

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
praise Him all creatures here below,
praise Him all creatures here below,
praise Him above,
praise Him above,
praise Him above, ye heav'nly host,*

worship
RESEARCH
PROJECT

*praise Him above,
praise Him above,
praise Him above, ye heav'nly host,
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, amen. Amen.

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Introduction

As an organization involved in music and worship, our desire is to help shape disciples whose music-making reflects Jesus. We believe we will be far more effective if we are working alongside churches, rather than just “doing our own thing.” To that end, we initiated a survey to better understand conservative Anabaptist churches, their practices in worship, and their goals. We hope this survey may also be helpful and informative to church leaders and members, allowing them to hear from each other.

A survey is, by design, intended to be *descriptive*—to give an accurate view of what people believe and practice. However, in analyzing the results of a survey on worship beliefs and practices, we are also working with a lot of *prescriptive* content—with people’s beliefs on what is right or wrong, ideal or not ideal. Prescriptive statements are often controversial ones.

These reports are not intended to support particular prescriptive views; however, we see value in hearing and learning from the varying and sometimes contradictory perspectives represented in the survey. These reports can be read, in part, as a window into our learning process, and will therefore contain some views of the report writers. We hope that it will still be possible to differentiate between whose views are being described and between the descriptive and prescriptive content of the survey responses.

We would like to thank the many leaders and lay members who made this research possible by giving us their experience and perspective concerning worship in their home church. We are also extremely grateful to Cari Nolt for her excellent work as research assistant on this project.

Overview

Survey Method

In the fall of 2020, Shenandoah Christian Music Camp launched a survey project to discover principles and practices in worship services across the conservative Anabaptist world. This report attempts to provide a summary overview of the survey and of those who responded to the survey. Other reports will then categorize and quote from the survey responses.

The original survey, consisting of forty questions, was available as an online form, a Microsoft Word document, and a hard copy. The survey included questions in the following main categories: basic demographics; the structure, order, and content of the Sunday morning worship service; the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the worship pattern from the survey-taker's perspective; the history and future of the worship pattern; communion; and the congregation's perspective on the worship pattern.

A research assistant emailed and called potential survey-takers and organized survey data as the surveys were returned. A committee then discussed and evaluated survey responses. The first surveys were filled out in October 2020. In the beginning of November, due to feedback we received and due to difficulties with the online format, we revised the survey and changed the online form into a fillable PDF. We included a cover letter to give more context for the survey and shortened the survey by deleting some questions, including the section on communion. With a few added questions, the revised survey came to a total of thirty-two questions. We also widened the pool of survey-takers to include lay members and later especially solicited the input of young people.

After the surveys had been completed, and as we organized material and prepared to write, we saw that the survey did not adequately cover the topic

of congregational singing. Therefore, we sent three questions to our survey-takers who had email and received thirty-three responses to the following questions.

1. Many of the churches we surveyed indicated that they value a cappella singing. Is this true for you? Why or why not?
2. Do you value a certain type of songs (content-rich hymns, experience-rich gospel songs, scripture choruses, etc.)? Explain.
3. Why do you value singing together (if you do)? What does congregational singing accomplish that you care about?

As stated earlier, our goal was to hear from a wide representation of conservative Anabaptist groups. Our survey results do indeed represent significant diversity. However, we also recognize limitations. Each survey-taker is only one person representing his congregation, so his answers may not reflect the viewpoint of each member of his congregation. Additionally, the survey results do not represent those groups who did not feel comfortable participating. In short, this report does not provide a comprehensive look at the present-day conservative Anabaptist worship service, but it does give at least a window into current practices, as well as the principles behind them, in many Anabaptist settings today.

The cover letter below, included in the second edition of the survey, offers more details on the project.

In this survey project, we at Shenandoah Christian Music Camp (SCMC) are seeking input from church leaders and lay members concerning the worship services of their congregation.

Who is SCMC? SCMC is an organization serving conservative Anabaptist communities by providing training and resources for singing and congregational worship. Stated simply, worship is our response to God. Our vision is communities who understand wholesome music as a core function of a whole and vibrant life and who use music to reflect the beauty and glory of God.

