

# **Worship Practices of SBC Churches in Alabama**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This project set forth the goals of developing a more comprehensive understanding of the state of worship in Southern Baptist churches in the state of Alabama. More specifically, this research sought to paint a clearer picture of what is happening in worship as it relates to the following questions:

- What does the local church context look like?
- Who is leading in worship and what actions are performed in that leadership?
- What habits and practices shape and guide the worship service?

The impetus for the survey, among several things, was a perceived absence of a baseline understanding about local church worship in Alabama SBC churches, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Even pre-pandemic, anecdotal reports suggest that the look, sound, and leadership of worship has been shifting more broadly over the past decade; but it seems that the pandemic accelerated certain changes in ecclesial life and practice. The scope of a national survey was not possible and too broad for this project, so it seemed appropriate to focus on a single denomination within a particular state. While the pandemic was (and has been) an influential factor in local church life, the impact of the pandemic is the not focus of this research; rather, it is the intent to better define and understand local church worship practices in Southern Baptist Convention churches throughout Alabama.

In the following narrative, we will unpack in greater detail the results of the survey, including more granular information about certain data points as well as crosstab comparisons of key survey populations (young vs. old churches, small/medium/large churches, ethnic representation, traditional/blended/contemporary churches, etc.)

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# CHURCH DEMOGRAPHICS

## SERVICE STYLE

This section of questions establishes the foundations and structure of a given church context within which a worship leader, ministry, and team functions and carries out its weekly leadership.

In framing the questions, we discovered it was helpful to clarify certain terminology and acknowledge contexts that structure their services in different ways (weekend services, overflow/simulcast services, multiple service styles, etc.). To do this, we used the language of “primary weekend service.” For churches with multiple services, we asked them to complete the survey according to the service with the largest average weekly attendance.

The first question is related to the number and style/type of services that churches offer. When looking at the data, we see a few notable statistics:

- 65% of churches have only one service.
- 29% of churches have two or more services.
- 88% of churches have only one style of service.
- Less than 12% have more than one style of service.
- Almost 62% of churches describe their most attended worship service as the service that is “blended” in style, whereas 29% say “traditional,” and almost 9% say contemporary.<sup>1</sup>

Churches that have a contemporary service or that report using a contemporary model for worship often have two services (42% vs. 29% overall) and often these services are in different styles. Most traditional and blended service churches have only one service. Also, almost 70% of older churches (OCs) offer only one service (compared to almost 60% of Younger Churches (YCs)). 10% of OCs offer services in more than one style (compared to 13% of YCs).<sup>2</sup>

When grouping churches together, those churches with a size of 149 or less report most commonly that they have only one service (74%) and one style of service (93%). Churches with an attendance of 150-499 report the use of a blended or one-service model (68%). Not

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<sup>1</sup> While the service style designations have serious limitations due to varied usage, inconsistent understanding, and conflicting definition, they were helpful for the purposes of this research because of their wide-spread use. They are terms that most people know and use, even if they use them differently.

<sup>2</sup> Older churches (“OC”) are those churches who indicate an average of 50+. Younger churches (“YC”) indicate an average age of <49.

surprisingly, larger churches often report having two services,<sup>3</sup> but a smaller percentage reports having a service in more than one style.<sup>4</sup>

## SERVICE ATTENDANCE

In looking at the average size of weekly worship attendance,<sup>5</sup> we see an abundance of small churches dotting the landscape.<sup>6</sup>

- Approximately 40% of churches have an attendance of <100.
- Approximately 48% of churches have an attendance of 100-499
- Almost 12% of churches have an attendance of 500 or more.

The following chart offers more statistical detail from all survey respondents organized by primary worship service style.

**Fig. 1.1 | Average Church Service Attendance**

*Percentage of churches reporting according to their highest attended primary worship service. Top 3 responses in bold.*

AVG. ATTENDANCE	OVERALL	ONE SERVICE/ BLENDED	TRADITIONAL	CONTEMPORARY
<b>15-49</b>	<b>25%</b>	13%	<b>61%</b>	0
<b>50-99</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>21%</b>	4%
<b>100-149</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>150-199</b>	7%	12%	1%	0
<b>200-499</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>33%</b>	5%	<b>35%</b>
<b>500-999</b>	7%	7%	1%	<b>35%</b>
<b>1000-1499</b>	3%	2%	1%	8%
<b>1500-2999</b>	1%	1%	0	8%
<b>3000+</b>	.3%	0	1%	0

It is helpful to notice that most traditional service churches (61%) report an average worship attendance of 15-49 while 21% report an average attendance of 50-99. This is noteworthy when compared with the data on the total survey population in the same category.

<sup>3</sup> 55% of 500-999 churches have two services. 71% of 1000+ churches have two services.

<sup>4</sup> 28% of 500-999 churches have one style. 57% of 1000+ churches have one style; 43% with more than one style.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that we are measuring the metric of attendance, not *membership*.

<sup>6</sup> Church size categories are based on the CCLI church size categorizations. See [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com) for more information.

For example, most blended service churches have an average attendance of 200-499.<sup>7</sup> It is also important to acknowledge that contemporary service churches seem to have a larger average attendance.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this report both for consistency and ease of explanation, information regarding church size will often group churches into four size categories:

Small = <149  
 Medium = 150-499  
 Large = 500-999  
 Mega = 1000+

Before moving forward, it is helpful to see how the service styles breakdown according to average service attendance according to these larger attendance groupings.

**Figure 1.2 | Church service style, by average attendance**

	TOTAL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<i><b>One service</b></i>	84%	82%	91%	75%	71%
<i><b>Traditional</b></i>	11%	16%	3%	10%	14%
<i><b>Contemporary</b></i>	4%	1%	5%	10%	14%

## AGE OF ATTENDEES

When we look at the age of congregations in our state, we see the following statistics:

- 50% of churches report the average age of worship attendees as 49 or less.
- 50% of churches report the average age of worship attendees as 50 or older.

We also compared churches according to age of attendees (younger/older churches).<sup>9</sup> Average worship attendance among OCs and YCs breaks down in the following ways, indicated by the percentage of respondents. The three most common church sizes are **bolded**.

<sup>7</sup> 33% vs. 26% overall.

<sup>8</sup> 70% in churches with an average attendance of 200-999.

<sup>9</sup> Older churches (“OC”) are those churches who indicate an average age of service attendees as 50+. Younger churches (“YC”) indicate an average age of service attendees as <49.

**Fig. 1.3 | Church Size According to Age**

AVG. ATTENDANCE	YOUNGER	OLDER
<b>15-49</b>	9%	<b>40%</b>
<b>50-99</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>100-149</b>	<b>18%</b>	12%
<b>150-199</b>	9%	5%
<b>200-499</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>500-999</b>	11%	3%
<b>1000-1499</b>	4%	1%
<b>1500-2999</b>	2%	1%
<b>3000+</b>	1%	0%

One can see that, overall, YCs are more characteristics of larger churches (53% of YCs are 200+ in attendance). OCs are more characteristic of small churches (78% of OCs churches are <200 in attendance).

We also see parallels between churches that indicate a service style designation of Traditional or Contemporary. 65% of traditional church services report an average age of 50+ whereas 68% of contemporary church services report an average age of <49.

As a point of concern, only 36% of churches with an average age of 149 or less indicate that their average age of attendees is <49. 64% report an average age 50+.

It is encouraging to see that the group of churches in the average attendance range of 150-499 report a younger congregation. 53% of this grouping said their average attendance age was 40-49. 13% said their average attendance age was 30-39. Only 6% said their average attendance age was 60-69.

A large percentage of churches in the size range of 500-999 report an average age of 40-49 (64%), and only 23% said their average attendance of was 50-59. Most churches with 1000+ in attendance report having an average attendance age of 40-49 (64%).

## **ETHNIC MAKE-UP OF CONGREGATIONS**

When we look at the representation of various ethnicities among congregations, the data reveals the following:

- The majority of churches (92%) report that their weekly attendance consists at least 80% or more white/Caucasian ethnicity.
- The majority of churches (78%) report that their weekly attendance consists of less than 10% of black/African American ethnicity. Only 17% report that 10-20% of their congregation is black/African American.

Other races (often Hispanic or Asian) were included in the question, but few churches reported their presence and only in very small percentages within their congregation.

- Most churches (96%) report that 10% or less of their congregation is Hispanic.
- A small percentage (11%) report that 10-20% of their congregation is Hispanic.
- Almost 14% of churches report that 10% of their congregation is “multiracial.”
- Some respondents noted that their congregation includes congregants from Haiti and India.

Further related to race/ethnicity, we noticed a few interesting trends in our data:

- 2% of churches report that their weekly attendance consists of less than 10% White/Caucasian ethnicity.
- Almost 4% of churches report an attendance that is 90% or more Black/African American ethnicity.
- Almost 6% of churches report that their weekly attendance consists of approx. 20% Black/African American.

It is interesting to note that contemporary service style churches indicate greater racial diversity:

- 16% of these churches report that 1/5 of their attendees are African American (vs. 5% overall)
- 1/4 of contemporary service style churches report that 10% of their service members are multiracial (vs. 13% overall)
- 6% of churches report that their congregation is 80% multiracial (vs. 0.8% overall)

Churches with an average attendance in the range of 150-499 report being a very *white*. The majority (75%) say that their congregation is at least 90% white and several report that they are 100% white (17%).

It would also make sense for larger churches to have slightly more diversity, but those statistics are not as different as one might imagine. For churches with an average attendance ranging between 500-999, 75% of congregations report that their membership is 90% white while 10% report that their membership is 100% white. A small percentage (15%) report that their congregation is only 80% white. For those congregations of 1000+ in attendance, they report even greater ethnic diversity. *None* of those churches report that their congregation is 100% white. In fact, 1/3 of these churches report that their congregation is only 80% white and 7% of these churches report that their congregation is 70% white.

## MUSIC GENRE CHOICES

One of the defining factors of any congregation is what kind of music they use in their services. We refer to the various types of music as “genres,” so the survey asked which genres were most often used in the church’s weekly worship service. It is helpful to see the responses among churches when categorized by primary worship service style (i.e., blended, contemporary, and traditional)<sup>10</sup> or average age of service attendees (i.e., younger church, older church).<sup>11</sup> Our research reveals the following:

**Fig. 1.4 | Music Genre Usage According to Service Style and Age**

*Percentage of churches reporting. Top 3 responses in bold.*

GENRE	OVERALL	TRAD.	CONT.	BLEND	YCs	OCs
<i>Historical/Fine Art</i>	4%	5%	4%	4%	0	4%
<i>Gospel Hymns</i>	<b>83%</b>	<b>97%</b>	50%	<b>83%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>85%</b>
<i>Classic Hymns</i>	<b>87%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>89%</b>
<i>Praise Choruses</i>	63%	<b>56%</b>	46%	74%	52%	64%
<i>Modern Worship</i>	<b>73%</b>	28%	<b>100%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>74%</b>
<i>Modern Hymnody</i>	46%	12%	<b>58%</b>	59%	49%	46%
<i>Folk-Inspired</i>	5%	1%	8%	6%	9%	5%
<i>Contemporary Gospel</i>	26%	12%	44%	33%	45%	26%

It is **surprising** to note that the most consistently used genre across churches of all styles is “classic hymns” (e.g., “Holy, Holy, Holy”). The least commonly used genre reported across churches of all styles was “Historical/Classical Fine Art.” Several respondents noted the inclusion of Southern Gospel music, while some also include bluegrass and jazz. It is helpful to compare the top genres in each church service style category with the overall responses. For example, Traditional church services report using very little modern hymnody (12% vs 46% overall).

