

Elmbrook Worship Statement

At Elmbrook Church, we recognize the importance and need for weekly corporate worship. We understand that worshiping God is more than music and singing. It's threaded through every part of our lives. When it comes to music, it is an honor and privilege for us to lead the Body of Christ in praise and worship. We know that, on any given weekend, there are multiple church backgrounds, styles and practices that people walk in with and we're so glad! It's our desire to help people understand why we do what we do and, more importantly, what scriptures say about corporate worship. Below we've articulated our approach to praise and worship. We believe in being purposeful and intentional, helping to provide a culture of engagement into the presence of God every time we gather as a church. We hope this helps answer questions you may have as you join us in worship.

Song Selection

We believe in cross-centered, biblically based lyrical content. We understand that we are accountable for the words we ask the congregation to sing. They must be theologically grounded and provide a proper roadmap to engaging God's heart through music. We believe it's important to be intentional with how we plan a worship set so that our worship doesn't become one-dimensional and self-focused.

Praise and worship is our response to the good news of the gospel and while it helps and benefits us as Believers, it's ultimately for God and God alone. It's easy for our worship to become focused on our needs and what He can do for us rather than focused on who He is and how we can honor Him. Below is the structure we use to create a balanced praise and worship service at Elmbrook Church.

- **Proclamation** – proclaiming God's love, hope, goodness, faithfulness, mercy, and more! We begin our services with high praise. The first thing we want to do, as a congregation, is what scripture tells us in Psalm 100:4, *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name."* We do this by proclaiming, to one another and to the world, the truths about who God is and how thankful we are for His marvelous works. 1 Chronicles 16:8 says, *"Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name; Make known His deeds among the peoples."* God's word is filled with scriptures telling us to brag on God; to praise Him for who He is and all He's done.
- **Recognition** – we recognize and welcome God in our worship services. It's acknowledging that there is a powerful presence among us and we must pay special attention to it. May it never be that we come and go from church without considering God's power and authority in the room. We know that God's presence changes us. Psalm 16:11 (NIV) says, *"You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."*
- **Invitation** – we invite God to make Himself known. Inviting God doesn't assume that He isn't already in our midst. He is! He's omnipresent. Rather, it's like inviting

someone to your house and telling them to make themselves at home. God loves when we acknowledge our need for Him and invite Him to move in our services. This requires that we have an expectation for Him to move in ways beyond what we can hope or imagine. Ephesians 3:20 (NIV) says, *“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”* God loves to deposit truth in our hearts and speak things to us. Many times this happens in praise and worship as we focus solely on Him.

- **Adoration** – to adore God is to hold him in high esteem; to glorify and express our love for Him. Although this happens in our personal interaction with God, it also happens in community as we corporately adore Him. Typically, this is a quieter moment in the worship time. The songs may be slower and softer as well as more thought provoking as it allows our hearts to hear what God might be speaking. Our adoration of Christ and His work on the cross is essential to our worship. It’s a fundamental aspect of worship that every Believer should participate in. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross should overwhelm us with gratitude and thankfulness. This is the core of which our adoration comes from. There are many scriptures that speak to singing of God’s love for us such as Psalm 89:1, *“I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.”*
- **Declaration** – we love to end our worship time declaring the greatness of God. We believe His saving power and generous love for us is worth celebrating! As we declare Him to all heaven and earth, our faith is strengthened, our hope is ignited, our joy is increased and our love for God is deepened. This is the Body of Christ. It is our opportunity, as a congregation, to enter His presence with thanksgiving in our hearts and praise on our lips. We join with heaven and declare God is alive and victorious!