SCMC has a small staff working out of an office in Harrisonburg, VA. We are led by a board of directors. SCMC holds music camps (when there is no pandemic) but is also wanting to develop resources for churches, schools, and families. Some resources currently in process include an elementary school music curriculum and several song books. We also recently printed a basics of music curriculum for congregations and schools. For more information about our board, our mission, and what we do, please download this booklet.

What are we after? Through the surveys, we are wanting to hear from churches we serve currently, but we'd also like to hear the perspective of churches we don't serve, as they have something to say that we need to hear. A committee is working to read and consider the surveys; eventually, we hope to compile and report some of what we hear from you. (All survey-takers will receive a copy of that. Published responses will be anonymous unless we have your permission to include your name.)

We also hope these survey responses will guide us in continuing to develop resources, particularly for the singing part of congregational worship. These might include writing songs and hymns, putting scripture to music, and considering how these would fit in the flow of a service. It could also include such things as hymn backgrounds or a sequence of songs and scripture readings. We're not entirely sure what these resources would look like, which is why we are asking for input. We are not trying to push resources that aren't wanted or helpful. We hope to hear whether and where there is a sense of need in this area. We don't think that every church will want or need these resources, and that is fine. We want to serve where there is need.

Finally, we are wanting to get to know people "on the ground" in order to stay closely in touch with real congregational life. We want to help provide resources that are useful and connective and that congregations can choose to draw upon at their discretion. We are not seeking "professional" worship, but to help bring focus and depth. This is not intended somehow to look past lay participation, but rather to encourage it. We especially hope to be of service to those who want to nurture growth in congregational worship but have limited time or experience for developing their own resources. If any questions on the survey feel too invasive, please feel free to skip them. Your feedback, whether enthusiastic or cautious, is welcome and desired. Please feel free to send additional comments, questions, or concerns to me directly at ____.

For the growth of the kingdom,
Wendell Nisly, *Executive Director*

Sample: not all pages are included.

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Vision and Aim

Introduction

One of the key questions in the survey was, “What is the vision and aim of the Sunday morning worship service? What are you trying to accomplish?” The majority of those who answered this survey question were church leaders, but there were also song leaders who answered from their perspective and lay members who either articulated their perception of their leaders’ perspective or their own vision for a Sunday morning worship service. The answers to this question are separated into the following categories.

1. Worshiper to God

- A. General
- B. Connection with God and Experiencing His Presence
- C. Communal Worship

2. Worshiper to Worshiper

- A. Preaching, Teaching, and Instruction
- B. Encouragement, Edification, Challenge, Building Up, Feeding the Flock, and Discipleship
- C. Conviction
- D. Preparation for God’s work
- E. Fellowship and Unity
- F. Intentional Participation
- G. Obedience to Scripture and Faithfulness to Tradition
- H. Welcoming Atmosphere

teaching, preaching, and discussion of Scripture. (Nolan Martin, PA)

- Worship—pointing to God as worthy. (Stan Nisly, KS)
- The edification of the brothers and sisters (which includes reminding us of who God is and who we are), preparation of the saints for service, and the glorification of the Father. (Jamin Yoder, IN)
- Our focus is first on worship; our Father is totally worthy of our worship in Spirit and Truth. We love to sing. . . . Then there is the preaching of the Word; we endeavor to feed a balanced diet. (Perry Miller, TN)
- The aim of the Sunday morning service is the glorification of Christ through the public proclamation of his Gospel, and the faithful call for humankind to enjoy God through the reconciling work of Christ. This is principally expressed through the public reading and faithful exposition of the Word, delivered (ideally) to hearts that have been prepared by the Spirit through the ministry of prayer. The heart is prepared for the ministry of the Word by the Spirit’s agency, especially invoked through the worship of prayer, song, witness (testimony), and corporate intercession. (Anon., ON)
- As a lay music leader, to allow the congregation to perceive the glory/beauty of God through song. (John Mark Sandoval, KS)
- Worship—obviously this one is a primary function when the church is gathered collectively. We have historically given less attention to this one than to the following one—instruction—and efforts to increase our “worship time” at the expense of “instructional time” have met with some raised eyebrows and a fear that we will move toward an increasingly shallow approach that emphasizes emotion and feeling rather than solid instruction. (Javan Bender, SC)
- Intentional corporate worship—worship and honor of Christ. Recalibrating our hearts as lovers of God. Confessing our idolatry through the week and renewing our love, reorienting our desires,