One noteworthy observation is that among contemporary service style churches the second most frequently used music genre is *classic hymnody* followed by modern hymnody. This leads one to think that there are other factors beyond music genre that influence the designation of a service as “contemporary.” Perhaps a service can still feel contemporary while using a variety of musical genres and modernizing other aspects of a worship service (instrumentation, personnel, lighting, architecture, aesthetics, service elements, etc.)

When we return to our comparison of younger and older churches, we see some trends that perhaps push against common assumptions about age and music preference.

**Interestingly, both YCs and OCs indicate that they use the same three genres most**

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<sup>11</sup>As a reminder, older churches (“OC”) are those churches who indicate an average age of service attendee as 50+. Younger Churches (“YC”) indicate an average age of service attendee as <49.



**frequently in their services** (Gospel Hymns, Classic Hymns, and Modern Worship). The percentages do show some variation, for example:

- 17% fewer YCs churches utilize Gospel Hymnody
- 10% fewer YCs utilize Classic Hymns
- 19% more YCs utilize Contemporary Gospel music

It is also worth noting that **both YCs and OCs use Modern Hymnody at almost the same rate** (49% vs. 46%)

Finally, it is also helpful to compare the use of genres among churches of differing sizes.<sup>12</sup>

**Fig. 1.5 | Music Genre Usage According to Church Size**

*Percentage of churches reporting according to average church service attendance. Top 3 responses in bold.*

GENRE	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<i>Historical/Fine Art</i>	1%	5%	18%	7%
<i><b>Gospel Hymns</b></i>	<b>89%</b>	<b>79%</b>	55%	<b>79%</b>
<i><b>Classic Hymns</b></i>	<b>85%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<i><b>Praise Choruses</b></i>	<b>63%</b>	65%	55%	57%
<i><b>Modern Worship</b></i>	57%	<b>93%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<i><b>Modern Hymnody</b></i>	27%	67%	<b>82%</b>	71%
<i><b>Folk-Inspired</b></i>	5%	6%	9%	7%
<i><b>Contemporary Gospel</b></i>	21%	36%	29%	54%

## PRIMARY WORSHIP PLANNER

Finally, our research wanted to know who was responsible for selecting the music for weekly services. Recognizing that churches and leadership have varying approaches to this task, our research shows that:

- 80% of respondents selected “Worship Leader” as the person responsible for selecting the music for weekly services.
- Almost 11% report a variety of other approaches, most commonly involving a collaboration between several people.
- Interestingly, in many places (often small churches), the pianist or pastor selects the music for worship.

It is interesting to report that blended style church services report an emphasis on a joint planning effort between 1.) the pastor and worship leader or 2.) a worship leader and the other worship staff or a co-leader.

<sup>12</sup> Data reflects the percentage of respondents within the given attendance category/column.

# WORSHIP LEADER PROFILE

The second set of questions in the survey focused on demographic and background information related to individuals who lead the musical worship portion of services. Questions cover a limited range of topics, including the title used for the position, the age, race, and gender of the worship leader, as well as employment status, leadership style, and service elements led by the worship leader.<sup>13</sup>

## WORSHIP LEADER ROLE

Considering the vastly different approaches to the role and position of “worship leader,” it seemed necessary to ask some clarifying questions. The first question asked the respondent to describe the church’s approach to the position of worship leader. Options included:

- *We have a single, primary musical worship leader who is consistent from week to week.*
- *We have more than one primary musical worship leader who rotates from week to week.*
- *We have a team of people who rotate as the primary musical worship leaders from week to week.*
- *We have a church member or lay leader who leads congregational singing.*
- *We do not have a dedicated musical worship leader.*

Almost 80% of churches indicate that they have a single, primary musical worship leader who leads weekly worship. Beyond that, approximately 11% of churches report that they have a church member or lay leader who leads congregational singing. Approximately 7% of churches have more than one worship leader or a team of people who rotate as primary leaders. **Interestingly**, 2% of churches report that they do not have a dedicated musical worship leader.

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<sup>13</sup> Other questions that were of interest but were removed due to length included questions on the worship leader’s race, background, training, as well as how long the leader had been in his/her role at the church.

**Fig. 2.1 | Approach to Worship Leader Position by Church Size**

	OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<i>Single leader</i>	<b>80%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>92%</b>
<i>More than one</i>	3%	4%	2%	0	0
<i>Team of people</i>	4%	3%	4%	5%	15%
<i>Church member</i>	12%	20%	0	0	0
<i>No dedicated leader</i>	2%	4%	0	0	0

Note that among small churches (<149), 20% have a church member or lay leader who leads musical worship, and almost 4% have no dedicated worship leader or more than one leader who rotates. Medium (150-499) and large (500-999) size churches overwhelmingly prefer to have a single worship leader (94% and 96%, respectively), while mega churches (1000+) also prefer single leader and show more interest in leading worship with a rotating team of leaders.

We also noticed that YCs were 11% more likely to have a single, primary worship leader.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, more racially diverse churches were 6% less likely to have a single, primary musical worship leader and 5% more likely to have a team that rotates compared to churches overall.

## WORSHIP LEADER TITLE

Churches have varying practices when it comes to the title they give to the person(s) in charge of leading musical worship. The chart below provides data on these practices with the top three responses in bold.

**Fig. 2.2 | Worship Leader Title by Church Size**

*Calculations based on the percentage of respondents who answered the question in the given church size.*

TITLE	OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<i>Min. of Music</i>	<b>27%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<i>Min. of Worship</i>	2%	1%	3%	<b>9%</b>	0
<i>Worship Director</i>	2%	3%	1%	0	7%
<i>Music Director</i>	<b>20%</b>	<b>30%</b>	8%	5%	0
<i>Worship Minister</i>	3%	2%	4%	0	<b>14%</b>
<i>Worship Pastor</i>	<b>21%</b>	8%	<b>33%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<i>Worship Leader</i>	16%	<b>23%</b>	<b>9%</b>	0	8%

<sup>14</sup> This data compares results from younger churches (“YC” = average attendance age of <49 and older churches (“OC” = average attendance age of >50).

In some instances, reports show that musical worship is also led by the “Associate Pastor of Worship and Education,” “Minister of Worship and Families,” or even the senior pastor or a member of the church.

Within small churches, the largest percentage (almost 30%) refer to “Music Director” followed by “Worship Leader” (23%). The smallest percentage use any other title that has “Worship” in it. This seems **interesting** and might lead some to wonder about the perceptions of the function of the worship leader and how that is reflected in the choice of title.

Several responses indicate the title of “Song Leader” in small churches. Some churches even have “pastor” as the primary musical worship leader. Medium churches note the presence of some “combo” titles, e.g., “Music and Senior Adults,” “Worship and Families,” or “Music and Youth.”

It is also **interesting** to see a somewhat even spread of the top three responses in small and mega churches. That is, within these church groupings the three choices are selected at high percentages, whereas in the medium and large churches, there are clearly 1-2 preferred choices with a steep drop to the third-place choice.

Other comparisons revealed that OCs were 12% more likely to use the title “Music Director” and 9% more likely to use the title “Worship Leader” than YCs, while YCs were 20% more likely to use the title “Worship Pastor” than OCs. Racially diverse churches indicated that they were less likely to use the title “Minister of Music” and “Music Director,” instead preferring “Worship Pastor” and “Worship Leader” at a 7% higher response rate compared to churches overall.

Traditional churches indicate a preference for the titles of Music Director (42%) and Minister of Music (21%), and very few use Worship Pastor (3%). Some mention other options such as Song Leader as well as Choir Director. Contemporary churches indicate a preference for Worship Pastor (52%) and Minister of Music (14%).

It would be easy to over-interpret the data, but it is good to avoid under-interpreting it as well. Our research suggests that there is something communicated in the way we title the role of “worship leader.” In assigning a title, churches often unknowingly answer questions like, “Is this a role that is more musical or ministerial; pastoral or programmatic?” It might be somewhat **concerning** to think that traditional churches view the role of worship leader as more musical and not pastoral or ministerial. Holding these various roles in a healthy tension under a single title will always be a challenge, and this research reveals trends that confirm this challenge and the variety of thinking and practice around it.

Perhaps the most **surprising** observation about the choice of title is that the only title that appears in the top three responses of all church size groupings is “Minister of Music,” suggesting both a priority on ministry and music.

## WORSHIP LEADER EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Churches have only a few options when it comes to securing someone to lead musical worship. Often this decision is influenced by church size, needs of the congregation, and the financial resources available to pay someone with training and/or expertise. The chart below displays the trends among churches of varying sizes.<sup>15</sup>

**Fig. 2.3 | Approach to Employment Status by Church Size (Worship Leader 1 only)**

*Calculations based on the percentage of respondents who answered the question in the given church size.*

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<b>Full-time</b>	<b>37%</b>	12%	<b>57%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Part-time/Bi-Vocational</b>	35%	41%	36%	5%	0
<b>Hourly/Contract</b>	1%	2%	0	0	0
<b>Volunteer (non-paid)</b>	27%	<b>44%</b>	7%	0	0

It is important to notice that most small churches have a volunteer worship leader (44%) or a bi-vocational leader (41%). Only 12% have a full-time paid worship leader.

The research also reveals that YCs were 22% more likely to employee their primary worship leader as a full-time paid employee and 18% less likely to utilize a volunteer for the role compared to OCs. Another notable trend is that there are more full-time or paid members of the worship team in contemporary service churches:

### Worship Leader 1:

- Full time/Paid (70% vs. 37% overall)
- Bi-vocational Paid (29% vs. 35% overall)

### Worship Leader 2:

- Full Time Paid (33% vs. 18% overall)
- Bi-vocational/Paid (50% vs. 29% overall)
- Volunteer (8% vs. 46% overall)

## WORSHIP LEADER AGE AND GENDER

In exploring the demographic makeup of leadership in churches, it is necessary to find out about the most basic traits of the age and gender of those leading worship. The chart below displays the trends in age among churches of varying sizes.

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<sup>15</sup> In the survey, the questions allowed for the possibility of a church having multiple worship leaders (especially those churches that have a larger staff or prefer rotating primary worship leaders). This data reports only on the responses for Worship Leader 1.

**Fig. 2.4 | Age of Worship Leader by Church Size (Worship Leader 1 only)**

AGE	OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<20	0	0	0	0	0
20-29	7%	6%	6%	9%	<b>29%</b>
30-39	16%	12%	<b>21%</b>	14%	<b>21%</b>
40-49	13%	9%	16%	<b>27%</b>	<b>21%</b>
50-59	<b>22%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>23%</b>	7%
60-69	<b>26%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>21%</b>
70+	<b>17%</b>	<b>24%</b>	8%	5%	0%

There are some notable **concerns** in this data. Perhaps the most concerning trend is that the age of almost 65% of all worship leaders is 50+. That trend is even worse among small churches where 73% of primary worship leaders are age 50+. Only 27% of worship leaders in small churches are age <49. But one of the bright spots is that more younger leaders are used further down the “depth chart” of a church:

Worship Leader 2:

- 55% are 50+
- 46% are <49

Worship Leader 3:

- 35% are 50+
- 65% are <49

There is an **encouraging** trend among contemporary service churches. The majority age for all worship leaders is between 30-39 and there is a variety of ages represented among Worship Leader 1. To say it simply: it is not only young people leading.<sup>16</sup>

The chart below displays the trends in gender among churches of varying sizes.

