

Music and Worship Ideals for BICF ZGC

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We are a people moving toward a glorious goal. Someday we will gather with people from every nation, language, tribe, and culture to endlessly worship the Lord Jesus Christ. In this awesome gathering our praises will retain their cultural and linguistic distinctives – it will not be a gathering of ‘the vanilla.’ We will be ‘perfect’ Africans, Asians, Americans... We will hear the truly ‘Greatest Hits’ from every nation! Best of all we will understand and appreciate it all. No confusion of tongues, no ‘taste’ differences, and no ‘volume’ wars. There we will be fully redeemed and cleansed from all of our sins, prejudices, and imperfections. Jesus will receive all glory and in that we will find unbounded joy.

Every Sunday morning at BICF ZGC we have a rehearsal for that Grand Day. Our unique and exciting congregation is indeed an International Christian Fellowship. As we journey together we must keep our eyes and hearts fixed on the goal. Everything may not seem just right here, but we are merely passing through. Our best praise still comes from a body of sin. Our sincere worship occurs in a world that is fallen. Yet, the glass is more than half full. Jesus is among us, working in and through each worshipper, enthroned in our praises.

This paper is an attempt to define what is in some ways almost indefinable. We seek to find a common ground of understanding about worship as we gather at ZGC. Opinions are like noses, everyone has one! And most people have quite strong opinions about what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ about worship. We set forth these ideas as flexible goals to keep in mind as you prepare to lead worship. Let us all remember that it is not primarily about us. Jesus is Lord. And He has come to redeem and gather us all to praise Him and bless all His people. Meanwhile, our best worship is a ‘work in progress.’

Biblical Theology – Let us strive to make our worship God-centered and God-exalting. May our songs review and rejoice in the great things God has done and is doing on our behalf. Worship songs are as important, some would say more important, for teaching good theology to the church as the sermon. Scripture is the best source book for worship, so make sure your songs are Biblically faithful.

Song sets should have a balance of declaration and devotion. We need to declare Gospel facts about who God is and what He has done. Songs should help believers know God and His salvation better. They should employ the full range of Scriptural images, truths, and descriptions of God’s grace. We also need to express our devotion to God in song. We love Him, honor Him, praise Him, and thank Him. Be careful that people don’t mistake our holy love for God as romantic or erotic. Our love songs are different from the love songs of this world. The balance of declaration and devotion insures we know who is the One we love, and we give Him our heads and hearts in loving worship.

Song Choice and Artistic Expression - All Christian music can be called worship, and should be played as worship, be it instrumental, poetic, etc. However, not all Christian songs are edifying for the entire congregation to sing together. If necessary, go through your songs and imagine each line on the powerpoint (as it will be on Sunday morning). Would this song be too vague or confusing for our international congregation to comprehend? Can the average person sing each line and be able to understand it as an expression of worship? If not, **save it for a special music** selection and explain the meaning to the congregation beforehand. We love artistic expression in worship, and expressing various spiritual points of view can be extremely helpful and glorifying to God. There is an appropriate context for every expression of reverence for God.

Variety and New songs - We are blessed at ZGC to have different music teams. We want to encourage stylistic diversity, but offering a different style does not have to mean introducing all new songs. We must seek to keep the music on Sundays accessible. For a Sunday morning set, do not introduce more than ONE new song. If you really feel the need to have more than one, please email the worship coordinator for approval. If you're just bored with all the songs we've done before, email the worship coordinator for a list of songs that have been done at the church before, or try doing an old song with a new twist or chord progression. However, lead the congregation through the changes you make to an old/familiar song, and be understanding and accommodating if they don't catch on. Be aware that most people will not easily be able to enter into worship the first time they sing a new song - be sensitive.

Church History - We have nearly two thousand years of Church musicology to utilize in our worship. Let us offer our people a great sample of the breadth of His praise. Let us teach our people the great songs and choruses from many lands. We can also utilize the prayers and liturgies which have strengthened the Church in its mission.

Musicality - Most congregations aren't composed of a hundred or so Aretha Franklins or Mariah Careys. In light of that, most worship songs are written in such a way that their tunes are relatively easy to learn. Your favorite Christian contemporary song may be too difficult for a congregation to sing. Being in an international church further complicates things, because many people have different musical expectations (e.g. most Africans clap on the 1 and 3 beats, while Americans prefer the 2 and 4). Remember, it is not a concert, it is corporate worship. Strive to make your music accessible.

Volume – Many Biblical worship scenes are full volume! Saints are called to shout their praise and extoll Him with loud voices! Other texts call us to be still, hushed, and silent before our glorious God. It is difficult to be biblically dogmatic about worship volume. There is a time to be loud and a time to use restraint. I have seen older saints painfully covering their ears during “high volume” music sets at ZGC while younger followers jumped for joy! Please consider the whole family of faith – and their varied sensitivities and limits – when you turn up that dial.

Repetition – As we meditate on God's truth, sometimes we need to hear a simple phrase over and over again before we begin to fully comprehend it. On the other hand, sometimes

repetition desensitizes our hearts and minds to truth. When you linger over a chorus, some people will check out and others will enter deeply into what God is doing in your midst. Strive to make all your worship engaging to the congregation - you may do this by praying, by instructing the congregation to pray or confess to the Lord, or by explaining why you are repeating a chorus. Don't let anyone think you are on "autopilot". Everyone needs to be assured that they are being thoughtfully and prayerfully led.

Thoughtfulness – The songs we sing should be excellent in their composition and quality. Here we are not describing a particular musical style, as we believe many styles can become holy vehicles for His praise. There are times for songs of joy and songs of lament in worship, but we should always strive for high quality, meaningful and engaging times praise before the Father. This striving for excellence in worship includes adequate preparation, practice, and presentation of songs. Lyrics to these songs should be given to the projection team (correctly spelled!) by the deadline indicated for that week. We seek to offer God our best in all aspects of worship.

The short version- two greatest worship-leading guidelines:

Love the Lord, love the Lord, love the Lord. Pray. Let Him guide you in your song choice, in your practices, in the prayers you pray into the microphone and in your prayer closet. Seek to lead with pure, humble motives. Let Him guide you in responding to criticism. And the second is like it-

Love the people, love the people, love the people. Put yourself in their position. Pay attention when you're leading- how are people responding? Learn what effectively leads them into worship, and pay attention when they look nervous, or are unable to sing what you're trying to play. At the end of the day, someone will almost always have a criticism about the way you lead. Take it into prayerful consideration, resisting anger. God has called you to model worship, and they can choose to follow or not. It is not manipulation. And as you follow the Lord, others who love Him will see and will follow. The best leaders worship with all their hearts even when nobody is watching. But when others are watching, true leaders find ways to draw them into the presence of God so they can experience the greatness of the Lord together.

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