*“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.
They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.^[b]
They tell of the power of your awesome works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.”*
Psalm 143:3-7

Being Energetic and Joyful

You will find that our goal, as worship leaders, is to come into God’s presence with joyful hearts! God’s word is filled with commands to be full of joy and celebration toward God. King David was a prime example of celebrating God’s goodness through energetic singing and even dancing! In 2 Samuel 6:5 it says, *“David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.”* While our instruments may have some different names and

sounds, the core of this verse remains the same: we are to praise God with everything in us. This is why we lead worship with passion and energy. We smile, we move, we clap and we play our instruments all for the glory of God. When David's wife, Michal, saw David outwardly expressing his love and joy toward God, she was embarrassed. In verses 21-22 it reads, ²¹ *David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord."* ²² *I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes."* Our expression of praise to God is not for our own recognition. Rather, it is to make it publically known that we love God and we celebrate the fact that He has saved us! When we do this in community, it's powerful and life changing. As followers of Christ, we all must understand that this is a command of scripture. It is not a matter of personality. We all have varying personalities and temperaments but God never commands us to do something in which He hasn't equipped us for. We have been created to praise and worship with gladness and zeal. We've been made in His image. In Zephaniah 3:17, it says that God rejoices over us with gladness and singing. God rejoices over US! How much more then should we rejoice over HIM!

Clapping Our Hands

If you've been in our worship services at Elmbrook Church, you know that we highly encourage the clapping of hands when appropriate during songs as well as after most songs. We do this because when we do, we are fulfilling the command of scripture. Psalm 47:1 (ESV) says, *"Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!"* Scripture is full of verses that tell us to clap, shout, dance, be loud in our praise to God. All of these are acts of praise. Praise is an outward, physical expression of respect and gratitude. When we express praise for God through singing and the clapping of hands, it is seen and felt by those around us bringing joy and encouragement to the Body of Christ. We don't applaud to say "good job" to the worship musicians. We applaud to express our thanks and celebration for God and His great love for His Church. Not only is it a command of scripture but it's our privilege to ascribe honor and worth to Him. As worship leaders, it's our responsibility to help lead the congregation through singing and being joyful. We will always encourage people to engage through praise and the clapping of hands. When we do this as a community, it's a powerful expression of love and adoration to God. At the end of songs, many times, applause is appropriate. Not for the sake of the worship team but to confirm the truths we just sang. It's the "amen!" at the end of our praise and worship.

How We Express Our Worship

We want people to feel the freedom to worship in whatever way is most beneficial for them. Notice we didn't say "comfortable" because we know God loves to press us beyond our comfort zones at times. So what's beneficial? For some, it's the raising of hands in surrender as they sing, for others it's closing their eyes and contemplating the truths being sung or the singing loud for everyone around to hear. The most important thing is that we recognize that our worship needs be vertical. Our worship is for God and God alone. The songs we sing, the applause we give, the hands we raise are all for God's glory and fame. Each one of us has a responsibility to offer our sacrifice of praise. We all have a part to play in corporate worship. Every week we have the opportunity to offer a corporate gift to God through praise and worship. When we do this together, it is

a sweet offering to God's heart. This is why we encourage everyone to come ready to participate. It's what we've been created to do!

When To Sing

We've been asked by some congregants, "When are we supposed to sing?" First, let us say, we LOVE when the congregation sings! The answer is simple, any time we sing, you sing. While there are occasions that we will have a more reflective song where we ask people to sit and receive, for the most part, we anticipate people joining us in singing. At times, you'll notice all of the vocalists on stage are singing and other times it's just one or two. This is merely for dynamics and creativity. It's not a distraction nor is it considered out of order when the congregation sings along regardless of whether a portion of the song is being sung by one leader or multiple vocalists. We encourage you to follow along with the lyrics on the screen and sing out. This is what corporate worship is all about and we love it! We encourage praise and worship to go beyond the song. Some may just read the words and agree in their spirits to the truths being sung. That's an expression of worship. Others may want to reflect on the attributes of God as we sing songs like How Great Thou Art. That's an expression of worship. Then there are those who love singing every word whether they know the melody or not. That's an expression of worship. We love that there are multiple expressions of praise and worship happening in the worship center at the same time. That's how the Body of Christ has been designed. We all bring our gifts and sacrifices of praise and it's a joyful noise to God's heart! The important thing is that we are all engaged, worshipping God as John 4:24 says, "*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*" Worshipping God requires the engagement of our hearts and our minds. Both can be beautifully expressed whether we are singing a new song or a well-known hymn.