**Fig. 2.5 | Gender of Worship Leader by Church Size**

*Calculations based on the percentage of respondents who answered the question in the given church size.*

		OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<b>WL 1</b>	Male	77%	65%	90%	100%	93%
	Female	23%	35%	10%	0	7%
<b>WL 2</b>	Male	60%	47%	58%	86%	83%
	Female	40%	53%	42%	14%	17%
<b>WL 3</b>	Male	53%	59%	40%	0	75%
	Female	47%	41%	60%	100%	25%

<sup>16</sup> WL 1: 20-29 (11% vs. 7% overall); 30-39 (22% vs. 15% overall); 50-59 (22% same as overall); 60-69 (33% vs. 26% overall)

A deeper analysis compares churches of a certain size with the overall results. For example, within medium size churches, Worship Leader 1 is going to be male in 90% of those churches and female in the other 10%.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the research also shows that YCs were 14% more likely to utilize a man for the role of primary worship leader compared to OCs.

One **interesting** trend among traditional service churches is that there are more primary and secondary female primary worship leaders in traditional service churches than in the overall report:

Worship Leader 1:

- Male 63% vs 76% overall
- Female 36% vs 23% overall

Worship Leader 2:

- Male 53% vs. 59% overall
- Female 47% vs 40% overall

In contemporary service churches, there are more male worship leaders than female compared to the total survey population:

- Worship Leader 1: Male (82% vs. 76% overall); Female (14% vs. 23% overall)

To highlight some of the data for churches with a second or third primary worship leader, we report the following trends. For churches with two worship leaders, the second worship leader is reported to be:

- 19% full-time, 27% part-time, and 47% volunteer
- 62% are male; 38% are female
- 16% are under the age of 29
- 43% are between the age of 30-49
- 15% are between the age of 50-59
- 24% are over the age of 60

One **surprising and encouraging** trend is that some churches report a second worship leader *under the age of twenty*, possibly indicating the engagement of a teenager or college student as an emerging leader under the guidance of an older, seasoned worship leader. It is also **interesting** to note that 38% of churches report that their second worship leader is female, as opposed to 24% female for the primary worship leader. Is it also **encouraging** that the second worship leader is often younger (almost 60% are <50 years of age), hopefully pointing to signs that churches are raising up a younger generation of worship leaders behind the large percentage of older primary worship leaders.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> vs. 77% and 23% in the overall survey pool.

<sup>18</sup> Almost 65% are >50 years of age.

There are some churches that report having a third worship leader in their leadership rotation. Research reveals the following trends:

- 6% are full-time, 9% are part-time, and 85% are volunteer
- 57% are male; 43% are female

## WORSHIP LEADER’S USE OF AN INSTRUMENT WHILE LEADING

It has become increasingly common among worship leaders, especially younger leaders or in churches with a more musically diverse approach, **to lead musical worship while playing an instrument**. For the purposes of this project, it seemed important to acquire data on how prevalent this practice is among churches. When leading worship, worship leaders play instruments with varying frequency and on a select number of instruments.

**Fig. 2.6 | Leading While Playing an Instrument by Church Size (Worship Leader 1 only)**

	OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<b><i>Never</i></b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b><i>Rarely</i></b>	9%	10%	9%	5%	7%
<b><i>Occasionally</i></b>	12%	8%	13%	<b>27%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b><i>Most weeks</i></b>	6%	5%	8%	5%	7%
<b><i>Every week</i></b>	28%	<b>24%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>43%</b>

Even with an increase in the practice of leading worship while playing an instrument, we see that more churches still have worship leaders who are leading **without** an instrument. It is **interesting** to note that if the church has more than one worship leader, the second worship leader more commonly leads with an instrument on most weeks.

A **surprising** trend is that small and medium churches prefer to lead with an instrument either *every week* or *never*. There is very little middle ground, while larger and mega churches are more spread out in their responses and prefer to lead *occasionally* or *every week* with an instrument or to *never* lead with an instrument.

In small churches, over half *never* lead with an instrument while 24% lead with an instrument *every week*. An **interesting** observation is that more instruments are used while leading as churches move deeper into their leadership “depth chart.”

### Worship Leader 2:

- 44% never (v. 30% overall).
- 41% every week (v. 47% overall).

### Worship Leader 3:

- 28% never (v. 40% overall).



- 56% every week (v. 43% overall).

It is **somewhat surprising** to see that worship leaders in medium size churches *never* lead with instruments at lower rates (40%) and lead *every week* at lower-than-expected rates (31%). Additionally, our research shows that YCs have primary worship leaders who lead instrumentally 23% more every week when compared to OCs.

It is not surprising to see that contemporary worship service leaders are much more likely to lead with an instrument than the overall responses.<sup>19</sup>

There have been shifts in trends regarding the instrument of choice for those leading musical worship. In the early days of worship leaders using instruments, it seemed that the trend was to prefer the piano/keyboard over the guitar, although they were both prevalent. The following chart helps illustrate how this compares across churches of varying sizes.

**Fig. 2.7 | Choice of Instrument While Leading by Church Size (Worship Leader 1 only)**

	OVERALL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<i>Piano</i>	30%	27%	32%	27%	46%
<i>Acoustic Guitar</i>	30%	23%	34%	55%	54%
<i>Electric Guitar</i>	5%	3%	4%	14%	15%
<i>None</i>	43%	49%	38%	27%	15%

Anecdotally, it seems that the acoustic guitar has taken over as the instrument of choice. The chart above, however, **surprisingly** reveals that the **piano and acoustic are equally preferred as the instrument of choice for musical worship leaders**. There are even some leaders who lead while playing electric guitar, bass, or even drums. Still, over 43% of the primary worship leaders prefer to lead **without** the aid of an instrument.

It is **interesting** to notice the difference between the first and second choice of instrument in large and mega churches compared to the almost equal choice in small and medium churches. Additionally, we also notice that as churches get larger, they are more likely to lead with an instrument and less likely to select *none*. Research also revealed that the primary worship leader at YCs played acoustic guitar 16% more often and no instrument 20% less often than OCs. It is not surprising to see that the acoustic guitar is the most popular instrument of choice for those leading contemporary worship service (41% vs. 26% overall). Piano was selected at 27% vs. 25% overall.

## WORSHIP LEADER SERVICE LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

Perhaps the most significant and important question of this section is the final question about the various kinds of leadership that the musical worship leader provides throughout

<sup>19</sup> 55% say every week vs. 28% overall.

a worship service. Often, we assume and expect that worship leaders provide almost exclusively musical leadership; however, as services and churches have expanded their view of the worship leader to include non-musical leadership, it is necessary to investigate how common non-musical leadership is among today's worship leader and what that leadership entails. This question was presented as follows:

*Please indicate how often your primary musical worship leader(s) does any of the following while leading the worship service.*

**Fig. 2.8 | Worship Leader Service Leadership Actions by Frequency**

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Most weeks	Every week
<b>Spoken prayer</b>	13%	12%	34%	19%	21%
<b>Conduct the congregation with arm/hand gestures</b>	29%	15%	20%	10%	25%
<b>Read scripture</b>	16%	13%	40%	17%	13%
<b>Exhortation/spoken leadership moments</b>	17%	13%	30%	26%	15%
<b>Announcements</b>	39%	25%	22%	7%	7%

Regarding spoken prayer, a somewhat **concerning** data point is that the most selected frequency was “occasionally” (34%). Yet it is **encouraging** that a combined 40% of respondents indicated that they led spoken prayer “most weeks” or “every week.” A somewhat **concerning** trend is that traditional churches note a sharp drop in the worship leader praying every week (6% vs. 21% of all churches) while 33% of blended church service leaders indicate that they lead in prayer “occasionally.” Another **concerning** data point is that 24% say they lead in spoken prayer rarely or never. Conversely, it is **encouraging** to see that 69% of contemporary service leaders report that they lead prayer “most weeks” or “every week” (vs. 40% of overall report).

The practice of conducting the congregation, usually during times of congregational singing, has been a holdover practice originating all the way back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century American frontier revival services continuing in the revival meetings of Billy Sunday, D.L. Moody, Ira Sankey, Homer Rodeheaver and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century crusade services of Billy Graham with the dynamic leadership of Cliff Barrows. We still see this practice in churches in present day, though its practice seems to have diminished, especially as worship leaders' hands are now more occupied with an instrument. When it comes to conducting the congregation, the most selected frequency was “never” (30%), yet a **surprising** 35% of responses indicated that they conducted the congregation “most weeks” or “every week.” Traditional churches indicate a much higher frequency of this, reporting that 43% conduct every week (vs. 25% of all churches). Blended churches report a similarity split with 30% of churches saying they never conduct the congregation and 23% reporting that they conduct every week. As expected, contemporary services are conducting the congregation with overall less frequency.

To report a somewhat **concerning** data point, when it comes to the worship leader reading scripture, the most selected frequency was “occasionally” (40%), while a combined almost 30% read scripture “most weeks” or “every week” and another combined 30% lead prayer “rarely” or “never.” Other trends include:

- 36% of traditional churches report that the musical worship leader never reads scripture (vs. 16% of all churches).
- 42% of blended church service leaders report that they read scripture “occasionally.” Only 27% report that they read scripture “rarely” or “never.”
- 16% of contemporary service leaders report reading scripture “every week” and 40% say “occasionally.” Interestingly, 0% say that they “never” read scripture compared to 16% overall.

The most selected frequency for a worship leader’s spoken leadership moment was “occasionally” (30%), while a **surprising** combined 40% lead a spoken exhortation “most weeks” or “every week” and another combined 30% lead a spoken exhortation “rarely” or “never.” In an **interesting** trend, traditional churches indicate a much higher response rate for never leading a spoken leadership moment (36% vs. 17% of all churches). 50% of contemporary service leaders report that lead a spoken exhortation moment “most” or “every week” (vs. 40% overall).

When it comes to leading a time for **announcements**, the most selected frequency was “never” or “rarely” (64%), while 22% lead that time “occasionally” and another lead announcements “most weeks” or “every week” (combined 14%).

A few other noteworthy trends emerge from this data. Here is a list of the frequency choices and the top two most selected leadership actions:

- *Every week* – conducting the congregation, followed by spoken prayer
- *Most weeks* – spoken leadership, followed by spoken prayer
- *Occasionally* – read scripture, followed by spoken prayer
- *Rarely* – announcements, followed by conducting the congregation
- *Never* – announcements, followed by conducting the congregation

Again, perhaps a **concerning** trend is that the reading of scripture is not facilitated by the worship leader either most weeks or every week. This seems to reveal perceptions about the musical worship leader’s role in the worship service. It is **encouraging** to see that the musical worship leader is leading in spoken prayer most weeks or every week and also engaged in spoken leadership/exhortation moments with some amount of frequency.

We can further examine the data on worship leader service leadership actions according to church size.

