

Larry Danks: Music ministry is people ministry

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Larry Danks has been minister of worship at [Trinity Baptist Church](#) in Kerrville since 2006 and leads the Singing Men of South Texas. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on music, church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated minister to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?

- Hillside Baptist Church, Camden, Ark., minister of music and youth
- First Baptist Church, Trenton, Mo., minister of music and youth
- Noland Road Baptist Church, Independence, Mo., minister of music, education and administration

Where did you grow up?

I was born and raised in northern Missouri. My parents were farmers, and my childhood was spent on a cattle and hog farm just outside of Galt, Mo.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

My family was always at church. As a child, I attended Sunday school, Sunbeams, Royal Ambassadors and such.

At the age of 7, I went down to the front of the church at the urging of both

my parents and my pastor. I knew the answers, and everybody was happy, though I knew I hadn't done any "God business" at that time.

A tragedy struck our little church when the very next day our pastor was killed in an electrical accident. I distinctly recall lying in my bed and being confronted with the realization if that had happened to me, I wouldn't have the assurance I would go to heaven. I asked Jesus into my heart immediately and haven't had a doubt since that time.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

- Southwest Baptist College in Bolivar, Mo., Bachelor of Arts degree in church music
- Midwestern Baptist Seminary, Master of Religious Education, Master of Church Music

About ministry life

Why do you feel called into ministry?

It seems I've always known God wanted me to serve him. I responded to that call as a 14-year-old at an associational youth rally. At that point in time, my pastor and director of missions encouraged me to preach. I did so from time to time, but I found I was doing that in my own power and didn't feel like God really was guiding me in that direction.

Through the encouragement and example of the first minister of music and youth I encountered in Trenton, Mo., I found God had given me an excitement about using my musical gifts for him. That has been the case since that time, and God always has been faithful to give me opportunities to serve him.

What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

The relational part of ministry is the most fulfilling. I don't direct choirs; I direct people. Ministers serve, encourage and reach out to people. Music is the tool God has given me to do just that.

What one aspect of ministry gives you the greatest joy?

I absolutely love helping choirs achieve things they thought were impossible. There is a synergy in choral life, and while I will never have a choir that is "perfect"—if that exists—I hope to bring choirs from where they are to a greater musical and spiritual achievement through their music.

What one aspect of ministry would you like to change?

I long for the ability to simplify both my life and the lives of those I serve. Life is complicated and so very busy. Being creative and being involved with people takes time. It seems time is in such short supply.

How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

Times certainly have changed for worship ministry in the past 40 years. Technology now is a part of our everyday lives where we used to meet it only occasionally. Our ministries also have changed to meet needs in a world that is fast-paced and where information is available to so many instantly. If a person sees these changes as tools with which to spread the gospel, then we can be encouraged that these changes are for the better.

We also live in a world that is far more skeptical, in general, and is much less tied to denominations than decades ago. We have seen volatility played out in front of us in both religion and in the news, in general. We must approach ministry to individuals cautiously in order to guard our integrity

for the future.

How do you expect ministry to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

I expect technical tools available for churches and for ministries will continue to improve, and the ways in which we can reach new people for Christ will be enhanced. Social media and the possibilities that exist there are just now being utilized by the church. That, too, will be a greater and greater tool for Christ.

If you could launch any new ministry—individually, through your congregation or through another organization—what would it be? Why?

We do some of this through our local association, but I would begin a more frequent opportunity for our people to sing hymns and to help multiple generations come to love the theology and the musicality of the hymns, both old and new. We really lose much when our people don't know the hymns and the way in which hymns can enhance our lives.

Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your ministry.

Aging congregations. How can a congregation age gracefully and at the same time think "outside the box" in order to impact our community for Christ?

The way in which the church has fallen from the center of a community's social and moral eye. The church has to face the fact that most of our communities carry on their activities without much consideration of what the church needs or wants.

Every generation is now facing a tremendous amount of stress over the

time demands and financial demands of everyday living. It seems like many people would love to find some way to live a simpler life, but that's just not possible in most cases.