Singing New Songs

We believe it's important that have a balance between newer, modern songs as well as established hymns and choruses. Most weeks we will sing at least one traditional hymn or chorus. We strive for familiarity in our set-list of songs. We will introduce between 12 and 15 new songs in a year. There are a couple of reasons we do this. First, it's a command of scripture. The Bible is filled with passages encouraging new songs. Psalms 96, 98, and 149 specifically start out saying, "Sing to the Lord a new song..." Secondly, we believe God is always speaking new things to His people. As worship leaders, we understand the importance of listening to what God is speaking and help provide songs that help the Church hear and respond. That being said, we understand God uses songs that have lasted through the generations. We want to honor and respect tradition while, at the same time, press us to new heights and depths God is calling us to.

Often times, new songs come from a place of response to God's power working in our lives. The psalmist tells us in Psalm 40,

*¹ I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.*

*³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.*

God loves to give us new songs for new seasons. While we don't want to forsake familiar songs that carry deep meaning for us, we also want to recognize the power of new songs.

When introducing a new song, we will typically sing it for two weeks in a row, take a break for a week and sing it again the fourth week. If we feel the congregation received the song well and is a good fit for Elmbrook, we will put in a regular rotation. We understand some would prefer we do all hymns while others prefer we do all newer songs. We aim to have a balance of both as we consider culture and recognize that we are a multi-generational church.

Style of Music

We don't believe one form of music style is more pleasing to God than another. Every church has its niche and we celebrate God's creativity in the many expressions of music throughout the global Body of Christ.

While we have a blend of musical styles, our sound is modern, meaning we have a band style worship team: drums, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, bass guitar, piano, pad, synth and vocals. We use strings such as violin, viola and cello from time to time. We also use brass for special occasions. Periodically, we have an acoustic weekend with a more scaled down sound using mainly acoustic guitars and vocals. We know this is a blessing for some and we love the unplugged feel from time to time.

The Use of Lights During Worship

We recognize that this is one of the highly debated topics of the Church today. Not just the use of special lighting but also the level of house lights.

With house lights, some prefer it bright so that they can see those around them while worshipping. Others prefer it darker so that others don't distract them. At Elmbrook, we have chosen a balance of the two. Our lights will change throughout the worship service to best serve the moment. During the message, the lights will be up giving people the ability to read their Bibles and take notes. During praise and worship the house lights are kept at a lower level but never dark. As worship leaders, it's important that we see the congregation's faces. Therefore, people can see those around them but it also gives a feel of warmth and focus.

Some have asked why we don't keep the curtains open on the windows to give natural light. While there are weeks that we do, there are a couple of challenges we face when the curtains are open. One is that during certain times of the year, the sun shines in so bright, it can be blinding for those on the stage. The second challenge is that, when the curtains are open and it's a nice sunny day, it makes everyone in the balcony a silhouette and we can't see faces. Whether you're a speaker or a singer, it's difficult when you can't see the people.

As far as the use of special lighting and haze, without a doubt this is a huge topic and, often, a misunderstood one. Our purpose in using special lighting is to enhance the visual side of our five senses, which God has given us. Though we have minimal lighting at Elmbrook Church, the use of color and slow movement, gives just enough texture and creativity in a way that a well-lit room doesn't. In no way, do we believe God's presence is more powerful with or without special lighting. This is a human issue and is only meant to help provide beauty and creativity in our worship services. God is a god of creativity and many are inspired as we express it through the use of color and lights.