**Fig. 2.9 | Frequency of Worship Leadership Action by Church Size**

*This chart provides the top 2 frequency choices for each worship leadership element, compared across churches of varying sizes.*

	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<b>Spoken prayer</b>	Occasionally – 37% Never – 14%	Occasionally – 30% Most weeks – 30%	Occasionally – 27% Most weeks – 27%	Occasionally – 43% Most weeks – 36%
<b>Conducting</b>	Never - 34% Every week - 31%	Rarely – 25% Never – 23%	Occasionally – 35% Rarely – 26%	Never – 27% Occasion – 27%
<b>Read scripture</b>	Occasionally - 36% Never – 28%	Occasionally – 50% Most weeks – 24%	Most weeks – 48% Occasionally – 38%	Most weeks – 43% Occasionally/every week – 29%
<b>Spoken leadership</b>	Occasionally - 32% Never – 25%	Most weeks – 35% Occasionally - 28%	Occasionally - 38% Most/Every Week – 24%	Most weeks – 50% Every week – 36%
<b>Announcements</b>	Never – 42% Occasionally - 24%	Never – 35% Rarely – 35%	Never – 35% Rarely – 35%	Never – 39% Rarely/Occasionally – 23%

In small churches, regarding the elements and actions of worship leader in the service, it is **surprising** to see that the largest majority *do not* conduct the congregation.<sup>20</sup> This is balanced out by the fact that the second largest response group reports that they conduct every week (31%). There are some additional **concerns** among small churches. For instance, there is less leadership of spoken prayer most or every week.<sup>21</sup> In addition, there is less reading scripture by the worship leader most or every week (18% v. 30% overall) and less spoken moments by the worship leader most or every week (32% v. 41% overall.)

It is both **interesting and encouraging** to note that large and mega churches perhaps view the role of worship leader as one that is more pastoral and not exclusively a musical one. In large churches, it is evident that there is an expectation or understanding that a worship leader will engage in pastoral acts of worship leadership, such as spoken prayer, reading scripture, and spoken leadership moments. Conversely, it is also **concerning** to see that small churches do not report this kind of leadership in their worship leaders, communicating a more exclusively musical role of the worship leader.

When comparing practices among churches of varying sizes, it is tempting to assume that a church is a certain size *because* they do certain things. It might also simply be a *report* of what is happening in churches of those sizes; a record of what is occurring in a church's context because of leadership training, expectations, and/or church culture.

<sup>20</sup> 45% never or rarely.

<sup>21</sup> 28% v. 47% overall.

# WORSHIP LEADERSHIP TEAM PROFILE

For our research purposes, we also investigated the “performing forces” used on the worship platform to aid in musical worship.

For those churches with different styles of worship, we asked that respondents answer according to the service that is most attended. Consequently, the charts below will provide a breakdown of data based on these categories.

## MUSICAL INSTRUMENT USAGE

A major part of our research is to know more about the people on the platform, what they are doing, and what tools they are utilizing to help them lead worship. As expected, instruments are a big part of worship and have been prominent for several decades now. In recent years, as instruments are more affordable, accessible, and available, we have seen an increase in the number and diversity of instruments used to accompany worship. The rise of the mega church in the 1980s and 1990s gave birth to the modern church orchestra; and in the late 90s into the turn of the century, we have seen a more accepting posture toward the inclusion of worship bands based on rock/pop music models of the twentieth century. In fact, one could argue that the church orchestra contributed to opening the gateway for the inclusion of the modern worship band as many orchestras included a drummer and bass player as a supplement to the piano. As music styles diversified, so did the requisite instruments for producing this music live in a worship service. It is no surprise that over time, the newly fortified “rhythm section” moved from the back of the orchestra to the front of the platform as its own separate ensemble: the modern worship band.

The following chart helps us see the instruments commonly used in worship according to various populations within our survey responses. The top five most used instruments are in **bold**.

**Fig. 3.1 | Instrument usage by Church Size and Service Style**

	TOTAL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+	Blend	Trad.	Cont.
<i>Piano</i>	86%	84%	90%	77%	100%	85%	97%	64%
<i>Trad Organ</i>	20%	14%	25%	27%	36%	19%	28%	18%
<i>B3 Organ</i>	8%	8%	5%	5%	100%	7%	16%	9%
<i>A Guit</i>	57%	37%	78%	91%	36%	61%	25%	91%
<i>E Guit</i>	38%	18%	54%	91%	36%	39%	22%	72%
<i>Bass</i>	50%	25%	73%	96%	100%	52%	28%	82%
<i>Drums</i>	53%	27%	81%	96%	100%	56%	22%	91%
<i>Keys/Synth</i>	52%	28%	76%	96%	100%	54%	25%	91%
<i>Violin</i>	10%	1%	15%	27%	50%	11%	9%	0
<i>Other</i>	18%	11%	25%	36%	36%	19%	22%	9%

We see the piano as common in almost all categories. As many have heard anecdotally, the organ has fallen out of usage in many places, but not surprisingly we see an increase in its use in traditional service churches. It is also somewhat **surprising** to see the common presence of the same top five instruments in three of the four attendance categories.

One **interesting** note about small churches: we see a variety of instruments used in worship under the “other” category. As expected, churches will use those instruments that are among their congregants and at their disposal. For medium and large churches, it is **surprising** that the rankings and proportions are about the same as the overall church sample; but there seems to be, in general, more usage of everything. One exception might be the electric guitar, where we see a sharp drop off from 54% to 38%. Also, there are more individual instruments used: woodwinds, brass, etc. and small combinations of each. As expected in mega churches, there is a greater presence of various groupings of instruments, indicative of a possible church orchestra ministry. We also see a larger percentage of mega churches still using organ; but even then, its usage does not propel it into the top five category.

Younger churches also showed a couple of **important** trends when compared to older churches. They typically use the modern band instruments (piano, drums, bass, acoustic, electric, keyboard) at a significantly higher rate (roughly 30-36% more). Racially diverse churches noted the same increase in modern band instrument usage but with less stark of a difference when compared to the overall sample (roughly 8-13% more).

We can clearly see that traditional service churches prefer using less instruments in worship, although for special occasions, they note an increase in the use of acoustic and electric guitars. Contemporary service churches not surprisingly make a greater use of the modern band instruments than the overall sample pool. In fact, they use acoustic guitar

more than piano, but they do show an increase in the use of the piano for special occasions. It is still important to clarify that for most of these churches, they are likely referring to using an actual piano. Many of them will use a piano sound, but it will be played through an electronic keyboard.

## INSTRUMENTALISTS

In surveying those playing instruments in worship, we thought it would be helpful to know some basic demographic information, such as the instrumentalists' age and gender as well as how many of them are engaged in worship leadership. The charts below give us a breakdown of this information.

**Fig. 3.2 | Number of Instrumentalists by Worship Service Style**

# of instr.	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
0	2%	3%	0	0
1-3	45%	42%	75%	9%
4-6	35%	37%	19%	63%
7-9	10%	11%	0	18%
10+	8%	8%	6%	9%

Here, we noticed an **interesting** trend that a greater percentage of blended or traditional styles church services typically prefer a smaller team of instrumentalists compared to their contemporary style church service counterparts. **Not surprisingly**, a contemporary service will likely utilize a modern band that typically include 4-6 (or more) instrumentalists. It is also **important** to notice that blended and contemporary services prefer larger teams of 10+ at almost the same percentage (8-9%). In general, contemporary service style churches prefer to engage more instrumentalists overall.

Below, we can see a further breakdown down of the use of men and women in instrumental groups. One **interesting** trend to notice is that there is typically a larger number of males playing instruments when looking at the overall data (1-3 at 49%, 4-6 at 26%, 7-9 at 5%.) Concurrently, we notice a steep drop in the number of female instrumentalists overall (from 82% to 7%) when utilizing four or more women on instruments. This difference is also evident in contemporary and traditional worship services.

**Fig. 3.3 | Number of Male Instrumentalists by Worship Service Style**

# of instr.	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
0	19%	17%	31%	0
1-3	49%	48%	59%	46%
4-6	26%	28%	7%	55%
7-9	5%	6%	3%	0
10+	1%	1%	0	0

**Fig. 3.4 | Number of Female Instrumentalists by Worship Service Style**

# of instr.	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
0	10%	12%	4%	0
1-3	82%	81%	85%	100%
4-6	7%	7%	7%	0
7-9	1%	1%	0	0
10+	1%	1%	4%	0

## VOCALISTS

For the purposes of this research, it is important to distinguish between the vocalists that “sing while holding a microphone” versus those who do not (e.g., a choir). Some ministries refer to this group of singers as a “praise team,” “vocal team,” or “frontline.”

**Fig. 3.5 | Number of Vocalists on a Microphone by Worship Service Style**

# of instr.	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
0	9%	8%	19%	0
1-3	46%	45%	66%	36%
4-6	37%	39%	16%	46%
7-9	6%	7%	0	0
10+	2%	2%	0	18%

As expected, most vocal teams are in the size of 1-6 singers, with only a few services (mainly blended services) utilizing larger teams. There is also an **interesting** data point among contemporary style services that have 10+ singers on a microphone. In general, contemporary service style churches prefer to engage more vocalists. A somewhat **surprising** data point is the percentage of churches that do not utilize any sort of vocal team (9%). Notice also the spike in percentage of traditional service churches who report that they have “0” vocalists on a microphone.



**Fig. 3.6 | Number of Male vocalists by Worship Service Style**

# of instr.	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
0	16%	14%	31%	0
1-3	72%	76%	48%	64%
4-6	9%	7%	17%	36%
7-9	1%	1%	0	0
10+	2%	2%	3%	0

**Fig. 3.7 | Number of Female vocalists by Worship Service Style**

# of instr.	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
0	14%	14%	11%	0
1-3	63%	62%	68%	70%
4-6	16%	17%	11%	20%
7-9	5%	5%	4%	10%
10+	4%	3%	7%	0

**Not surprisingly**, we see a reverse of the trend with instrumentalists with more females involved in vocal leadership than men. This speaks to a problem that we often hear anecdotally about the lack of male singers in churches. We see a steep drop in the number of men singing on microphones in the overall data. In general, regardless of service style, it seems that churches of any style are most often only able to engage 1-6 men in vocal leadership on a microphone.

## AGE OF WORSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

Based on our sample size and for the sake of brevity, it seems helpful to combine size groupings of 11-15 and 16-20 into one category of “11+.”

**Fig. 3.8 | Age of Worship Team Members by Worship Service Style**

	#	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>20-29</b>	0	31%	30%	<b>43%</b>	11%
	1-5	<b>61%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>89%</b>
	6-10	5%	5%	5%	0
	11+	3%	3%	0	0
	#	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>30-39</b>	0	25%	23%	<b>50%</b>	0
	1-5	<b>68%</b>	<b>70%</b>	39%	<b>100%</b>
	6-10	6%	5%	11%	0
	11+	2%	2%	0	0
	#	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>40-49</b>	0	22%	21%	39%	0
	1-5	<b>66%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>89%</b>
	6-10	11%	12%	0	11%
	11+	1%	2%	0	0
	#	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>50-59</b>	0	21%	21%	32%	0
	1-5	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>78%</b>
	6-10	7%	6%	11%	22%
	11+	1%	1%	0	0
	#	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>60+</b>	0	20%	20%	17%	14%
	1-5	<b>73%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>71%</b>
	6-10	6%	7%	4%	0
	11+	1%	0	9%	14%

Only a couple of observations jump out from this data. Mainly:

- It is **important** to notice the increase in percentages as the age brackets increase, telling us more churches are engaging older populations in leadership more consistently across the board. This is visible in the overall data as well as the one service and traditional service styles.
- In the two younger age brackets (20-29 and 30-39), we notice a **concerning** data point of higher percentages responding that they have no (“0”) individuals on their

teams in those ages. This is especially evident in traditional services and, conversely, absent in contemporary services.

- It is **encouraging** that contemporary services report a fairly strong presence of all age brackets, even with a slight increase in the three youngest age brackets.