What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry or, specifically, your ministry?

I wish our laypeople knew we are very conscious of their time and finances, and we work very hard to only ask them to be at rehearsals and meetings when it is necessary. We have families, too. It would be nice to spend some time with them, but instead, we must work with the time our people can attend in order to maximize the impact of our organizations. It is discouraging when we do everything we can to provide a quality, efficient meeting structure, and people still choose other activities over what we believe to be essential.

About Baptists

I would hope our laypeople would realize that we, as Baptists, treasure the word of God and seek to see it impact our own lives and the lives of all we influence. I can't think of any substantial decision we ever make in the church that isn't held up to the standards set in Scripture. That is our guide and our hope.

What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?

I was raised a Baptist. I was in the "cradle roll" before I was born, and it was our local Baptist church that shaped me in my formative years. My education primarily has been in Baptist institutions, and for that I'm grateful. That cut of Baptist, however, does not exist anymore.

Those of us who serve in Baptist churches find a rather uncertain

landscape in many ways. I have found my greatest fulfillment comes from ministry in my local congregation. I interface with our local association and state convention where I feel like my time, efforts and skills can make a difference for the kingdom.

What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?

In 1985, I authored a resolution that was passed at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Dallas, which called for a return to the priorities of evangelism and missions in the local church. I believe we need to spend more time being missional in our churches and less time trying to be attractational. It's all about our focus and the priorities for our calendars and budgets. God honors those congregations that keep their eyes on him.

About Larry

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

During my college years, George and Susan Baker, formerly ministers at Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, were my major teachers at Southwest Baptist College. Pete and Joann Butler followed as I attended Midwestern Baptist Seminary. Both of these couples helped me to understand there is much to be done in the local church and the practical tools needed to help get that accomplished.

I've been blessed to work with several excellent Baptist state music directors. Bob Wooley and Bobby Jones in Missouri, Ervin Keithley in Arkansas, and now Tom Tillman in Texas have had a great influence in my life and ministry.

Randall Bradley has been a treasured teacher, mentor and friend since

seminary days. His friendship and thoughtful tutelage always are welcome in my life.

I have been honored to be counted as one of the [Centurymen](#) for the past 11 years. The love for the ministry of excellent music and the devotion to sharing that music across the world has been a life-changing experience.

What did you learn on the job you wish you learned in seminary?

It's all about people. I'm convinced people skills are the most important skills we need for ministry. We must be devoted to becoming more excellent musicians and leaders, but the minister who faces difficulty in a ministry position most often does so because of a lack of people skills, not a lack of musical ability.

What is the impact of ministry on your family?

To be honest, vocational ministry can be very hard on families. The time demands of a minister's calendar and personal budget coupled with the uncanny ability of God's people to have needs at just the "wrong" time make family life a challenge. In our most recent church assignment, however, my wife and I both work at the church, and the partnering we feel in that arrangement is wonderful.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

A hymnal. The devotional impact of our hymns cannot be underestimated. It should not replace the Bible, but it is a great companion to it.

God's Singers by Dave Williamson explores and emphasizes the "why" of our singing and our choir's ministry.

My Utmost For His Highest by Oswald Chambers provides short but deep

devotional thoughts for each day.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Wow, just one? I guess my favorite comes from Daniel 3:17-18—"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

May I have the boldness to stand for Christ when confronted!

Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus? Why?

I guess I would have to say Joshua. He served in the "second chair" for many years yet, when needed, stepped up. Following God's command to "be strong and courageous," he led the children of Israel into the Promised Land.

Many of us are called to serve in the "second chair," yet there are times when we must lead our people into God's presence. That only comes by being patient, prepared and ready to serve.

Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.

Two things:

I am a father to three great children and grandfather to 10 amazing grandchildren.

After almost 50 years, I still hold a high school basketball scoring record.

If you could get one “do over” in ministry, what would it be, and why?

I have regrets over strained relationships I had at one time or another with church members. Most of those strains came out of some very careless or inadvertent actions or inactions, but they were strains nonetheless. I'd love to be able to go back and speak into those people's lives and ask forgiveness.