

CORPORATE WORSHIP

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Park Street Church takes a high view of worship, which stands at the center of our life together as a church; We believe that God is uniquely present with us in worship, which is not simply a meeting for education and inspiration. Lord's Day worship is a foretaste of our eternal Sabbath, when the gathered faithful rest in the Lord, continually offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. This worship-offering is primarily determined by God: who he is and what he has done for us, his people. This view, which has been passed down by the Church catholic over the past two thousand years, is one expression of our participation in the universal Church: one Body with many members, gathered variously in countless times and places.

1. Worship is "decent and in good order."¹ The service is constructed as an offering fitting its object – the God who made heaven and earth, who redeemed us by the blood of Christ who rose on the first day of the week, reigns in glory, and sits in judgment over the world. Services are carefully planned in order to show the *worth* we ascribe to God, and to remind us what we ought to think and believe and do. We show worth to God through preaching, prayer, and music, and through our order of service, which knits these elements together in a deliberate fashion. The sermon retains its traditional place somewhat early in the service, proclaiming week after week God's revelation through the scriptures, inviting us to respond in prayer, offering, and song.²
2. "All of these must be done for the edification of the church."³ Worship services should be intelligible to all, including outsiders, and we earnestly hope that unbelievers will be convicted by our worship. Nevertheless, ours would not be considered a "seeker service"⁴ since the edification of the church is the primary goal. Rather than aiming for entertainment or emotional fulfillment,⁵ Paul's word *διαπαιδαγώγησις* (edification) suggests strong substance and a long-term trajectory.⁶
3. The flavor of our worship services with regard to formality/solemnity and ritual is generally middle-of-the-road, since we are conspicuously a large-tent church. We fully embrace a traditionally ordered service that allows us to join with so many generations who have come before us, to benefit from their wisdom and to provide a fitting context to participate in great music, thoughtful prayer, and rigorous expository

preaching: this intends to reflect the God who is himself the master of form and the Rock of Ages. At the same time, we avoid ritualism, refrain from ascribing inappropriate significance to extra-biblical liturgical practices, and favor directness and simplicity: this intends to reflect a God who humbled himself in the person of Jesus to reveal himself, and allows us to live in liberty, not in legalism. The worship service is for everybody; we don't segregate people according to age or preference (e.g. youth services, children's sermons).

4. Worship is offered in the Spirit and in Truth. It makes no intent to calculate or manipulate; it is not a "Good Work," but rather comes from the thoughtful heart.⁷ It is the natural outflowing of our love for God, because he first loved us: it is gratitude for salvation, for God's infinite goodness toward us. We grow in faith only through the Holy Spirit, so heartfelt worship is created, not by a perfectly-planned liturgy or musical formula, but by the substance of prayer and praise offered by God's people through the vessel of the service.
5. Worship is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.⁸ *Sacrifice* is just as consequential to that phrase as *praise and thanksgiving*.⁹ In worship we offer God our best, and that best is determined by our collective means as a community, not by individuals¹⁰ or the standards of another church. Located in a university city, Park Street Church has always operated along the lines of a university church or cathedral church as conceived by Martin Luther, in which the richest, best offerings of Christian worship (from learned preaching to beautiful music) were utilized and preserved for the next generation,¹¹ for the edification of the congregation and for the good of the wider Church.

Our music is guided by the two-fold aims of glorifying God and edifying his Church. Starting at its founding in 1809, Park Street has stood more-or-less in the musical tradition that has developed over the past two millennia in the Western church,¹² rather than with the music that grew out of 19th-century revival-style worship (that has characterized much of American evangelicalism from that time up to the present day). A report read to the congregation in 1845 names from its founding, Park Street Church's goals for music— to:

1) Cor. 14:40; also "...God is not a God of disorder but of peace..." 1 Cor. 14:33

2) This contrasts with the revival-type service, with a sermon as the climactic element, and music and prayer intended mostly to prepare the congregation to receive the sermon.

3) 1 Cor. 14:26

4) not chiefly because "no one seeks after God" Rom. 3:11

5) i.e. in the manner our culture worships its idols: "You must not worship the Lord your God in their way." Deut 12:4

6) Also 1 Peter 2:5

7) See Mark 7:6; Isaiah 29:13;

8) Heb. 13:15

9) See 2 Sam. 24:24; John 12:3; Luke 21:4

10) See 1 Cor. 12

11) See the preface to the 1526 German Mass

12) As such, and consistent with the biblical model, this church holds in high esteem both music by skilled musicians, as well as singing by the entire congregation, whereas some traditions have neglected one or the other.

