

2nd Opinion: In worship, you can't please everyone

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I recently spent a memorable and meaningful few days with a group of music ministers. I had many significant conversations with these men and women about their life in the 21st century church. Many wanted to talk about the challenges of their specific settings.



Bill Wilson Granted, I was only hearing one side of these stories. Believe me, I know every story has multiple sides and complexities. Some of the things I've seen music leaders do defies belief. Even with that proviso, I am convinced those who lead in music and worship ministry are the recipients of an obscene amount of vitriol, anger, criticism and unreasonable expectations. While my experience with congregations and their relationship with music/worship leaders has been overwhelmingly positive, such is not the case for many.

Healthy churches can do better. Start with a hard question: How can we bring our expectations back to earth and turn our focus to the true calling of worship?

Here are some general thoughts to guide that conversation:

More art than science

1. Let's acknowledge worship and music leadership is more art than science. No formula for worship will work in all settings. Just because something works at your cousin's church in Birmingham does not mean it will succeed at yours.

2. Music hooks our emotions. When it comes to our emotions, most of us are irrational. That makes for a toxic brew in a church. No area of church life seems to invite more overreaction than worship and music. Since overreaction usually is a sign that something else is going on in your life you are ignoring, you might want to ask the simple question: "What is this really about for me?"

Most of us are narcissists

3. Most of us are narcissists when it comes to worship and music. We know best, and we want what we want when we want it. We need a good dose of humility. Actually, we need to become Christians, because from all appearances, too many of us check our Christ-like spirit at the door most Sundays. Helpful, objective and constructive feedback is rare. Try setting up something to help with this.

4. There is no way to make everyone happy when it comes to planning music and worship. In fact, one sure way to make everyone unhappy is to try and make everyone happy. It's the wrong agenda for many reasons. Primary among them: Your church's music ministry is not there to please you. It is endeavoring to lead a group of people to worship God. By the way, one of the side effects of healthy worship is it helps grow you into the person God intends you to be. Guess what? That never is painless.

5. Music ministers often are artists first and administrators/schedule makers/people managers/relationship builders second. Granted, many of them need to work harder at some of their shortcomings, but don't most of us?

No one has all the skills

6. No music minister possesses all the skills all the people want. If you think they do, you just don't know them well enough. If they tell you they do, they are deluded and/or dishonest. In addition, many were trained for a music/worship culture that no longer exists.

7. Music and worship leadership is a team effort. No one person deserves all the blame or credit for what happens. Team leadership is not a music-specific skill. When interviewing potential music minister candidates, this should be as high a priority as anything on your list of desired traits. Remember, character trumps skills.

This isn't 'American Idol'

8. When it comes to music and worship evaluation and expectations, far too many people are harshly critical in a way that dishonors Christ and his church. This isn't American Idol, and the congregation is not on a panel of self-absorbed judges.

9. The relationship between pastor and music minister is pivotal. Make sure both know you expect a healthy and collaborative approach. Make time and resources available to help make that happen.

10. Changing the style of worship music often is seen as the essential element in attracting young adults/turning around decades of decline/reaching unreached people groups/attracting throngs of the disaffected and disengaged. Such shortsighted thinking has created monumental strife and started an untold number of vicious congregational civil wars. It has fractured more churches than most of us can count. It seldom works, because the real issues at the heart of such concerns remain unaddressed.

I came away from my time inspired by the willingness of these men and

women to learn and adapt to a changing church world. Sadly, I am deeply concerned about the congregational landscape they must navigate in the meantime.

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