## SPECIAL INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLES

We also know that churches may utilize various other instruments in different combinations or ensembles, typically on special occasions. The most common responses to the occasional usage of other ensembles include **handbells** and then a variety of answers in the “**other**” category, including:

- Full orchestra
- Bluegrass ensemble
- Various combinations of brass and woodwinds
- Drum ensemble
- Guitar class

You can see the following percentages of churches who responded that they use certain instrumental ensembles occasionally.

**Fig. 3.9 | Percentage of Churches using Instrumental Ensembles by Service Style**

	Total	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>Handbells</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Brass Ens</b>	9%	8%	13%	9%
<b>String Ens</b>	7%	7%	9%	9%
<b>Woodwind Ens</b>	5%	4%	9%	0
<b>Other</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>22%</b>	9%

# CHOIR & ORCHESTRA PROFILE

Large musical ensembles, most often choirs and orchestras in combination, have been a hallmark of evangelical church worship from the mid to late twentieth century to the present. Choirs especially are inseparable in examining the history and development of church worship since the Middle Ages and the origins of polyphony. Through continual expansion, development, and evolution, the presence and use of choral music in worship leadership has continued to remain a staple, especially in much of evangelical and Baptist worship. Various reports over the past twenty years have acknowledged a decline in the presence and use of choirs, particularly in American evangelical worship with the rise of modern worship expressions that prefer bands and small teams of vocalists. Our research, however, seems to report a different story, at least among Alabama Baptists. Granted, we are looking at a snapshot of a given point in time with no reference to previous data for comparison. But given this snapshot, it seems that churches still, overall, prefer the inclusion of choirs with some regularity. In addition, the rise of the mega church and the inclusion of more instruments in larger groupings (most often as a church orchestra) has made a sizeable contribution to larger churches with more financial and personnel resources to support such forces.

Our research noticed a few important trends from church with choirs and/or orchestra (CWCs). Given the musical variety that CWCs encourage, we noticed an overall increase of every worship music genre compared to the total pool of respondents.

- 7% more gospel hymns
- 8% more classic hymns
- 13% more praise choruses
- 8% more contemporary worship songs
- 10% more modern hymns
- 9% more contemporary Gospel

In addition, it is also important to note that CWCs feature a consistent increase in the usage of a variety of instruments compared to the overall pool, particularly:

- Piano 8% more
- Pipe organ 12% more
- Bass guitar 9% more
- Drums 8% more
- Keyboard/Synth 10% more

## CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA USAGE

We can sort the data according to the common categories of church size and worship service style. This comparison reveals certain spikes or drops in responses that paint a clearer picture of worship in these churches.

#### Fig. 4.1 | Churches with Choir and/or Orchestra

Data for the church size category is based on **all** surveys. Data for church service style categories is based on those who indicated which service style would be the basis for their answers.

	TOTAL	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+	One Serv /Blend	Trad.	Cont.
<b>Yes, a choir</b>	51%	47%	64%	36%	14%	64%	52%	64%
<b>Yes, an orch</b>	1%	0	0	9%	0	1%	0	0
<b>Yes, both choir/orch</b>	11%	1%	16%	32%	79%	14%	17%	18%
<b>No, neither choir/orch</b>	17%	24%	9%	9%	0	21%	30%	18%

When we look at churches that have choirs and/or orchestras, it is worth highlighting a few distinctives from the research.<sup>22</sup>

- 51% of churches surveyed have **ONLY a choir** (total 78% have a choir).
- 11% of churches that **have a choir also have an orchestra**.
- 17% of churches have **neither a choir nor an orchestra**.

It is **interesting** to observe that 10% of small and medium churches do not have a choir or an orchestra. **Surprisingly**, CWCs are also best represented among mid-sized churches of 200-499.

The data also revealed that OCs have choirs about 8% more often than YCs, but that YCs had orchestra about 9% more often than OCs. Also, YCs had choirs of 21-40 people 10% more often than OCs and tended towards a little larger size on average. They also had larger orchestras on average than OCs. A **surprising** trend is that YCs had their choirs and orchestras lead **every week** more often (16% & 8% more, respectively) than OCs. When we cross checked the data for CWCs in more racially diverse churches, the data did not differ significantly from churches overall in the percentage of churches who have choir, orchestras, both, or neither. RDCs were 9% less likely to have a choir lead every week and 7% more likely to have choir never lead.

One of the **most surprising** responses is the number of churches with traditional services styles that indicate they have neither a choir nor orchestra. Among blended/one service style churches, many had choirs but very few had orchestras. Those who had an orchestra also had a choir. This seems to indicate that orchestras are not stand-alone and usually go with a choir.

## FREQUENCY OF CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA LEADERSHIP

<sup>22</sup> This section's data appears to be skewed by the churches who do not have a choir or orchestra answering "never" in the overall results. This will mainly be a summary of findings for choirs, not a comparison.

**Fig. 4.2 | Frequency of Choir Leadership**

*Data calculated based on those who responded to the question.*

	Total	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+	One Serv /Blend	Trad.	Cont.
<b>Never</b>	10%	17%	5%	0	0	10%	21%	0
<b>Rarely</b>	5%	5%	6%	0	0	5%	0	22%
<b>Occasionally</b>	13%	16%	14%	0	8%	13%	16%	22%
<b>Most weeks</b>	22%	22%	19%	25%	39%	24%	11%	11%
<b>Every week</b>	50%	40%	57%	75%	54%	49%	53%	44%

In an encouraging trend, 50% of CWCs say that their choir leads every week, while 30% (the remainder) say the choir leads most weeks. Clearly, choirs are engaged in worship leadership most if not every week in the largest percentage of churches, as opposed to only being used occasionally, rarely, or never. One can also see a greater variety in frequency of leadership for choirs in contemporary services.

**Fig. 4.3 | Frequency of Orchestra Leadership**

*Data calculated based on those who responded to the question.*

	Total	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+	One Serv /Blend	Trad/	Cont.
<b>Never</b>	58%	98%	44%	0	0	61%	44%	25%
<b>Rarely</b>	6%	0	11%	22%	0	4%	22%	25%
<b>Occasionally</b>	10%	0	17%	33%	10%	10%	11%	0
<b>Most weeks</b>	7%	0	6%	0	46%	6%	22%	0
<b>Every week</b>	18%	2%	22%	44%	46%	20%	0	50%

18% of CWCs that have orchestras say the orchestra leads every week, while 58% say it does not lead during normal services, which is somewhat **surprising**. The frequency of “never” is likely related to the number of churches that do not have orchestras while one can also see a more sporadic usage of orchestra in churches of various sizes and service styles.

## SIZE OF CHOIRS AND ORCHESTRAS

**Fig. 4.4 | Size of Choirs**

Data calculated based on those who responded to the question.

	Total	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+	One Serv /Blend	Trad/	Cont.
<b>1-4</b>	5%	11%	0	0	0	3%	25%	0
<b>6-10</b>	9%	18%	2%	0	0	8%	20%	0
<b>11-15</b>	17%	31%	6%	0	0	17%	20%	11%
<b>16-20</b>	18%	26%	15%	6%	0	19%	0	22%
<b>21-40</b>	33%	15%	57%	25%	23%	35%	15%	33%
<b>41-60</b>	13%	0	18%	50%	23%	13%	10%	22%
<b>61-80</b>	3%	0	1%	6%	31%	3%	5%	0
<b>81-99</b>	2%	0	0	13%	8%	1%	0	11%
<b>100+</b>	2%	0	0	0	15%	1%	0	0

**Fig. 4.5 | Size of Orchestras**

Data calculated based on those who responded to the question.

	Total	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+	One Serv /Blend	Trad/	Cont.
<b>1-4</b>	28%	100%	22%	13%	9%	29%	33%	0
<b>6-10</b>	19%	0	28%	38%	0	23%	0	0
<b>11-15</b>	21%	0	28%	38%	9%	20%	17%	50%
<b>16-20</b>	16%	0	6%	13%	46%	17%	0	50%
<b>21-40</b>	16%	0	17%	0	36%	11%	50%	0

33% of CWCs have 21-40 choir participants, which is the most common among CWCs with the next most common sizes ranging from 11-20 people. Of CWCs with orchestras, no orchestra is over 40 people with the most common size of 15 people or less.

Regarding the presence of men and women, the data confirms yet again the **concerning trend** that there is a greater presence of women in choirs with less engagement from men. This holds true particularly in small to medium size churches as well as one service/blended or traditional style worship services.

In orchestras, it is somewhat surprising to see a slight inversion of men and women engaged in leadership. It is 2-3% more common to have 7+ men in orchestras compared to women, but it is also 2-3% more common to see 1-6 women in orchestras compared to men. This trend also holds true in medium, large, and mega size churches as well as services of all styles.

# PROFILE OF WORSHIP PRACTICES

Perhaps the most significant section of our research focuses on the leadership of worship teams while they are on the platform. Simply stated, the question we are asking in this section is “What are worship teams doing while leading during a worship service?” In support of that question, we also asked what various resources they use to support their leadership. Various charts and explanations below reveal a clearer picture of what is happening in a typical service, including areas of effectiveness as well as points of concern.

To gain a more detailed picture of the various styles of services available in Baptist churches in the state of Alabama, it was helpful to ask respondents to clarify which service style would be the basis for their answers.

## SERVICE LENGTH

**Fig. 5.1 | Approximate Service Length by Service Style**

	TOTAL	One service/Blend (84%)	Traditional (10%)	Contemporary (4%)
<i>Under 50 minutes</i>	5%	4%	17%	0
<i>50-60 minutes</i>	41%	39%	50%	55%
<i>60-75 minutes</i>	45%	47%	27%	46%
<i>75-90 minutes</i>	9%	10%	3%	0
<i>Over 90 minutes</i>	1%	<1%	3%	0

It is worth observing that one service/blended style services report a service of 60-75 minutes while style-designated services like traditional and contemporary report services of 50-60 minutes.

**Fig. 5.2 | Approximate Service Length by Service Attendance**

	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<i>Under 50 minutes</i>	8%	2%	5%	0
<i>50-60 minutes</i>	50%	30%	19%	29%
<i>60-75 minutes</i>	31%	58%	76%	64%
<i>75-90 minutes</i>	9%	10%	0	7%
<i>Over 90 minutes</i>	1%	0	0	0

It is **encouraging** to see the number of small churches with longer services in comparison to all other church sizes. Conversely, it is also **concerning** that they also have the highest percentage of services that are under 50 minutes. Small churches also report a 50-60-minute service compared to other churches, who mostly report 60-75-minute services.



## CORNERSTONES OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

There are many elements of worship common to Baptist worship. One might call these “cornerstones” that are essential to effective, biblical, corporate worship. The chart below provides data on the length of or the frequency with which these elements are included in weekly worship services, organized by service style. The chart includes the top two answers for each element. As needed, the lowest selected response has been included to show any surprising or concerning trends.