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- “INCREASE DEVOTIONAL FEELINGS” This is weightier than today’s understanding of *feelings* would suggest, and can be understood more like the **inspiration** of the imagination (especially with wonder, and also with joy, gratitude, etc.) Ps. 98, 150.
- “ELEVATE THE AFFECTIONS” Again, in modern language we would say it should be **exhortative** – at the time *affections* referred to what Paul commands us to put on in Col 3:12ff.)
- “AS WELL AS TO CULTIVATE A TASTE FOR SCIENTIFIC MUSIC & ALSO TO INTRODUCE INTO THE SANCTUARY FROM SABBATH TO SABBATH TUNES OF A CHARACTER MORE STRICTLY SACRED THAN WERE IN USE IN THE CHURCHES OF THAT DAY.” [emphasis in original] This may seem to address purely musical goals, but the church felt this way precisely because the music they decided to forego was deemed too “light” or frivolous a vessel to carry the deep truths of the Faith. They sought a weighty vessel¹³ *set apart* from every-day merriment, which, along with their vigorous emphasis on the primacy of the lyrics over the music, allowed the Psalms¹⁴ they sang to serve their **didactic** purpose, in accordance with Deuteronomy 31 and Colossians 3:16.

Glorifying to God: In all our worship services, we maintain the traditional focus of musical worship: who God is, and what he has done (and what he will do in the future). See Psalm 145. On the Lord’s Day, we are particularly responsive to our living hope through Christ’s resurrection, being moved to joy (Ps 95) and wonder (Ps. 8), neither excluding cries for mercy (ps. 51, 130), songs of lament, etc, when appropriate, and shaped by the Church year. We offer our first fruits to God, the very finest of our ability and effort.

Edifying to the Church: The music in our morning services continues the tradition begun in 1809. Our music is meant to be Didactic (Deut. 31), Exhortative (Col. 3), and Inspiring (Ps 98, 150). In this, we are not constrained by genre or style *per se*. While our music has changed significantly over time and continues to evolve, there is no insistence or compulsion to mirror the music or aesthetics of the popular culture. Western sacred music has developed over time to intrinsically facilitate the goals enumerated above, while commercial/pop music develops in a way that is just as well suited to its own quite different goals. In short, we aim to use the music that is most plainly suited to its objective.

The evening service was originally conceived as an outreach to new Christians and those considering the Faith.¹⁵ The music is meant to be

immediately accessible, with culturally familiar musical and lyrical forms.¹⁶ While the music in continuity with past centuries of worship has many benefits, those benefits may not be realized by a worshipper for whom the music and poetry are as unfamiliar and inaccessible as a foreign language. The evening music is an additional opportunity to approach that most basic shared goal: singing praise to God.

THE MORNING MUSIC MINISTRY consists of the Sanctuary Choir and the Park Street Orchestra, from which smaller ensembles and soloists are drawn as needed. In addition, the Cherub choir and Children’s choir provide musical education for the next generations. All of the ensembles work hard to present music with excellence. Musicians unite together at high points in the Church year, Easter being chief. Any congregant with appropriate skill is welcome in any of the groups. There is a fair degree of turnover in the ensembles from year to year, as the bulk of our musicians are students and young professionals who tend to be in Boston for a limited time.¹⁷ In the past few years, we have seen significant growth in the music students from conservatories who faithfully unite with us in worship and serve in the choir and orchestra. University students (the archetypal ambitious Boston student in particular) often find a unique on-ramp to the AM services of Park Street: the richness and captivating depth they find is intrinsically appealing to their imagination and sense of curiosity—*faith seeking understanding*.

THE EVENING MUSIC MINISTRY consists of the Sunday Night Band, as well as a Children’s choir for that service. The players in the band are scheduled on a rotating basis. Though the instrumentation is that of a typical band, the style of playing and singing is geared, as possible, towards the reality that the band is no more and no less than the accompaniment for the congregation, which is the intended performer (with God the audience). All congregants with appropriate ability are welcome on the band roster. We generally have a mix of skilled amateurs, seasoned professionals, and students (usually from Berklee College of Music).

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13) cf. Calvin on music

14) In its early years, Park Street retained the Puritan practice of singing only the Psalms.

15) Though the principle still applies in how the service is shaped, the target has changed. A recent survey indicated that it is not those who grew up outside the church who find our 4PM service more graspable, but those who grew up in the church with that sort of music. Those who came to faith later in life actually responded just as favorably to our AM music as the “natives” who have sung hymns with organ their whole lives.

16) Nevertheless, many traditional hymns are included as well, accompanied in a modern style, not only because they have retained legitimate popularity within the PM idiom but also because they touch on the three historic goals (Didactic, Exhortative, Inspiring) within the PM framework.

17) For example, over the past 4 years, we have had around 30 new singers in the choir, but also 30 members who have left the choir, due to taking jobs outside Boston, finishing graduate programs, etc. – and the orchestra is similar.