When it comes to using haze (fog, as some would say), the purpose of the haze is to create a backdrop for the lights to reflect off of. Without haze, we wouldn't see the colorful, special lighting. Much like a painter paints on a white canvas, we use haze as our backdrop so that we can see the color and movement of the lights. Some compare the use of special lighting and haze to rock concerts and "performing." While it's not our motive to look or feel like a rock concert, we certainly don't believe that this comparison is a reason for the Church not to use creative elements like this. The same can and has been said about the use of instruments such as drums and the electric guitar. As a worship team, it's never our heart to perform. In fact, we teach against it. Our audience is God and God alone. There's a thin line between leading and performing. That line is motive. Our motive is to help every person engage the heart of God through praise and worship. As a worship team, we are responsible to provide people the opportunity to engage and then get out of the way, allowing the congregation to take over as we facilitate the room. As worship leaders, we long to see this.

Levels of Audio

We run the audio between 90-92 decibels in our weekend services. We know it will spike a little higher momentarily on a big build or dip below during a quieter song. We understand that the level of audio is one of the more challenging issues many churches face. One of the reasons is because we all hear differently. Some like it loud, some like it soft. Some wear hearing aids, others don't. There are times we will have a person tell us the music was too loud only to turn around and have someone else say how perfect it sounded and thank us.

As any room, the audio can be different depending on where a person is sitting. In order for it to be loud enough in one area, it may be louder than one desires in another area. This is why we encourage people, if they find it too loud, to try sitting somewhere else and see if that helps. While our audio engineers do an incredible job of balancing the sound, the reality is every room has its challenges. It's not a winnable topic for sure, but we do our best to provide a full and pleasant sound for as many as possible.

For those concerned about hearing loss, we use OSHA's hearing chart (Occupational Safety and Health Administration - <https://www.osha.gov>) as our guide. OSHA states that in order to cause hearing loss at 90-92 decibels, a person would have to be listening at that level for 6-8 hours non-stop.

Within a 20-minute worship set, there may be a cumulative total of 10 minutes in the 90-94 dB range. Our sound engineers regularly monitor the decibel levels using

professional grade decibel meters with settings that are appropriate to a dynamic live music environment to insure we stay around this 90-92 dB mark. The readings on our professional meters may differ from a decibel meter app that one may have on his or her smartphone. This is largely due to the fact that the microphone in a cell phone is not designed to be a flat response reference microphone.

As we get older, our hearing changes. We begin losing certain frequencies in our hearing. This is natural. Certain frequencies that never bothered us before may begin to sound harsh and even painful the older we get. Some may lose frequencies causing it to be more difficult to make out certain sounds or even words. For this reason, we begin hearing music different from others. When these frequencies start affecting our hearing, naturally, we tend to blame the level of volume when, in reality, it may be an equalization issue. Certain frequencies can sound harsh, causing the mix to irritate our ears, even a good mix. This may explain why two people can hear two conflicting things making one pleased and the other frustrated.

Some churches provide earplugs for this very reason. Not necessarily because they just want it loud but because they recognize that even at a lower volume earplugs may help those with more sensitive ears. Though we don't hand out earplugs at the door, we would encourage you to use them if it helps you engage in praise and worship rather than stay outside the worship center during the music or purposefully arrive to service late. We know this is a difficult subject for some and we will continue to strive to do our best to serve everyone.

We hope this is helpful for those who have struggled with some of these issues. It's the heart of Elmbrook leadership to provide a worship environment that helps everyone engage with our Creator. Our hope is that we never let personal preference dictate our response to the great news of the gospel that God sent His Son for us to provide freedom, healing and victory in our lives. We have been created to glorify God and one way to do this is by singing songs as a community.

It's our honor to serve the Body of Christ through the leading of praise and worship. We consider it a great privilege and we are humbled at the opportunity. May we all respond to the command of our God to worship Him!

"Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;

praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

praise him with the harp and lyre,

praise him with timbrel and dancing,

praise him with the strings and pipe,

*praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord.”*

Psalm 150:6