

The Encouragement Newsletter

Last quarter's newsletter focused on Praise and Worship in the house of God. Specifically, the newsletter explored how Praise and Worship is not just the musical segment of our gathering together. It actually encompasses every segment of the gathering. I have been in music ministry for many years and although I still have a lot to learn about this very vast ministry, I have garnered enough personal experience and examples from others to share some insight and encouragement. Let me say from the start, I know many music ministries or departments consist of all musicians, singers, dancers, drama, audio and other areas, but I am focusing this writing on the musicians and singers within The Music Ministry.

MY BEGINNINGS—

As a young girl growing up in church, I loved to hear the music in God's house. During this era, music for God's house had a distinct sound. You did not have to listen twice or try to figure out if the song was about Jesus like you have to do today. It was just a different day, but I loved the distinctiveness. To go on...I believe everyone is born with purpose and God orchestrates events to ensure His purpose has a platform for its manifestation. According to my mother, when I was an infant, the church organist would hold me in his arm while he played. I believe this experience was the beginning of my stirring. As time went on, we joined another church that did not have consistent musicians. They came for very brief moments. For some reason, they did not stay. One day, a lady named Carlena Platt joined the church. She really loved to the Lord. Although she could not sing, she formed a little choir and began writing songs for us to sing. This little choir received invitations to sing at various churches. Because we did not have any musicians, we had to sing acappella. Like I said, I loved the sound of the music in God's house and I longed to play the piano for our church and little choir so that we could have instrumental music too.

No matter the age, the Lord will grant you the desires of your heart. One Sunday, we had a guest speaker. He was no stranger to us, but to my surprise, my life was about to change. While he was speaking, he walked up the aisle where I was sitting and asked "Young lady, what do you want from the Lord?" Little did I know this question was the beginning of the manifestation of my infant stirring. I said I wanted to learn how to play the piano. He prayed for me and instructed my mother to enroll me in piano lessons. She followed his instructions and this was my music ministry beginnings as a musician. As time went on, I later became the "young" leader of the choir started by Sister Platt. I grew in my ability to play and we were still invited to go to places and sing, but now we had music. Ha! Ha! Ha! I was a very happy soul.

LEARNING MUSIC MINISTRY AS GOD DESIGNED—

I have always had a strong desire to see God's house flourish and be offered the best by His people for His glory. I am certain this began with my mother instilling dedication to God along with faithfulness to Him and His house. I approached the music ministry with this mentality. From my beginnings until today, I believe the musical equipment should be well maintained and whatever can be improved, should be improved because we are using it to honor the Most High God. As a young musician I believed the piano should be regularly tuned; drum heads changed (*get rid of the duck tape*); broken drum sticks replaced, etc. I believe you get my drift. I was a stickler very young. Assemblies with small budgets can manage to maintain the instruments when finances are dedicated for maintenance. In the word, we see that David made instruments used for ministry around the ark. They were not any kind of instruments. (See *I Chronicles 23:5 and II Chronicles 7:6*) Reading King David's life as a worshiper, we know he only offered God the best. We should do no less.

As a young leader, I knew very little, but had an intuition about things. I knew music was very important to God because it was His idea from the beginning of time. If music was not important, Psalms probably would not be the largest book in the Bible. Music would not have been an integral part of bringing the ark back (I Chronicles 16) nor in the dedication of the temple during King Solomon's reign (II Chronicles 5). Songs would not have been a part of Moses's celebration when the children of Israel crossed the Red

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Sea (Exodus 15); Prophetess Miriam would not have played the timbrel, danced and sang a song of victory (Exodus 15:20-21); and Prophet Isaiah would not have been singing the song of the Lord concerning His people in Isaiah 5. Lastly, Paul would not have exhorted us to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in Colossians 3:16. Therefore, by design, the purpose of music is to give God glory first and foremost; then used as an exhortation to others.

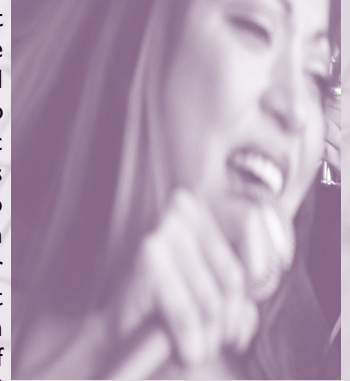
MUSIC MINISTRY IN GOD'S HOUSE

Senior leaders in God's house have a plethora of ways to administrate the music ministry. Some are closely engaged and very hands-on; some have minimal engagement; and others have no engagement. No matter the level of engagement, most give the responsibility totally to the musical folks with one person appointed as the Minister of Music, Director of Music or Chief Musician as the leader. May I submit to you that church leaders should be engaged in this area of ministry. I know some music folks do not want the pastor involved. They believe the pastor should stick to preaching, but as the senior leader, he/she is accountable to God for the operation of His house. I am not saying the senior leader should micro-manage the ministry by selecting songs and attending rehearsals, when there is a leader in place, but I am saying, the senior leader and music ministry leader should work together as a team with one purpose. I will explain myself.