**Fig. 5.3 | Frequency and/or Length of “Cornerstones” of Corporate Worship**

*Data calculated based on percentage of churches answering.*

	One service /blended	Traditional	Contemporary
<i>Public scripture reading</i>	1 time – 39% 2 times – 35% (0 times – 5%)	1 time – 30% 0 times – 27%	1 time – 50% 2 times – 30%
<i>Spoken prayer</i>	3 times – 51% 4+ times – 26% (1 or 2 times – 22%)	3 times – 55% 2 times – 24%	3 times – 55% 4+ times – 27%
<i>Amount of time for singing</i>	20-25 min. – 41% 15-20 min. – 34% (<15 min. – 3%)	20-25 min. – 43% 25-30 min. – 25% (<15 min. – 11%)	20-25 min. – 55% 15-20 min. – 36%
<i>Number of congregational songs</i>	3-4 – 73% 5-6 – 24%	3-4 – 82% 5-6 – 19%	3-4 – 64% 5-6 – 36%
<i>Sermon length</i>	30-35 min. – 29% 25-30 min. – 27% (<25 min. – 8%)	25-30 min. – 41% 20-25 min. – 31% (35+ min. – 17%)	25-30 min. – 36% 30-35 min. – 36%
<i>Baptism</i>	1-3 times/year – 42% Once a quarter – 19% (once a month – 12%)	1-3 times/year – 63% Once a quarter – 19%	1-3 times/year – 36% Most weeks – 27%
<i>Lord’s Supper</i>	Once a quarter – 60% Once a month – 19% (1-3 times/year – 13%)	Once a quarter – 59% 1-3 times/year – 24%	Once a quarter – 64% Every month – 18%
<i>Music during offering</i>	Instrumental – 41% No offering – 26%	Instrumental – 62% Varies week to week – 14%	Cong. Singing – 44% No offering – 33%

A few **surprises** arise from the data:

- A healthy presence of prayer in worship services (most noting that prayer is included 3 or 4 times within a service.)
- All churches report congregational singing for 20-25 minutes in weekly services.
- Traditional churches tend to prefer singing more congregational songs, as they are the only category to have 25-30 minutes as their second highest choice (25%).
- All churches also report singing either 3-4 or 5-6 songs.
- Among traditional service churches, 17% report sermons of 35+ minutes in length.

- Both surprising and concerning is that all churches report that they most commonly baptize only 1-3 times a year.
- It is encouraging to see that 12% of one service/blended church services baptize once a month and that 27% of contemporary church service baptize most weeks.
- 18% of contemporary church services observe the Lord's Supper every month.

The also reveals several **concerning** trends:

- The 27% of traditional service churches and 5% of one service/blended churches who never (0) include public scripture reading.
- The number of traditional (24%) and one service/blended churches (22%) who include spoken prayer only 1-2 times within a service.
- It seems to be a concerning trend that the Lord's Supper/Communion is observed so infrequently among one service/blended churches with 60% saying they celebrate this ordinance only once a quarter.
- The 8% of one service/blended service churches who have a sermon less than 25 minutes.
- The number of traditional (11%) and one service/blended churches (3%) who include have 15 minutes or less of congregational singing.
- Among one service/blended church services, 8% report sermons less that 25 minutes in length.
- Unfortunately, most churches observe the Lord's Supper only once a quarter.
- Post-covid, there has been a stark rise in the number of churches who have jettisoned their offering time in the service. Our data reflects this as well.

From this data, it is helpful to encourage churches to make slight adjustments to their services to promote a healthier, more robust expression of worship.

- Include more public scripture reading and likely from a variety of leadership voices (worship leader, pastor, deacons/elders, members of the worship team, church members, etc.)
- Include more prayer, not less, even if in short segments. A recommendation would be to include prayer approximately 3-5 times within a service.
- Consider including sermons in a range of 25-35 minutes in length.
- Sing more songs, not less. If possible, try to include at least 4-5 congregational songs in a service.
- Take the Lord's Supper/Communion together more frequently. If churches currently observe it once a quarter, consider moving to once a month.
- Find ways to include worship expressions that involve giving.

## OTHER ELEMENTS IN WORSHIP

Beyond certain essential, cornerstone expressions of corporate worship, there are several other expressions of worship that engage congregants and require leadership in corporate settings. The chart below examines this list of elements in worship of differing styles according to how frequently they are part of weekly worship services. For the sake of brevity and analysis, the chart groups together the responses for “never” and “rarely” and “most weeks” and “every week.”

For the purposes of this research, the list of elements was limited to:

- Recorded pre-service music
- Live pre-service music
- Public scripture reading
- Corporate prayer by congregation<sup>23</sup>
- Greeting one another
- Improvised prayer
- Scripted prayer
- Recitation of creeds
- Responsive readings
- Offering/passing the plate
- Invitation
- Benediction
- Recorded post-service music
- Live post-service music

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<sup>23</sup> There is some concern that respondents may have been confused on what this element is, whether referring to a time where the congregation is praying together while an individual prays aloud

or whether they are all praying the same words aloud together, or (as in some charismatic traditions) whether they are all praying their own prayers aloud simultaneously.

## 5.4 | Frequency of Elements in Worship by Service Style

This chart provides the top 2 frequency choices for each worship leadership element.

	One service/ Blended	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>Recorded pre-service music</b>	Every/most – 50% Never/rarely – 40%	Never/rarely – 59% Occasionally – 31%	Every/most – 55% Never/rarely – 46%
<b>Live pre-service music</b>	Never/rarely – 48% Every/most – 42%	Never/rarely – 46% Every/most – 32%	Never/rarely – 90% Every/most – 10%
<b>Public scripture reading</b>	Every/most – 81% Never/rarely – 10%	Every/most – 61% Never/rarely – 25%	Every/most – 64% Occasionally – 27%
<b>Corporate prayer by congregation</b>	Every/most – 55% Never/rarely – 31%	Every/most – 46% Never/rarely – 39%	Every/most – 46% Never/rare/occas. – 54%
<b>Greeting one another</b>	Never/rarely – 54% Every/most – 38%	Every/most – 50% Never/rare – 37%	Every/most – 63% Never/rarely – 27%
<b>Improvised prayer by an individual</b>	Every/most – 68% Never/rarely – 21%	Every/most – 71% Never/rarely – 25%	Every/most – 55% Occasionally – 27%
<b>Scripted prayer by an individual</b>	Never/rarely – 76% Every/most – 15%	Never/rarely – 75% Occasionally – 21%	Never/rarely – 91% Occasionally – 9%
<b>Recitation of creeds</b>	Never/rarely – 91% (Every week – 3%)	Never/rarely – 82% Occasionally – 11%	Never/rarely – 91% Occasionally – 9%
<b>Responsive readings</b>	Never/rarely – 73% Occasionally – 19% (Every/most – 9%)	Never/rarely – 75% Occasionally – 18%	Never/rarely – 100%
<b>Offering/Passing the plate</b>	Every/most – 59% Never/rarely – 40%	Every/most – 90% Never/rarely – 10%	Never/rarely – 46% Every/most – 46%
<b>Invitation</b>	Every/most – 95% Never/rarely – 4%	Every/most – 100%	Every/most – 91% Never/rarely – 9%
<b>Benediction</b>	Every/most – 76% Never/rarely – 20%	Every/most – 83% Never/rarely – 13%	Never/rarely – 46% Every/most – 46%
<b>Recorded post-service music</b>	Never/rarely – 61% Every/most – 33%	Never/rarely – 79%	Never/rarely – 55% Every/most – 36%
<b>Live post-service music</b>	Never/rarely – 48% Every/most – 46%	Never/rarely – 59% Every/most – 37%	Never/rarely – 33% Every/most – 33% Occasionally – 33%

A few surprising trends stand out upon closer look at this chart. Most notably:

- How polarized many of the answers, e.g., how many the options are “Every/most weeks” or “rarely/never.” This seems to report very little variety in weekly service planning. Not surprising, in some measure, is that churches find a somewhat predictable structure and format to their worship gatherings and repeat this week to week.
- That contemporary churches never/rarely have live pre-service music, most likely preferring pre-recorded music.
- The majority of churches who do not have a time of greeting.
- The even split among one service/blended churches and contemporary churches on the inclusion of a time for offering/giving. Conversely, there is a stark jump in percentage of traditional churches that include a time for offering/giving.
- Baptists are known for their call to respond to the message in the “invitation” time. The data confirms this.

A few concerning trends also stand out. Specifically:

- It is concerning the percentage of churches that never/rarely/occasionally have the public reading of scripture.
- The percentage of churches that never/rarely/occasionally have improvised prayer by an individual.
- This data confirms a historic practice that creeds are incredible rare in Baptist worship.

Considering this data, we would encourage churches to explore ways to bring variety, even in small doses, to a weekly worship gathering. This variety of frequency or format can freshen up or enrich services that often start to feel mundane or routine week after week.

Here are some recommendations:

- The simplest solution is to consider doing those things less often that are in the “every/most weeks” category (with some exception like public scripture reading) and consider doing more often those things that are in the “never/rarely” category.
- Not all of the above elements need to be included in weekly service but consider the “sprinkle” method of occasionally adding in one or two less familiar elements to a service. Churches might consider doing this not every week but only once a month. For example, one church might consider, within a month of services, including a responsive reading, reciting the Apostles creed, and having live music played before or after the service as people enter or exit.
- For elements that are already included in worship on a frequent basis, consider doing them less frequently to try to keep them fresh. For example, if the musicians play live pre/post service music, consider having that pre-recorded one week. Or instead of greeting one another every week, sprinkle that in on occasion.

## LEADERSHIP OF WORSHIP SERVICE ELEMENTS

Our research discovered that various church leadership positions often facilitate certain elements in worship. Answers include the top two most selected positions for each element of worship organized by service style.

The list of possible worship elements includes:<sup>24</sup>

- Recorded pre-service music
- Live pre-service music
- Public scripture reading
- Corporate prayer by congregation
- Greeting one another
- Improvised prayer
- Scripted prayer
- Recitation of Creeds
- Responsive readings
- Offering/passing the plat
- Invitation
- Benediction
- Recorded post-service music
- Live post-service music

**Fig. 5.5 | Leadership of Elements in Worship by Service Style**

	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>Primary Musical Worship Leader</b>	Live pre-service music (33%) Public scripture reading (41%) Corporate Prayer (27%) Greetings (45%) Improvised prayer (32%) Creeds (36%) Responsive readings (54%) Invitation (28%) Live post-service music (36%)	Recorded pre-service music (56%) Live pre-service music (29%) Greeting (50%) Responsive readings (43%) Invitation (27%) Recorded post-service music (50%) Live post-service music (25%)	Recorded pre-service music (56%) Primary musical worship leader (36%) Greeting (38%) Improvised prayer (44%) Written prayer (17%) Creeds (50%) Responsive readings (67%) Invitation (30%) Benediction (67%) Recorded post-service music (57%) Live post-service music (100%)
<b>Another Minister</b>	Public scripture reading (62%) Corporate Prayer (51%) Greeting (40%) Improvised prayer (39%)	Public scripture reading (33%) Improvised prayer (33%) Written prayer (33%) Creeds (75%)	Public scripture reading (46%) Corporate prayer (40%) Improvised prayer (22%) Greeting (50%)

<sup>24</sup> One oversight in this list was the omission of The Lord's Prayer.