Worshiper to God

GENERAL

- To ascribe honor to God by declaring his greatness and goodness in prayer and singing. To learn about God and how to live as His children through the

Strengths and Weaknesses

INTRODUCTION

“What strengths and weaknesses do you observe in your pattern of worship?” From the answers we received to this question, the top four categories that emerged were singing, lay participation, engagement, and routine/predictability (along with their counters, flexibility/spontaneity).

Because strengths and weaknesses are often closely intertwined, the same element can be both a strength and a weakness. For example, one survey-taker wrote:

Traditional service: I see this both as a strength and a weakness. It is a strength in that people know what to expect of the service and how to fill their roles. However, it is a weakness in that people fall into a rut and go through the motions of the Sunday morning worship. . . . Because our service is always conducted in an exact way, it feels like little thought is put into the service—thinking specifically of the worship part of it, not the sermon. (Anon., PA)

Similarly, one deacon noted that a strength is their highly valued and anticipated group discussions, but that a weakness is the lack of involvement in the testimony portion of their service. Both are in the category of lay participation, but in one portion of the service it is a strength, and, in another portion, it is a weakness.

Because this question deals with both positives and negatives, we ask you to read with grace. This is not an attempt to create conflict or to spread criticism; it is an attempt to allow these survey-takers to speak to each other and to you. We hope this will be a means of strengthening both what is weak and what is strong, so that Christ’s name will be glorified, and his church will be prospered.

OUTLINE

1. Singing
2. Lay Participation and Contribution
3. Engagement
4. Routine and Predictability, Spontaneity and Flexibility
5. Preaching and Teaching
6. Fellowship, Diversity, and Unity
7. Focus and Flow of Service
8. ScriptureGeneral
9. Conclusion

Note: To make reading more user-friendly, we took liberties to edit quotes and to adjust the spelling and wording without changing the meaning. We also segmented quotes when different parts of the quote were applicable to different categories.

Threats and Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

When observing opportunities to change, it can be a challenge to differentiate between opportunities for godly growth and changes for less noble reasons. A similar challenge is to clearly see the most significant pressures and threats to the things we value. To help shed light on needs in these areas, we asked, “What opportunities and threats do you think are present for your congregation?” in the context of congregational worship. By drawing attention to the places where others see potential danger and opportunity, our hope is that we might also be stirred to renewed imagination and action in these areas.

OUTLINE

1. Music, Singing, and Hymnals
2. Outreach and Ministry
3. External Influences
4. Complacency/Passivity/Casualness
5. Community and Connection
6. Incorporating New Forms/Development
7. Miscellaneous

Note: To make reading more user-friendly, we took liberties to edit quotes and to adjust the spelling and wording without changing the meaning. We also segmented quotes when different parts of the quote were applicable to different categories.

Music, Singing, and Hymnals

OPPORTUNITIES

- I think we should consider taking our worship experience into the town somehow. Maybe spread out as smaller groups every once in a while in an attempt to share what we love with the less fortunate. Our singing would be a big part of this. (Daniel Horst, ON)
- Our congregation has a history of high involvement in and love for singing. It’s a challenge to pass on that passion to a generation of youth. (Joseph Miller, MO)
- We have multiple gifted song leaders, and a congregation that enjoys learning new songs. All members participate. (Mark Miller, OH)
- Quality music in the home is important to build appreciation for quality music in congregational singing. (John Miller, IN)
- Congregational/church singing is obviously a beautiful opportunity for the body of believers and our visitors to be led to experience God in an ordinary worship setting. I’m convinced this is so vital in our day and age. (Peter Reimer, Belize)
- We do have a number of people in the congregation who are gifted and called in multiple genres of music—from folks who regularly participate in [a choir] to folks interested in more contemporary expressions (a cappella and otherwise). Several of these are well-positioned to help develop a stronger culture of music at [church]. (Anon., ON)
- In the way of opportunities, I see training in the skills of public speaking, Bible study, music, etc., as a powerful way for leaders and members to learn to better serve each other. (Deborah Shank, VA)
- I believe we have opportunity to teach a lot more knowledge and understanding in worship/music. Our people are open and excited to learn. (Adolf Unger, AB)
- Our church’s leadership team would welcome more investment made into our worship, especially our singing. I received a green light to introduce your congregational curriculum, *Draw Near*, the end of this month and will see what type of reception there is to offering the rest of the course. (Daryl Weaver, PA)
- Music education (especially for our older members). (Jamin Yoder, IN)
- Our biggest opportunity is unity among us and a desire to learn right music skills and elevate the quality of our singing. (Kevin Leis, ON)
- Not all members seem to understand that singing is a part of a Kingdom community—not just “my thing” or a “devotional Sunday morning exercise.”