Music ministry has the capacity to influence, control and manipulate the gathering in ways that positively and/or negatively affect God's people. In most gatherings, music is at the beginning and end of the meeting. This means, musicians and singers have face-time with the congregation in equal measure or more than the senior leader, the speaker or any other ministry for that matter. This ministry is before the congregation each Sunday. Depending upon the church structure, several songs will be ministered by a praise team, choir or combination of the two. This will last approximately 15-20 minutes; then there is the offering with music, which equals 5-10. Then if there is a "song selection" from the choir, a chorus, etc. before the spoken word, that is an additional 5-10 minutes. If there's dancing and celebration after the selection (*or at any time*), there will be another 5-10 minutes. If the people just cannot sit down, this celebration can last another 20-30 minutes. Finally, there is the alter call, which can last about 5-15 minutes. Time frames vary, but using this break down, you can see that music ministry equates to about 30-50 minutes on a typical Sunday morning. This does not include background music, for example, during a baby dedication. Untraditional ministries that emphasize praise and worship with a musical team that flows freely, the total ministry in music could be an additional 30 minutes each Sunday. Oh! Do not

forget the Bible Study for some ministries. You can see how music ministry plays a prominent role just like the spoken word. This is why I say senior leaders should be involved. Selection to this ministry should not be based upon talent alone. Careful attention must be paid to the individuals assigned this very powerful place in ministry.

Some do not believe the musicians, singers, choir director, etc. have that much power or influence. I have many stories that prove the power of music ministry within a church. However, I will only share one story. I was talking with a young lady one day and she described the declining conditions of her home church. There were many issues, but one thing I took note of was her explanation of what happened when the musicians left after their disagreement with the pastor. These musicians had the responsibility of playing for the choirs and regular services. Once the musicians left, one-fourth to half of the choir members left. This left the church's music ministry bankrupt and church membership dropped. Sure, the church could get more musicians and build another choir (*and they did*), but my point is to show the influence and power of music ministry. Because of the influence, musicians and singers, especially those in leadership roles, must be careful of their actions. I am definitely not saying a musician or singer cannot leave an assembly. Above all, we must obey God. But, there are many who go from assembly to assembly leaving a trail of destruction that upsets the house of God and this is what must be avoided by musicians and singers that carry so much influence. A lot of effort should be put into sorting things out. If no agreement can be reached, then there may have to be a parting of ways lovingly in peace.



I am aware there are two sides to every story. Therefore, I am aware that some upsets are due to leadership's treatment of musicians and singers. Many within the music ministry feel used, abused, and disrespected. This is due to misunderstanding (*by leaders, musicians and singers*) of the place of music in the house of God. Again, I was engaged in a conversation with a musician that joined a church and was eager to use his gift in the music ministry. He went through the formalities of the ministry in order to be part of the music team. In joining the team, he was under the impression the church did not pay the musicians. The only paid musicians were the "for hire" musicians (*meaning they were not members of the church, but hired to play for the church*). He decided he would be committed to his church, but would also play at another church "for hire". As time went on, he had the opportunity to play for another church at a higher rate of pay. There was one problem, it conflicted with his commitment to his church. However, the new opportunity would bring finances needed to support his family. He decided to talk with the minister of music about this opportunity and what it meant to his commitment. In the end, she spoke with the leadership and they decided to match the rate of pay so he could remain committed to his church. After this experience, he learned that other musicians that were members were always being paid. He had a good spirit about the new found information, but the question is "Why?" Why would the church's leadership lead musicians to believe they do not compensate, but all along they do? For many musicians, this is a BIG source of contention that make them go from assembly to assembly to be paid. No, it is not all about the Benjamins (money), although some run after money, just like people run after money in other professions. It is a heart issue on all accounts. But, the leaders should be honest and operate with integrity with all musicians—not just a select few. This is the way to endeavor to keep the unity and forge a strong team of the two most

I have mentioned two examples of musicians in this section, but singers encounter the same situations. There is so much more to expand upon. I do not have the space to write. I will say, though, it is a fact that everything rises and falls on leadership. The affects of good and bad leadership flows down to the followers. In a collaborative effort, the senior leader and the leader of the music ministry should work together and forge an awesome leadership team so that this area of the ministry with its influence is effective without strife and division. How is this team forged? It is forged by doing many things, but I will name two.