	Written prayer (46%) Creeds (46%) Responsive readings (47%) Invitation (75%) Benediction (61%)	Responsive readings (43%) Invitation (59%) Benediction (57%)	Written prayer (83%) Creeds (50%) Responsive readings (50%) Invitation (50%) Benediction (67%)
<b>Church Members</b>	Recorded pre-service music (29%) Corporate Prayer (30%) Scripted prayer (40%) Offering (41%) Benediction (21%) Recorded post-service music (28%)	Recorded pre-service music (19%) Corporate prayer (40%) Greeting (29%) Improvised prayer (50%) Written prayer (50%) Responsive readings (43%) Offering (30%)	Offering (60%) Written prayer (17%) Improvised prayer (22%)
<b>Deacons/Elders</b>	Improvised Prayer (32%) Offering (55%)	Public scripture reading (50%) Corporate prayer (47%) Written prayer (33%) Offering (40%) Benediction (24%)	Offering (60%)
<b>Members of the Worship Team</b>	Recorded pre-service (46%) Live pre-service music (57%) Recorded post-service (45%) Live post-service music (58%)	Recorded pre-service music (19%) Live pre-service music (41%) Recorded post-service music (38%) Live post-service music (38%)	Recorded pre-service music (33%) Improvised prayer (22%) Live pre-service music (67%) Corporate prayer (40%) Recorded post-service music (43%)

This chart is particularly helpful in revealing the view of leadership roles across service styles. This data is also helpful for comparison; for example, the amount of leadership given to deacons/elders in traditional services vs. blended and contemporary services; or the amount of leadership expected of the primary musical worship leader in a contemporary service vs. a traditional service. Perhaps the most **concerning** aspect is how rarely the leadership of a more spiritually significant nature is shared with other members of the worship team. For example, why do we not see members of the worship team reading scripture, praying, or facilitating responsive readings more often? This aspect of our research reveals what we believe to be one of the most fertile areas for growth and exploration among churches.

## USE OF SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

This section explores the usage of various aids leaders use to facilitate worship services. This includes the possible use of hymnals for congregational singing, sources for accessing purchasing music, and the bible translation used in corporate worship.

For music sources, we limited our list to the following choices:

- Praisecharts
- SongSelect
- Multitracks
- Loop Community
- Choral publishing outlets
- Hymnal
- Other

For bible translations, we limited our list to the following choices:<sup>25</sup>

- KJV
- NKJV
- ESV
- NASB
- NIV
- Other

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<sup>25</sup> For bible translations, there was an oversight in our research in that we neglected the inclusion of the Christian Standard Bible translation (CSB) that has grown in popularity since its original publication in 2017 as a revision to the Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004.)



**Fig. 5.6 | Usage of Supportive Resources**

	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<i><b>Holding a hymnal while singing</b></i>	No – 76% Yes – 25%	Yes – 85% No – 14%	No – 100%
<i><b>Music from sources</b></i>	SongSelect – 61% Choral outlets – 49% Hymnal – 48% Praisecharts – 42% Multitracks – 20%	Hymnal – 80% Choral outlets – 44% Songselect – 24% Praisecharts – 16%	Praisecharts – 82% SongSelect – 73% Choral outlets – 64% Multitracks – 55% Hymnal – 36%
<i><b>Bible translation</b></i>	ESV – 29% NKJV – 20% Other – 20% <sup>26</sup> NIV – 13%	KJV – 59% NKJV – 21% NIV – 10% (ESV – 3%)	NASB – 36% NIV – 36% Other – 18% (ESV – 9%)

It is not surprising that traditional church services report a greater use of holding the hymnal singing and that contemporary services 100% report that they do not use hymnals during congregational singing. One **surprising** point is the number of traditional church services that report they do not hold a hymnal during congregational singing (14%).

**Interestingly**, among resources used, choral outlets maintain a strong presence in all style services and the hymnal is used by a decent number of contemporary services. It is **surprising** how many blended/one service churches prefer SongSelect over Praisecharts, leading one to think they may not know about Praisecharts or prefer the cheaper option of SongSelect.

Regarding bible translations used, it is **surprising** to see how little the ESV is used in both traditional and contemporary services and how much the KJV and NKJV is still being used, especially in traditional church services.

In addition to the above resources, respondents reported the use of a variety of other resources in smaller percentages:

- LifewayWorship.com
- Songs for Praise and Worship
- Getty Music
- Sovereign Grace Music
- Guitar tabs
- Hymnary.org
- SheetMusicDirect

<sup>26</sup> This mostly included the CSB along with a smattering of other translations and combinations.

Also, the most common hymnals are the *Baptist Hymnal* (various publication years), *Lifeway Worship Hymnal*, *Celebration Hymnal* and *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*.

## USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Churches use a variety of software and hardware technologies to support corporate worship. It is certainly possible to be across the spectrum of “low-tech” and “high-tech” churches within the Baptist world, and this chart helps us see the prevalence of these various technologies within services of different styles.

For the purposes of this research, we limited our list of possible technologies to the following:<sup>27</sup>

- In-ear monitors
- Click track/metronome
- Instrument tracks<sup>28</sup>
- Vocal tracks<sup>29</sup>
- Playback
- Ableton
- Loop Community/Prime
- Mainstage
- Laptop to run click/tracks
- Ipad to run click/tracks
- Ipad for charts/sheet music
- Screens for congregation
- Confidence monitors for worship leaders
- ProPresenter
- PowerPoint
- MediaShout
- Proclaim
- EasyWorship

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<sup>27</sup> Certain low-tech options were omitted, such as printed sheet music, music stands, printed bulletins, etc. while certain technologies were assumed, such as an audio/PA system, lighting, etc. Potential options that were overlooked include streaming services (like Spotify or Apple Music), QR codes on screens, hearing assisted technology, etc.

<sup>28</sup> In some contexts, this likely means a pre-recorded accompaniment track, likely for soloist.

<sup>29</sup> In some contexts, this likely means a pre-recorded accompaniment track, likely for a soloist, that also has vocals on the track.

**Fig. 5.7 | Software Usage by Service Style**

*This chart lists the top 9 out of 18 technologies.*

One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
Screens – 85%	Screens – 33%	ProPresenter – 91%
Confidence monitors – 59%	Instrument tracks – 29%	In-ear monitors – 82%
ProPresenter – 59%	Vocal tracks – 29%	Screens – 82%
In-ear monitors – 43%	In-ear monitors – 24%	Confidence monitors – 64%
Instrument tracks – 42%	ProPresenter – 24%	Click track/metronome – 46%
Ipad for charts – 25%	PowerPoint – 19%	Ipad for charts – 46%
Clicktrack/metronome – 22%	Laptop to run tracks – 14%	Instrument tracks – 27%
Laptop to run tracks – 20%	Confidence monitors – 14%	Laptop to run tracks – 27%
PowerPoint – 18%	Click track/metronome – 10%	Playback – 18%

**Fig. 5.8 | Software Usage by Service Attendance**

*This chart lists the top 9 out of 18 technologies.*

<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
Screens - 69%	Screens – 92%	In-ear monitors - 91%	In-ear monitors - 100%
Instrument tracks – 42%	ProPresenter – 81%	ProPresenter – 86%	ProPresenter – 100%
Confidence monitors – 34%	Confidence monitors – 69%	Confidence monitors – 86%	Confidence monitors – 100%
ProPresenter – 29%	In-ear monitors - 57%	Screens – 81%	Screens – 93%
PowerPoint – 26%	Instrument tracks – 37%	Click – 62%	Click – 71%
Vocal tracks - 21%	Ipad for charts – 36%	Ipad for charts – 48%	Instrument tracks – 64%
In-ear monitors - 18%	Click – 26%	Instrument tracks – 38%	Ipad for charts – 57%
Laptop to run clicks – 16%	Ipad to run clicks – 20%	Laptop to run clicks – 24%	Laptop to run clicks – 57%
EasyWorship – 12%	Laptop to run clicks – 17%	Ipad to run clicks – 19%	Ableton – 50%
		Ableton – 19%	

Specifically, the usage of pre-recorded tracks of instruments and vocals has become more common place, especially through the availability of in-ear technology that allows musicians to play and sing live while being supported by supplement of audio tracks via the aid of a click track or metronome. This allows for a more full, robust sound that mimics recordings available on commercial outlets. It also allows smaller worship teams to sound “bigger” or perhaps fill-in or cover for the absence of a missing band member on a given Sunday.

Finally, because of its increased usage (especially mid and post-Covid), it also was important to determine the prevalence of livestreaming among churches.

**Fig. 5.9 | Use of Track and Livestream Technologies by Service Style**

*This chart provides the top 2 choices for each technology.*

	One service/Blend	Traditional	Contemporary
<b>Use of click and instr. tracks</b>	Never/rarely – 68% Every/most – 30%	Never/rarely – 71% Every/most – 21%	Never/rarely – 60% Every/most – 40%
<b>Purpose for tracks</b>	Supplement sounds – 52% Covering an instr. – 39%	Covering an instr. – 46% Having sound of band – 36%	Absent member – 63% Covering an instr. – 63%
<b>Use of vocal tracks</b>	Never/rarely – 87% Every/most – 11%	Never/rarely – 93% Every/most – 7%	Never/rarely – 100%
<b>Livestream</b>	Yes – 75% No – 25%	Yes – 55% No – 45%	Yes – 82% No – 18%

It seems a bit **surprising** that so many churches still do not use click or instrument/stem tracks, but the financial investment in audio technology to support that often makes it unrealistic for most churches. It is **encouraging** to see the number of churches that do not use vocal tracks in their services. It is **surprising** to see the number of services in all styles that still do not livestream their services.

It also seemed helpful to analyze the data for this section according to the size of churches, given their need for various technologies and financial resources to access such technologies.

**Fig. 5.10 | Use of Track and Livestream Technologies by Service Attendance**

*This chart provides the top 2 choices for each technology.*

	<149	150-499	500-999	1000+
<b>Use of click and instr. tracks</b>	Never/rarely – 73% Every/most – 26%	Never/rarely – 66% Every/most – 28%	Never/rarely – 58% Every/most – 42%	Never/rarely – 36% Every/most – 64%
<b>Purpose for tracks</b>	Having the sound of a band – 46% Supplement sounds – 39%	Supplement sounds – 52% Covering instr. – 46%	Covering instrument – 83% Supplement sounds – 58%	Supplement sounds – 60% Covering absent band member – 60% Covering instrument – 40%
<b>Use of vocal tracks</b>	Never/rarely – 85% Every/most – 11%	Never/rarely – 92% Every/most – 6%	Never/rarely – 95% Every/more – 5%	Never/rarely – 93% Every/most – 7%
<b>Livestream</b>	Yes – 56% No – 44%	Yes – 92% No – 8%	Yes – 91% No – 9%	Yes – 100%

It is not surprising to see the large percentage of small churches that do not livestream, given the more complex or intimidating nature of this technology and that such smaller churches have less of an audience that would depend on a livestream feed.

A couple of **surprising** data points are the number of medium churches that indicate they do not have a regular band as well as the number of small, medium, and large churches that do not use click/instrument tracks. Anecdotally, this seems more commonplace than the data reveals.

## WORSHIP LEADER INTERVIEWS

As a companion to the survey data, we thought it would be helpful to include qualitative data through interviews with worship ministers/pastors. This provided an opportunity to ask questions that do not fit neatly on a survey but that have a place in this research project. In some cases, interviewees were able to expound on questions in the survey or speak more openly about issues in their ministry. Collectively, this helped us gain a better picture of what is happening in churches across the state. While timing and financial limitations did not allow an overwhelmingly number of interviews, we were able to secure 23 interviews with individuals from a variety of churches in size, style, location, and demographic. This should give us a decent picture of what is happening on the “frontlines” of worship ministry across the Alabama SBC church landscape. While some interviews were conducted in person, the majority occurred over zoom in the summer of 2024.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through a qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.TI) to help identify common themes, issues, and topics across all interviewees. The following is a summary of the findings from these interviews.