Finding Our Way Through Worship

A Look at Patterns of Worship and Why They Matter

Kyle Stoltzfus

Many times, when we talk about a Sunday morning service, we focus on the content of the service: the words said or sung and what we thought or felt about them. We less frequently notice (though we sometimes offer a preview of the “order of the service”) the pattern or order of the service. The pattern we choose for our service may at first seem unimportant compared to the ideas communicated through speech or song or how we feel about them. Our worship patterns, however, affect more than just the content of worship. Since we are created in a way which connects the activities we do with our bodies to the kinds of things we learn to love, the pattern of worship matters as well. The things we do with our bodies, whether kneeling for prayer, standing to sing, opening and closing our Bibles, and the order in which we do these things eventually shapes our souls.¹ Without it being explicitly said, the pattern our services follow highlight one activity or another as being significant, invite or discourage congregational participation, and associate a congregation’s worship with a certain tradition, whether that be Old Order or revived, Roman Catholic or Reformed, high Anglican or low.

This report has two foci. First, we focus on the activities of worship and when they occur during

a Sunday-morning service. What happens when, and what does this highlight as important? Then, we focus on who participates in the service. Who is involved, and what priorities or commitments does this reveal? Drawing from survey responses, I will offer the pattern of a generalized Sunday-morning service followed by evaluation.² My claim is that, while there are many different patterns of worship represented in the survey, the general pattern assumes the priority of preaching: the sermon. With that said, it is hard to overlook the significance of congregational participation indicated by most worship practices. This is especially true when we consider the significant role congregational singing takes in many Sunday-morning services. So, in addition to being preaching-organized, the typical service represented in the survey is congregationally-oriented.

Grasping for a “Typical” Service

A typical Sunday morning service opens with a call to worship. The call may include a few words of welcome, but, more significantly, it immediately incorporates the congregation into the service with several songs. Worshipers from non-Anabaptist traditions might notice that the call to worship is unadorned with

1 One of the distinguishing characteristics of Christian worship is its attentiveness to the pattern of worship as well as its content. The worship patterns we use matter because the things we do with our bodies matter. Putting it plainly, we do not always think about the things we do with our bodies, and yet the things we do form us, whether we think about them or not. When Paul directs Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:13 to “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (ESV), he is prescribing certain activities to be included as part of Christian worship. Hebrews 10:25 envisions Christians who first “forsake not the assembling” and “exhort” each other during their worship. This is in contrast to the heterodox Valentinian Gnostics, whose disembodied spiritualities made such things as assembling as a congregation, much less whether or not to read Scripture together, accessories to their spiritual lives, at best!

2 The problem with this sort of generalization is how it runs roughshod over patterns which do not fit the mold—and there are many! Because of the variety represented in the survey, it may not be an exaggeration to claim that the organizing pattern of conservative Anabaptist worship is something other than a pattern. I mean that a desire for worship in Spirit and truth, aspiration to enjoy God’s presence in encouragement and conviction, or a bent toward congregational participation may be just as critical as a prescribed pattern.

Singing in Worship: Why Do We Care?

Wendell Nisly

Background

Among survey participants, there is broad appreciation for singing as a valuable and necessary part of worship. But why is singing valued?

