THE CHURCH MUSICIANS AND THEIR IMPORTANT ROLES IN WORSHIP

Dante C. Oblimar, MM
STFT Surya Nusantara, Pematangsiantar
Email: Dante.missionary2017@gmail.com

Abstract

Many musicians find themselves engaged in different musical activities of their respective church affiliations all throughout the year. In the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand, where I had the privilege of working with the Seventh-day Adventist Churches, musicians are tasked to handle leadership function as elected church officers to take charge of the musical needs of the church. Their main function includes assigning singers, accompanists, instrumentalists, and song leaders for each weekly services such as the Midweek Prayer Meeting, Vespers, Sabbath School program, Hour of Worship, and sometimes even for the afternoon service for the youth. As a practice, a music committee is formed which may include the membership of the elected music leader, associates, church pastor, and the elder for music. The committee usually appoints other musicians who may be requested to provide music for the church such as a choir director for adult, youth, and for children. They are also requested to prepare programs for church special celebrations such as thanksgiving, year-end gatherings, and others. Outreach activities where musical parts are needed keep the musicians busy not to mention their involvement in other services such as funerals, hospital or sick visitations, and others.

Keywords: Worship and Music

Introduction

Musicians work as volunteers and do not expect any payment from the church. They take it as an opportunity to serve God and His church through their talents. They believe that their ministry plays a vital role in their church therefore it must be taken as sacred office and receive it as a calling, [1] because they do it not for men but for God. [2] On the other hand, other denominations in other parts of the world are hire paid or salaried music personnel to provide music in their weekly services. The musicians work either full-time or part time as director of music, usually called as a church music minister, to oversee the over-all music program of the church including
choir and instrumental groups. The head of the church music department, together with his or her associates also make plans for other music activities such as seminars, workshops, musical worships, and concerts within their given term.

Some churches need musicians who can creatively plan and lead worship teams and recruit volunteer music ministry members. Sometimes they are tasked not only of music leadership but also as choir conductors and generally are given specific job descriptions by the hiring church. Volunteer or hired, church musicians provide the musical needs of the church and see to it that the weekly worship experiences of the congregation are enhanced.

Worship is an integral part of the church therefore it is important that church musicians know their four major roles and the responsibilities attached to each in order to be effective, namely: church musicians as Music Leaders, as Music Ministers, as Worship Leaders, and as Worshipers. With the help of church pastors and elders, musicians both volunteers and hired, professionals or self-taught will be guided in their understanding of these important roles in worship.

**CHURCH MUSICIANS AS MUSIC LEADERS**

*Provide Appropriate Music*

Church musicians are all the people who are tasked to take charge of the musical needs of the church, namely: the head and associates of the church music department, song leaders, members of the praise team, accompanists, singers, instrumentalists, choir directors and his/her members, and others. They are part of a team that plans, provides, executes, and oversees musical activities and musical growth of the church. Since church music leadership is in their hands they need to be strong leaders because it has been said that “everything rises and fall on
leadership.” Working closely with pastors or in other churches with the elders, music leaders ideally select music which coincides with the theme of the sermon and selects the musicians that will render them. [5]

Music leaders should plan carefully every musical element of the worship service so that the participation by the congregation is attained and do not make them as spectators only. [6]

Knowing that music is a blessing when used rightly and a curse when misused or abused, [7] music leaders are to implement a high degree of discrimination as they choose and use music according to church’s principles of worship. With their own understanding, they might be misled, therefore a spiritual guidance is much needed. [8]

**Improve Musical Skills**

As music leaders, they are expected to grow in their knowledge of music and be the best music leaders they can possibly be. Musicians will always find themselves confident and effective in their ministries when they work on their musical skills and abilities. [9]

In Asia, where most of the elected music leaders are volunteers and are not professional musicians, a continuing education in different music leadership programs must be acquired to constantly improve in their abilities. For example, the pianists and keyboardists, who are commonly self-taught, need to upgrade and take lessons in congregational accompanying. Taking extra piano lessons will always enhance their skills. Next, the song leaders should work on their conducting techniques to execute proper leadership with their hands. Their knowledge of the songs in the hymnals must be added from time to time. They also need to learn to read notes and understand different rhythmic patterns. Then the choir conductors need to seek help from professionals to improve in their leadership in hand conducting, choral sound production,
organization, and over-all leadership. Finally, the music ministry heads are to be active in attending seminars on leadership.

Their desire and passion to hone and master their musical skills will inspire other budding musicians. They need to have a heart and affection towards the congregation motivating them to also use their gifts.\textsuperscript{[10]}

\textit{Develop Interpersonal Skills}

Many musicians are labeled as sensitive; some are known to have a melancholic personality and usually are introverts.\textsuperscript{[11]} Most of the time their personality is misunderstood by many. But when they embraced to be church music leaders, they need to develop some interpersonal skills which are keys to success in their job. Because they work with people, they are to learn how to connect with them.