- 1) **Communication**—Everyone must understand the expectations of their roll. Who will do what and how. Responsibilities and expectations must be clear for both leaders. Leave nothing to assumption.
- 2) **Relationship**—As leaders get to know one another, a healthy way of relating and doing ministry should be the outcome. In a genuine relationship, no one intends to use or abuse anyone's talents or abilities. There should be no room for selfish motives. As in the example of the unpaid musician there had to be some type of selfish motivation lurking to get all they could from him. Communication and building a trusting relationship is not only key, for the leaders, but it is fundamental to have a thriving music ministry team.

THE MAIN MINISTRY RESOURCE

You know the saying, "You can't squeeze water from a turnip". This is what happens when adequate human resources are missing when trying to successfully implement something within a music ministry. For example, in small ministries (and large ones too) people lack commitment. I have met people in both large and small ministries who confirm that only a few people do the work of the ministry. With a few hands, the same people are not only serving in the music ministry, but they are serving in other ministries as well. Now, add family obligations and working a job to the equation, our human resources are more strained than we may want to admit.

Again, I do not have all of the answers, but I do have my experience, which has definitely been my teacher. With this in mind, let me offer some encouragement for maintaining the music ministry.

- 1) If you are the leader in any capacity (Sr. Leader, Worship Leader, Minister of Music), ask some questions like, "Why are we doing this?"; "What do we want to achieve?"; "What is the purpose?"; "Is this what the Lord wants at this time or is one of those "trendy" things everyone is doing to be relevant?"; and "Do I have the right human resource(s) to do this new thing or reinstitute something of the past?"; and "Do we have financial resources?" When asking the questions, be very honest. Sometimes emotions can drive us too much and we overlook the obvious.
- 2) Strengthen and maintain what you have. In our fast paced, get the latest technology and new is better world, we tend to forget about what we already have in the ministry. This is not to say we should not strive for the best, learn new music and new ways of doing things, but identify what is functioning well and what is not working. Perhaps new isn't really better.
- 3) Rebuild and Build. Count the Cost (CTC) before you build. Before you change the music ministry in any way, CTC. Rebuilding is a part of strengthening what you have. It consists of restructuring. Building is planning for new things. By assessing what you have and who you have

to effectively minister, you can determine whether it is best to build or rebuild. In I Chronicles 15, the Levites did not do anything new to bring in the ark. David assessed what went wrong and restructured things to operate according to God's plan.

Remember, this ministry, is about bringing honor the King. To do this, we need to wisely consider our human resources. Some things may not get done or they may have to wait until another time. No matter what, always CTC. (Luke 14: 28-30)

EVERY ASSEMBLY HAS ITS CULTURE

It is important to realize that each local assembly has its own culture (*i.e., specific way of doing things*). What works in one ministry, may not work in another. For example, my church has a time of praise and worship in music that last 45 minutes to an hour each Sunday. This is the culture. Now, for other assemblies, this will not work. It is so imperative to know what will work in the ministry and there is much to consider. However, many ministries institute things because another ministry does it. It may be believed that if another ministry is doing it successfully, it is the answer for church growth and making people happy. So, a ministry will imitate that ministry in hopes of growth, etc. The shocking thing is this. After all the effort, time and money, it may not even work because it is not God's way for the ministry, no matter how many churches are doing it and no matter how many people want it. God will only bless what He has willed, not current ministry trends. He knows the purpose of each ministry He has ordained and he knows what it needs to accomplish His purpose.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, change is all around us. God is changing ministries for His glory. This includes the music ministry. So many have turned the music ministry into entertainment and it has become more about what the people want rather than what God wants. It has become about flesh (*and boy do you see flesh—literally—gracing the pulpits*). But, I am here to tell you that God has always had a standard of holiness and righteousness. He expects those with the most influence to teach the people by their life and lifestyle the difference between the holy and profane. Let us not get caught up in the hype of the latest music trends and miss God. Let us build upon the rock, which is Christ Jesus, without compromise and fear. It may not look like the ministry down the street or the one on the Christian television network, but build according to the Lord's instruction because this is what matters.

Do you have any thoughts on this topic? Post your comment on my blog. Please visit me at **Bloggin' the Journey @ the E-Place at www.TheEncouragementPlace.com**.