

Music Survey Summary

With the retirement of Carol Morris, our longtime music director, the Walnut Creek United Methodist Church Music Task Force decided that this is a good time to reflect on what we as a church community appreciate about WCUMC's music ministry as it has been, and what we might be interested in exploring or changing. To this end we created and published a survey that was offered to the congregation through the Weekly Newsletter and a special mailing. Additionally, the survey was announced during several church services and all members were encouraged to complete a survey.

In general, all questions were evaluated on a statistical basis where appropriate and careful analysis was made of the comments by those who participated in the survey. Recurring subject responses were tabulated to indicate a population trend, while single subject responses were ignored. A good degree of confidence exists that the subject responses indicate a trend in the community, however, the volunteers evaluating the survey are not statisticians, nor educated in survey analysis.

General Response to the Survey: We received a total of 64 completed surveys. The majority of our respondents (71%) have been a part of the WCUMC community for more than ten years and 70% fell between the ages of 60-79. 76% of the respondents were female and 78% described the faith context of their formative worship experiences as Mainline Protestant. At least 69% of respondents or the respondent's children had participated in the music program in one way or another with 39% belonging to the choir at some point. (Unfortunately there was a flawed question that only allowed the respondents to mark one way they had participated in the music program.) From the responses of the survey we can conclude that music is a very important part of worship for the people who responded to this survey (98%).

Recommendation: *It is essential for this committee to invest the time and energy to find the right person to lead the music program and any additional appropriate support staff required.*

Quality of the WCUMC Music Program: The quality of the music program before, during and after the worship service is the most

appreciated aspect of our music program. This was clear through both the statistical evaluation of numerous questions, in addition to a high number of comments added by those who took the survey. Additionally, there is a value placed on professionalism.

Recommendation: *Look for a well-trained, experienced music leader to guide our music program in a way that builds on its current quality and maintains or creates roles for talented musicians in our church and the community.*

Opportunity to Participate: The opportunity to participate in the choir, bell choir and/or other music making opportunities is the second most appreciated aspect of our music program. Many people appreciate the Christmas programs and musical theater productions as opportunities to participate in the church and the Carnegie Hall and other mass choirs as opportunities to participate in music beyond the church

Recommendation: *Look for a candidate with experience in and enthusiasm for providing a range of musical opportunities for parishioners and community members. These opportunities could be used as community outreach and a way to expose people to our church.*

Communal Singing: The communal aspect of singing together is highly valued.

Recommendation: *Encourage the new Director of Music to engage and incorporate the congregation into the musical offerings during worship.*

Choir: There is a very high value placed on the choir (89% approve) with several respondents going as far as saying that they would find another place to worship if there was no choir or if the quality of the music sung by the choir diminished or became too simplistic. Many respondents shared that singing in the choir is the way that they worship. Again, many choir members mentioned that it is important to have opportunities to perform beyond our church. It should be noted here that 37% of our respondents have in the past or currently sing in the choir.

Recommendation: *Maintaining a quality choir is essential. Look for a director with experience in choral direction, a faith that is consistent with ours and the ability to incorporate the two and share that spirituality with*

the musicians. Continue to provide opportunities for the music groups to perform outside of our church and with other groups.

Music Style: 76% of those responding like traditional hymns, while 74% like the green and black hymnals (the survey asked respondents to check multiple responses). These responses demonstrate that the congregation likes traditional music, however, over 50% of people would like to see us add diversity of musical styles to our worship service. People enjoy it when multiple musical styles and musicians are incorporated into services including soloists, guest musicians, etc. 37% would enjoy services with new musical styles, while 48% said they would enjoy services with musicians other than the choir and organ. 32% said they would miss the more traditional hymns, while 21% said they would miss the choir and organ. Bell choir has a 68% approval rating. 80% like guest instrumentalists and soloists. 70% want us to build on traditions and strengths. A pervasive theme amongst respondents is for more upbeat music. The desire for more energy was mentioned over and over. The appreciation of more musical styles was the primary theme of what people have enjoyed when attending services at other churches.

Recommendation: *Look for a new music leader who has experience in traditional/classical music but who can also provide alternative musical styles. It will be important to invest time and energy in finding the right person (people) for this role. This could be difficult given the need to find a music professional who can bridge both traditional and contemporary styles in line with our liturgical traditions, but given the importance of music to so many people in our congregation, a careful, broad search will be worth it. He/she needs to be able to create inclusive musical experiences for a congregation with different tastes in musical style. Candidates should be able to articulate new, specific ideas about how to do this, based on past experience, and be excited about experimentation and iteration. Most importantly, the candidate must be energetic.*

The Organ: The congregation is divided on the organ. The people who like the organ seem quite passionate about not losing it. On the other hand, many like the instrument, but not the way it is currently being incorporated into the service. There were many comments about not wanting such

somber music particularly at the end of the service. Some people felt that the organ boxed us in too much to a particular style of music.

Recommendation: *We keep our organ but integrate it into a more diverse musical program with it being only one element among many in our worship service.*

Children/Youth: For the future of our music program, there is an overriding desire to incorporate children and youth into our services. 80% enjoy children and youth participation. This is significant considering most of the people responding to the survey are aged 60 or older and not young families with children currently involved in our church. Respondents would overwhelmingly like to use children's and youth music programs to grow the congregation.

Recommendation: *Look for a music leader with some experience working with children and youth in worship music, and/or who could develop music programming in concert with our other church leaders or local community youth music leaders. Integrate discussions about children and youth in music with other planning efforts around children's involvement in worship and religious formation, and seek regular feedback from families with children and teens, and from young adults, about the role music is (or isn't) playing in their or their families' worship and spiritual formation experiences. Use a children's music program as a community outreach program. Explore interest in a music incubator.*

Conclusion

We are a congregation that loves music! We place enormous value on the quality of our music and the roles that music plays in worship, and in inspiring emotions that bring us closer to God and to one another. Most of us deeply appreciate many aspects of WCUMC's current music program, but many of us also long for change. Our congregation's overall openness to some variation within and across worship experiences is clear, but people desire an ongoing commitment to quality across all musical styles. In our search for new music leaders, we need to seek people with:

- a demonstrated record of high quality music performance and leadership*
- a respect for the musical traditions of WCUMC and the United Methodist Church*

- *a deep interest in how music connects with our liturgical year and theology*
- *experience incorporating multiple musical styles and traditions while maintaining the integrity of the worship experience*
- *a willingness to experiment and the skills needed to invite the many talented musicians at WCUMC to participate in those experiments*
- *ideas about how to engage children, youth and families in music, and a willingness to work with leaders in our children, youth and family ministries to integrate music into the broader picture of spiritual formation and worship experience*
- *good communication skills that can be deployed in helping our congregants try new things, learn more about our musical traditions, improve our confidence in participating in music, and be ready for some experiments that may not work or may take some time to get used to.*