Some interpersonal skills that should be developed or improved in relation to their being church music leaders are the following: the ability to communicate which includes being an active listener who can project appropriate body language; can relate with others by being compassionate and showing care for the well-being of others;\textsuperscript{[12]} can acknowledge and admire others’ talents; can speak calmly when problems arise; and can accept others regardless of their differences,\textsuperscript{[13]} to mention some.

When church musicians put effort to reach excellence in their role as music leaders, worship experiences will surely be enhanced. The church members are always blessed with musical parts in worship rendered by growing music leaders who aim for excellence. This is what God expects because He is an excellent God.\textsuperscript{[14]}
CHURCH MUSICIANS AS MUSIC MINISTERS

Edify the Church

Music ministers are responsible in equipping God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.[15] Through music they are to encourage, edify, teach, and admonish one another as a church family.[16] The congregation are always blessed, inspired, and encouraged by the rendition of beautiful music and its words. Prayerfully chosen and prepared well by faithful musicians, music can lead the worshipers to ponder upon the greatness of God.[17] This is what music ministering all about. Church musicians are to minister to the spiritual needs of the congregation through music in worship.

Sometimes, if not most of the time, church musicians today are trapped on focusing on the artistic aspect of music making only and without considering what worship really is. Ellen White says: “Musical talent too often fosters pride and ambition for display, and singers have but little thought of the worship of God. Instead of leading minds to remembering God, it often causes them to forget Him.”[18]

Avoid Performance and Entertainment Styles

As music ministers, musicians should avoid the practice of many churches where they put too much emphasis on music, its performance, musicians and their talents.[19] Music as one of God’s greatest gifts to men are to be used to glorify Him and not to exalt self or the musician.[20] God has given both man and angels the gift of music-making[21][22] to rejoice in and worship the Lord.[23] It is sad to know that musical talents get the praise and not the Giver of the talent.
Performance practices and styles when done on the pulpit puts musicians on the spotlight and get the attention for their own glory.[24][25] Although they are on the pulpit front and center, music ministers are not the main attraction.[26] It is not a moment to show off and shine.[27] God should have the glory in all musical renditions in worship.[28]

Music ministers must realize that the more they apply the Biblical principle of speaking to one another in songs[29] where more congregational participation in singing and music making are encouraged, and lessen the giving of too much importance to individuals and other selected groups, performance will be minimized.

Entertainment is present in many cultures today and because we are exposed to it everywhere especially from TV, movies and the social media, church musicians are tempted to use it, and church members have learned to expect it. Music ministers do not entertain because music in worship was not meant for entertainment. Ellen White says, “Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God.”[30]

One of the common issues in this regard is the use of “energizer songs” or “action songs” during the youth program. Generally, energizer songs which are usually secular are done in camping, seminars, and social gatherings with a purpose of breaking the boredom of the attendees and participants. Because they are so entertaining and really energizing, church musicians adopt these songs in church worship using sacred or religious lyrics. When ministry becomes performance, then the sanctuary becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, worship becomes entertainment, and man’s applause and approval become the measure of success. Even the unsaved visitor will fall down on his face, worship God, and confess that God is among us.
**Witnesses for God**

Music is a great tool for evangelism. It is an effective means to impress spiritual messages. Many has been brought to church and accepted Jesus as their personal Savior because of the messages of the music that they have heard from church musicians. As witnesses for God through music, music ministers should make efforts to enhance their church outreach music ministries.

One of the best ways for music ministers to function in church worship is to bring worship experience even to non-church goers or non-believers. The community of the church must be served by the music ministry programs. Ellen White says: “Learn to sing the simplest of songs. These will help you in house-to-house labor, and hearts will be touched by the influence of the Holy Spirit." Students, go out into the highways and the hedges. Endeavor to reach the higher as well as the lower classes. Enter the homes of the rich and the poor, and as you have opportunity ask, “Would you be pleased to have us sing? We should be glad to hold a song service with you.” Then as hearts are softened, the way may open for you to offer a few words of prayer for the blessing of God. Not many will refuse… He will bless us in this service for others, and we shall see of His salvation. When the church, with the leadership of the music minister, experience true worship experience produces real witness.
CHURCH MUSICIANS AS WORSHIP LEADERS

Understand Worship

Worship is an integral part of Christian life. Musicians, as worship leaders, must have the right understanding of what worship really is, because worship services are not just like any other programs as thought and treated by many.

“Worship” comes from two Old English words: weorth, meaning “worth,” and scipe or ship, shape or “quality”- the quality of being a friend or a good sport. So, worth-ship is the quality of having worth or of being worthy. Therefore in worship we declare that God is worthy of our praise and that in it God is the center which means that worship is all about God and not about man. In their leadership, musicians must lift the cross high. In everything they do in worship, it should point to God and what He has done, what He is doing and what He will be doing.

Prepare Parts

Because all that we do in worship is for the glory of God, worship leaders must be well-prepared and organized. The Bible says: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” God is a God of order, any student of the Bible can testify to that. In the book of Leviticus we can see how detailed God is in His instructions on how offerings are to be presented in certain ways, the manner on how to kill and cut the sacrificial animals, and how the priests behaved and dressed.

