Brentwood-Benson Music

Twenty songs with a variety of worship songs and some choral classics.

“Worship Works” from Word Music

Twelve songs that includes choir devotionals and relevant scripture passages. Easy to moderately-easy.

“Simply Worship Series” from Word Music

Two volumes of twenty songs of contemporary anthems. Moderate easy to moderate.

One should be careful not to duplicate the worship songs that are being used in the church just because the song is in anthem form. Select the anthem music that God is leading.

The following is a listing form CCLI of the top twenty-five worship songs as of March 2011. Many of these songs can be found in anthem form.

1	Mighty To Save	Fielding, Ben\Morgan, Reuben	4591782
2	How Great Is Our God	Tomlin, Chris\Reeves, Jesse\Cash, Ed	4348399
3	Blessed Be Your Name	Redman, Beth\Redman, Matt	3798438
4	Everlasting God	Brown, Brenton\Riley, Ken	4556538
5	Revelation Song	Riddle, Jennie Lee	4447960
6	Here I Am To Worship	Hughes, Tim	3266032
7	Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)	Tomlin, Chris\Giglio, Louie\Newton, John	4768151
8	Open The Eyes Of My Heart	Baloche, Paul	2298355
9	Your Grace Is Enough	Maher, Matt	4477026
10	Jesus Messiah	Tomlin, Chris\Carson, Daniel\Reeves, Jesse\Cash, Ed	5183443
11	In Christ Alone	Townend, Stuart\Getty, Keith	3350395
12	Holy Is The Lord	Tomlin, Chris\Giglio, Louie	4158039
13	Forever	Tomlin, Chris	3148428
14	Shout To The Lord	Zschech, Darlene	1406918
15	Come Now Is The Time To Worship	Doerksen, Brian	2430948
16	Our God	Redman, Matt\Tomlin, Chris\Myrin, Jonas\Reeves, Jesse	5677416
17	You Are My King (Amazing Love)	Foote, Billy	2456623
18	Lord I Lift Your Name On High	Founds, Rick	117947
19	From The Inside Out	Houston, Joel	4705176
20	Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)	Baloche, Paul\Brown, Brenton	4662491
21	How He Loves	McMillan, John Mark	5032549
22	God Of Wonders	Byrd, Marc\Hindalong, Steve	3118757
23	Hosanna	Fraser, Brooke	4785835
24	The Heart Of Worship	Redman, Matt	2296522
25	Beautiful One	Hughes, Tim	3915912

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## VITA

Leon F. Boss

## PERSONAL

Born: December 17, 1955.

Married: Mary Alden Easley, June 19, 1978.

Children: Marybeth, born August 7, 1981.

David Tyler, born November 5, 1983.

Malea Lynn, born September 28, 1991.

## EDUCATIONAL

B.M.E. Samford University, 1978.

M.C.M Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981

## MINISTERIAL

License: January 11, 1978, First Baptist Church,  
Dora, Alabama.

## PROFESSIONAL

Minister of Music, First Baptist Church, Troy Alabama, 1981-1988.

Minister of Music, Valleydale Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, 1988-1992.

Minister of Music, Raleigh Road Baptist Church, Wilson, North Carolina, 1992-1997.

Minister of Music, Trinity Baptist Church, Cayce, South Carolina, 1997-2008.

Interim Minister of Music and Worship, Dutch Fork Baptist Church,  
Ballentine, South Carolina, 2009 -2010

Minister of Music and Worship, Dutch Fork Baptist Church  
Ballentine, South Carolina, 2010 – to the present.