### **Code-document Analysis – Patterns and Priorities in SBC Worship Practices**

This analysis of interview data reveals which themes emerged most strongly among interview with worship leaders. We will include the highest-coded areas that will provide insight into prevailing concerns, theological emphases, cultural adaptations, and stylistic choices within contemporary Southern Baptist worship.

#### **Primary themes**

Church music and worship style dominates the data and is likely the most central issue in the minds of worship leaders. Adjacent topics of discussion include style, instrumentation, song selection, and liturgical flow.

Content is the second-most reference topic and reveals a high degree of reflection on lyrics, theological substance, biblical fidelity, and also the message of the songs.

Other less central but relevant themes includes digitalization, intergenerational worship, and denominational identity.

#### **Other notable themes**

- Tradition vs. innovation (reflecting debates over hymnody vs. modern worship music, formal vs. free liturgy)
- Planning & musical excellence
- Congregational participation (emphasis on shared rather than performed experience)
- Theological foundations (referenced less—is this assumed? Or neglected?)

#### **Themes with low frequency** (either as niche concerns or underexplored areas)

- Missions
- Technology use
- Covid impact
- Children/youth worship

Overall, this analysis revealed that leaders are deeply invested in musical style and content. There is also a spectrum of thoughtfulness and intentionality depending on the individual leaders. There are some under-discussed issues (theology, technology, age demographics) that would benefit from more research or training. Surprisingly, digitalization is certainly emergent but not yet a primary focus for many. Perhaps it is assumed in some spaces and ignored in others?

As expected, the research confirms that we are in a season where we are negotiating between tradition and change. Some churches are navigating those waters more easily than others. But with hope and optimism, it seems that churches desire theological depth and meaningful congregational engagement—two hallmarks of SBC churches for decades.

### **A Co-Occurrence Analysis – Interconnected Themes in Worship Leadership**

This analysis summarizes the relational patterns between themes among the interviews, drawn from a code co-occurrence matrix. This is a deeper analysis that examines how themes were linked or mentioned together. Patterns reveal complex interdependencies between various content areas such as leadership, musical style, theology, and worship approach. In sum, these insights reveal how worship leaders and practitioners conceptualize and connect these various dimensions of worship practice.

The data revealed the following interconnected themes:

- Worship style preferences
- Worship style values
- Traditional worship
- Contemporary worship
- Experience and atmosphere
- Cultural context

The analysis shows that when ministers discussed "Worship Style Preferences," they simultaneously referenced other themes over 1,100 times—a clear signal that **style preferences anchor much of the discussion and are linked to a broad range of other concerns.**

#### **Key Thematic Pairings (co-occurrences)**

##### *Church music and worship style – connected to – content*

For many, this highlights that worship style is not just an aesthetic preference but strongly entwined with thoughts on theological depth, lyrical content, and message.

##### *Worship style preferences – connected to – traditional worship*

It is unsurprising that when discussing worship preferences, the most common comparison is between traditional and contemporary forms of worship.

##### *Worship style preferences – connected to – experience and atmosphere*

Stylistic decisions are associated with emotional tone, spiritual atmosphere, or congregational experience.

##### *Cultural context – connected to – worship style preferences and denominational identity*

There is an awareness that local culture and church identity affect stylistic choices.

*Leadership – intersects with – music, prayer, and planning.*

This seems to highlight that ministers frame worship holistically; that it's not just about music but about overseeing the entire spiritual environment.

## **Patterns of Complexity**

### *Multidimensional Framing of Worship Style*

In framing worship style, which can be challenging, leaders often discuss style simultaneously with the following:

- Theological concerns (content, significance)
- Cultural adaptability (context, experience)
- Institutional identity (denomination)
- Practicalities (leadership, planning)

### *Experience-based Leadership*

Emotional and atmospheric concerns exist with leadership themes, highlighting that ministers lead not just with doctrinal authority but by shaping experiential worship spaces.

### *Tradition and Innovation Co-Exist*

Traditional worship references frequently co-occur with style preferences and cultural context, suggesting that many leaders engage in evaluative comparisons between old and new forms, rather than framing them as binary choices.

## **Gaps and Silences**

Certain themes occur less frequently than others previously mentioned. These include digitalization and intergenerational worship. This highlights a few realities:

- This was not a priority in the interview questions
- This is an emerging or underdeveloped theme
- There is potential for future training emphasis or research

## **Practical Ministry Insights**

- Worship leaders think relationally. For example, style choices are not isolated but rather tied to content, leadership approach, congregational experience, and cultural understanding.
- Churches also operate in a space of tension that requires they honor tradition while adapting to current (“contemporary”) needs.
- Emotional resonance through atmosphere and experience are a higher priority than they have ever been and as critical as theological content in worship planning.



## **APPENDIX I**

### **Methodology**

This report provides significant amounts of data on trends and statistics produced from quantitative and qualitative surveys. With over 3,000 SBC churches in the state of Alabama, this survey reflects data from approximately 400 different churches of varying size, location, local context, and philosophical approach.

The quantitative survey included fifty questions organized in five categories:

- Worship Demographics
- Worship Leader Profile
- Worship Leadership Team Profile
- Choir and Orchestra Profile
- Profile of Worship Practices

Following various sample surveys with potential questions and consultations with academic and church leaders, the survey was narrowed to the final fifty questions. There were approximately 30-40 additional questions covering adjacent areas of interest, but they were removed from the original list for future exploration. The intent was to limit the survey to 40-50 questions with a survey completion time of 15-20 minutes. We did sample test surveys to a small cohort and found that we were in the desired window of completion time.

The survey was distributed using mass emails obtained through the Alabama State Board of Missions office and their church database. We conducted an email campaign through the month of May and June (2024) to collect surveys, targeting churches of varying size and well as worship leaders of both full-time, part-time, and volunteer status. In addition, we built a website (<https://www.samford.edu/programs/grants/survey-of-southern-baptist-churches-worship-practices-in-alabama/>) to hold and promote the survey as well as future reports of research findings. We also promoted the site through social media channels. We made direct contact with the Directors of Mission (Associational Mission Strategists) in each local Southern Baptist association around the state. We made sure to target our email survey to at least five key churches within each of the associations, under the advisement of the Director of Missions from that association. This would help ensure that we would have survey data from across the state, even though some local associations are larger than others. As anticipated, the most challenging places to procure survey responses were in rural, less populated regions. We placed follow up phone calls to the target churches within each association to help prompt a response to the survey that was sent to them.

Knowing that not all churches are online or use email, we also did a random sampling of small churches to mail out approximately fifty paper surveys. Cost prohibited a larger population for the paper mail out. We received back approximately twenty-five paper surveys.

## APPENDIX II

### Survey Questions

- What musical instruments are *most commonly* used in weekly Sunday services? (Check all that apply.)
- What musical instruments are used on special occasions? (Check all that apply.)
- During a typical primary/weekend worship service, how many people are playing instruments
- During a typical primary/weekend worship service, how many people are singing on a microphone at one time (vocal team, praise team, etc.)?
- Indicate the approximate number of men and women among your **vocalists** during a typical primary/weekend worship service (not including choir singers).
- Indicate the approximate number of men and women among your **instrumentalists** during a typical primary/weekend worship service (not including orchestra players).
- Indicate the approximate number of all worship team members in each age bracket (**not** including choir/orchestra participants).
- What other instrumental ensembles are included in primary/weekend worship services on special occasions? (Check all that apply)

### **APPENDIX III**

#### **Interview Questions**

In addition, our process included interviewing 25 worship leaders from across the state, representing churches of varying size, geography, approach, and context. Interviews were conducted mostly via zoom with a small number conducted in person at the worship leader's church. The nature of these interviews was to be more conversational while also asking targeted questions that would further illuminate the picture of worship at each specific church. Certain questions do not fit on a paper survey, and these interviews allowed us to gain a more colorful and robust picture of a given church context. These questions included:

##### Demographic questions:

- What is your leadership role?
- How long have you been in that role?
- How large is your weekly attendance?
- Number and style of worship service(s)?

##### Worship Team:

- What is the make-up of your worship team (# of people, ensembles, instruments, etc.)?
- Does your church pay your instrumentalists (possibly considered as contract or intern pay)?
- Does your church pay your vocalists (possibly considered as contract or intern pay)?
- Have any of your worship team members received training in music or worship (high school up to college or other methods)? If so, approximately how many team members and at what level?

##### Worship Planning/Leadership:

- What is the most important factor that influences weekly worship planning?
  - Liturgical calendar, sermon series, theme, preaching pastor's input/vision for the service, other
- In your opinion, what is the most important thing about how worship services are conducted at your church?
- What do you think is the healthiest aspect of your worship services?
- If there was one thing you could change about your worship services, what would it be?
- If there was one thing that you hope would *never* change about your services, what would it be?
- How are your services different now in comparison to before the Covid-19 pandemic?
  - What aspects changed? Stayed the same?
  - What aspects/elements are new on this side of the pandemic? What was added?
  - What aspects/elements are no longer include on this side of the pandemic? What was removed?
  - What aspects/elements were altered or changed in some way?
- What are you most nervous or anxious about with your worship services and worship team as you look to the future?
- What are you most excited about with your worship services and worship team as you look to the future?

Optional questions, if appropriate:

- How many full-time staff are at your church?
- Part-time staff?
- Difference in attendance pre and post Covid?
- What is the number one complaint you deal with?

## **APPENDIX IV**

### **Limitations, Omissions, and Future Research**

To date, we are unaware of any sort of research survey like the one we have conducted in our state for Alabama SBC churches. In processing and analyzing the data, it is certainly clear that future, deeper research would be beneficial. This was anticipated as we removed important questions in the early stages of building the research study. Now upon completion, we have identified areas/questions that would be helpful to explore in future research:

- The presence and frequency of Sunday evening services?
- The presence and frequency of Wednesday evening services?
- Musical leadership issues:
  - Is there shared leadership within songs (one person leads a verse, another leads the chorus, etc.)
  - Who sings melody? Which voice part?
  - What resources are used to help teams prepare? (Planning Center, recordings, chord charts, lead sheets, full sheet music, etc.)
  - What are transitions like between songs, for example, when/if songs occur back-to-back?
  - When do various groups/ensembles rehearse and for how long?
- Is the congregation verbally instructed/encouraged to worship expressively or participate in other ways?
- The type/level of training of the worship leader(s).
- Where does the pastor sit during worship when not preaching/speaking?
- Where does the worship team sit during worship when not leading?
- Choir ministry profile:
  - Do people have to audition?
  - Are there paid singers in the choir?
  - What does the choir look like when they lead (attire, robes, holding folders, etc.)?
  - Use of “presentational” music in addition to congregational music?
  - The numerical balance of men/women in the choir?
  - The ages represented in the choir?
- Production ministry profile:
  - What production team positions are used and how many are paid or volunteer?
  - What/how monitors are used to help the worship team hear?
  - If livestreaming, which services are livestreamed (if there are multiple services)?
  - Which streaming platform is used?
  - Are services broadcast on television?
  - Use of separate audio feed for broadcast?
  - How many cameras are used for livestream/broadcast?
  - Estimated viewership of church’s livestream compared to live attendance?
  - The nature and look of house lighting and any changes during the service?
  - Means of communication about worship and church life (QR code, website, social media, print, email/text, etc.)?

In some instances, we mistakenly omitted certain possibilities in survey questions choices. This included:

- When considering musical styles, we neglected to include Southern (white) Gospel music as an option.
- When considering various Bible translations, we neglected to include the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) as an option.
- In considering worship elements, we neglected to include the Lord's Prayer as an option.