We see that many are guilty of not preparing for the worship of God. Pianists sit on the bench without practicing with the song leaders and have no list of songs to be sang. When the song number was announced, they quickly find the song number and many times it causes delay. Many singers who practice before the service because they lack time within the week, find
themselves still practicing although many worshippers have already arrived for meditation time. Song leaders come up the pulpit without any preparation on what to sing and start apologizing for not being prepared. Without being sure on how to do conducting with the hand, many are brave to just do lead even they are wrongly executed; In Indonesia, it is a practice of the presides to call anyone or groups of people to offer a song right on the spot. Without any preparation, they follow with all their hearts to come up the stage with their songbooks or hand phones. Everybody waits for anyone to suggest what to sing then once agreed, someone signals to the pianist the song number;

Music ministers must prepare the musical parts because these are musical offerings to God. Without a deeper understanding of why and who we worship, preparation for worship will never be taken seriously.

**Prepare Spiritually**

Because worship is a spiritual activity, spiritual preparation of the worship leaders is essential. Before they can be effective public worship leaders, musicians must have their deep personal and private worship. They must be true worshippers in private. Their daily encounter with God through prayers and His Words makes them powerful and influential in their actual public leadership, causing the congregation to experience true worship because what they do is only an overflow of what they have already experienced.

In other words leaders can only bring the people of God before His throne when they themselves have been there. *We cannot share what we don’t have*, as the saying goes. Jenn Petersen said: *We know we can’t lead others somewhere we haven’t been, so we get on our knees and lay it all out before Him. Privately. When there is no one else watching, He sees.* This is
also true in their preparation for their musical renditions. Their time for worshipping is during practice or rehearsals. In actual leading, they connect the congregation to God and help them learn the real meaning of worshipping the Lord.\(^{[45]}\)

Without the Holy Spirit, worship leadership is in vain because the Bible says, “not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord.\(^{[46]}\) The Holy Spirit’s work is to empower worship leaders with boldness. With the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Jesus were filled with courage and boldness as they speak the truth\(^{[47]}\) Worship leaders need to have a consistent time in prayer to hear that still small voice to guide. As called to serve, this should not be treated lightly.\(^{[48]}\) So, in leading the congregation through music and song, they should allow the Holy Spirit to speak to them and be led.\(^{[49]}\) Worship leaders who are spirit-led do not depend on their own abilities and skills.\(^{[50]}\)

**Prompt Worshippers**

Once in front, worship leaders connect with the congregation and then through an atmosphere worshipful music they prompt them to perform the act of worship.\(^{[51]}\) Whatever the worship leaders do impacts the quality of the worship experience because they are easily noticed. In the beginning part of most worship services, the musicians are first to be seen. The pianists or organists start to play some meditation music as a prelude which aims to set the atmosphere of worship. The song leaders start the service proper with a short song service. The choir is usually positioned on their place ahead of time. Because of this, the movements and actions made by the musicians should all contribute in prompting the congregation to participate actively. They should always be examples of modesty and proper decorum.\(^{[52]}\) Any distractions must be avoided.
Grow in Christian Living

Worship leaders are students of the Bible and continually grow in their Christian living. They are filled with the Scriptures not just the Spirit. God desires worshippers to worship Him in spirit and in truth. [53] Hence, it is important that worship leaders be filled with the Scriptures so that their worship is based upon truth and not just subjective experience. When we speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs we will engender the filling of the spirit in others.

Anyone in leadership becomes a model of purity in their hearts and in their lives. It must be the goal of leaders, as they influence others, to aspire and achieve a greater standard of living. With this, they can serve not only by what they say, but most especially by who they are! [54]

CHURCH MUSICIANS AS WORSHIPPERS

Participate Actively

Church musicians are one of the busiest people in the church. Most of them come early to do their last touch of their preparation and after the services they leave the church late to still prepare for next week’s services. Looking into the parts of a worship service, one will agree that music has a big percentage in number compare to other non-musical parts. Knowing this, musicians can be overwhelmed and forget that they are also worshippers after they have done their musical parts.

Many musicians are often observed to be very active in leading out in worship but are actually passive worshipers themselves. This happens when before or after a musical rendition some musicians actually do not join the worship service. Those who will give the special music are either outside the church practicing or at the anteroom waiting for their part but busy doing
other things. Right after their part, they exit from the pulpit and stay at the anteroom or outside
the church chatting. Others find themselves going home to eat and never come back. Some
pianists, after playing stay in the anteroom and wait for the next musical part; and the song
leader, when not provided with a seat with the other participants also stay at the anteroom.

Church musicians must be active worshipers too by joining all parts of the service seated
with the congregation, or with the pulpit or platform party attentively listening to the message of
the hour because Jesus told the Samaritan woman: “But the hour is coming, and is now here,
when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking
such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and
truth.”[55] God is seeking worshipers who will worship him truly from their hearts.[56]

When church musicians experience true worship while functioning either as music
leaders, as music ministers, and as worship leaders during the weekly services, the more they are
changed. And the more they are changed, the more they become effective leaders.

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