Most of us would have a few quick answers to that question, but if we probe beneath the surface, we may find a deeper understanding into why conservative Anabaptists care so much about singing. A number of values emerged in the survey, some prominent and others less so, that provide insight into why Anabaptists value singing so highly. This knowledge may help us evaluate, protect, and shape our singing now and in the future.

In the survey results, three of the broadly held values for worship services are congregational participation, unity, and worship. As we will see, congregational singing is believed to nurture and promote these three key values.

Participation

Congregational participation is highly valued among survey takers. Some hope to resist the consumer mentality that is prevalent in the broader Western culture:

There's a lot of work to be done on the idea of worship and attending church as a participant rather than a consumer. (Daryl Weaver, PA)

There is in some ways a good sense of participation rather than consumption, but I do feel our structure and events can easily allow or

encourage more of a receptive attitude than a contributor's attitude. (John Perfect, VA)

Some respondents emphasized that the congregation is an interconnected body, not simply a gathering of individuals. In this view, the congregation is not only more than the sum of its parts—it is as different from ordinary gatherings as a man and a woman are different from a husband and wife.

I don't want us to lose the current amount of participation that we do have. New Testament gatherings of the body are *gatherings of the body*, not some mandated meeting of God in a designated space. (John Perfect, VA, emphasis original)

[Regarding our vision for worship,] various members would give answers involving the idea of “worshiping together” (which I would distinguish from communal worship). I personally feel . . . that the Sunday morning service ought to be strongly participatory and to some degree spontaneous in order to deliberately capitalize on the power of gathering to build our sense of corporeal community. As worship leaders, we've had conversations with [our leaders], and will be having more in the future about ways of consciously strengthening our corporate worship, especially our congregational singing. (Christopher Good, ON)

One of my personal visions is to foster a deeper awareness and appreciation of the spiritual significance of community and corporate activity. The voluntary act of gathering with

Hymnal Report

Wendell Nisly

Introduction

Among survey respondents, all congregations sing from a hymnal, and the majority use hymnals as their only song source. Some also use a song licensing service.¹ In this report we will look at the hymnals in use and follow with a few observations.

Hymnals in Use

The surveys revealed that there are a wide variety of hymnals in use in Anabaptist churches. In this survey, 24 different hymnals were mentioned.² Various churches used more than one hymnal.³ Of these, 13 different hymnals are listed as primary hymnal. The following table shows hymnals or licensing companies in use, listed alphabetically.

| Hymnal or Licensing Company | Publication Date ⁴ | # of times mentioned |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Best Loved Songs and Hymns | 1961 | 1 |
| Brethren Hymnal | | 1 |
| CCLI (song licensing) | 1988 | 10 |
| Christian Hymnal | 1959 | 19 |
| Christian Hymnary | 1972 | 13 |
| Church Hymnal | 1927 | 16 |
| German Baptist Brethren Hymnbook | 1882 | 3 |
| Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde/ Mennonite Brethren German Songbook | 1999 ⁵ | 2 |

- 1 A number of churches use CCLI, a copyright service granting permission to copy or project songs. Only two survey respondents listed CCLI as their primary source for music, and both of these also used a hymnal. About 57 of 75 churches (76%) use only hymnals, while others also use some paper or projected supplement. By way of contrast, a 2018 survey of 1000 Protestant pastors found that in churches with an attendance over 250, only 41% used hymnals. Interestingly, among churches with an attendance less than 50, 85% used hymnals. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/08/28/most-churches-arent-engaged-in-a-worship-war-over-music/>
- 2 Congregational hymn-sings seem to be a tradition in many congregations. The books marked with an asterisk are used for hymn-sings only. Additionally, some churches use certain hymnbooks listed on this chart for hymn-sings only. One survey-taker mentioned that his church uses hymnbooks not in their racks such as *Hymns of the Church*, *Zion's Praises*, *Harmonia Sacra*, and *The Mennonite Hymnal* for their congregation's hymn-sings. These are not included in this chart's numbers.
- 3 Keep in mind that these statistics may not necessarily be representative of Conservative Anabaptists as a whole. Still, it gives a sense for what hymnals are in use.
- 4 In a few cases we have been unable to find publication dates.
- 5 The version they use is a 1999 shaped note version of a book published in the 1950s.