

# Elders' Response to Worship Issues

Positions stated in this document are not intended as a creedal interpretation of scripture. The positions stated in this document are simply intended to clarify the elders' views on issues raised by members regarding this body. After much prayer, study, discussion and effort to follow the guiding of the Holy Spirit, we believe the statements contained in this document reflect what is best for the South Baton Rouge church of Christ at the present time. We sincerely hope these positions will help guide us as we continually seek "To Know Christ and Make Him Known."

In response to questions about where the elders stand on specific issues:

1. We remain committed to congregational singing without instrumental accompaniment. While we are reluctant to use the silence of scripture to bind what scripture does not bind, we think that congregational singing is excellently suited for "speaking to one another" and "making music in our hearts to God" (Eph. 5:19) and offering up the "fruit of our lips" in praise (Hebrews 13:15). Furthermore, although we do not consider the examples of church history necessarily binding, we do think that it is significant that the early church sang acappella through the early centuries of its existence.
2. We remain committed to two Sunday morning worship services. We regret any misunderstandings that many have arisen as to the purpose of these services, but believe two services under one eldership is scriptural so long as those who attend are "united" in Christ. We continue to believe two services assist us in our goal of reaching as many people as possible with the gospel of Christ. While we feel strongly the diversity of cultures, backgrounds and personalities is one of our greatest strengths, it also presents one of our greatest challenges. We believe it is necessary to respond by allowing different types of songs, preaching methods and worship styles within the guidelines of scripture. The criteria listed in this document are an effort to aid all members to worship in a meaningful way. **Because of our diversity, all members must show respect and love for those who are different from themselves.** Our wish is that we not be preoccupied with personal preferences, but instead focus on opportunities to learn from those who are different. We pray that every member of this body will make a commitment to building each other up working toward unity. As for potential differences in services, we accept that each service may develop its own "personality" but restate our desire that most members would be able to worship meaningfully in either service. While dated in some ways, we believe the original positions stated when we chose to have two services is generally consistent with these principles and where it isn't would be superseded by this document. A copy of "Considerations Regarding Two Sunday Morning Assemblies" is available.
3. We are committed to male spiritual leadership. While women are a vital part of the life and work of the church, we believe that scripture lays down certain guidelines to encourage and promote male spiritual leadership. We believe that women should not serve as elders or teach publicly where men are present when the matter is Bible teaching and interpretation of scriptures. We also believe it is not appropriate for women to lead prayer or sing solos in our assemblies, (IE, Sunday morning, Wednesday night, Sunday night home Bible studies, etc.). There are seminars and workshops like the recent family workshop in which ladies can teach or co-teach in a coed setting without violating this principle. This means a sister can teach in areas not Biblically focused but rather focused on other topics where they have special experience and expertise. We believe these same principles also apply to a woman serving on a panel moderated by a man. A handout is available regarding this titles "Participation of Woman in Public Worship."
4. We stand firmly against doing anything in our assemblies for the sake of entertainment, or simply for the sake of novelty or tradition. However, there are times when certain "non-traditional" methods can be acceptable and useful for presenting the gospel to a wide diversity of people. The elders have been asked in particular to address the issues of videos, drama and skits, and music groups as these pertain to the Sunday morning assemblies. When used exclusively to help communicate the gospel of Jesus in accordance with elders' approval, we do not believe "non-traditional" methods are sinful or a threat to anyone's salvation. However, it is

our view that only a very limited inclusion would be wise for our congregation at South Baton Rouge currently and only within the following guidelines:

- Must be consistent with scriptural teaching and elders' positions stated in this document.
- Must enhance overall message being presented.
- Must be well planned and well executed.
- Must be approved by at least two elders.
- Any major change different from positions outlined in this document must be accompanied by advance communication with the congregation.

1. *Video*

We are approving the occasional use of a carefully chosen video of high quality that fits well with the lesson or theme of worship. These should not include singing with instrumental accompaniment and should be consistent with our policy of male spiritual leadership. We would want the use of any video to be consistent with our above criteria. Incidental background instrumentation may occur.

2. *Drama/Skits*

The general guidelines that apply to videos are applicable to drama and skits also. We would prefer in the immediate future to limit activities of this type in our assemblies to occasional ones such as certain carefully chosen readings with a dramatic character or brief enactments of Biblical scenes. If there was an interest in other forms of drama, these could at this time more appropriately be included as parts of special events (retreats, special weekend events, or even special Sunday Bible classes.)

3. *Music Groups*

We believe that everything should be done to enhance full participation in congregational singing during our Sunday morning assembly times. It seems to us that currently for our congregation this will be best accomplished by not using any special singing groups or praise teams. We would, however, think it appropriate to have such singing groups at special events.

Questions have also been raised regarding the way Romans 14 and its principles apply to our assemblies. We believe that the primary focus of Romans 14 is directed toward individual Christian relationships and actions, and that Acts 15 provides a better model for matters that concern the congregation. Although it is our desire to be as sensitive as possible, we do not feel it is appropriate to try to use this passage in a way that will paralyze the church or bind the views of some on the congregation. We further believe that when we examine central affirmations of the chapter such as "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Rom. 14:19) we should primarily be concerned about how this teaching can apply to our own lives, not how one group should apply it to another group. (Indeed this focus on self-application is an important general principle of Bible study.) A "making every effort to do what leads to peace" might mean a resolve to visit the other service (or stay for both services) every month or two to promote fellowship with all brothers and sisters.

It is the elders' desire to improve communications so that we stay informed on issues that may arise. We want to shepherd this body in the most sensitive way possible. To that end, there will be congregational meetings quarterly where all will be encouraged to share thoughts and feelings. It is our desire that these meetings focus on issues that will build up and be supportive of the mission **to know Christ and make Him Known.**

Thank you again for your participation, patience, support and prayers in recent months. We look forward to striving to be the church that God desires for us to be at South.

These guidelines reflect our prayerful judgment as to what is best and scriptural for the South Baton Rouge church at the present time.

Jimmie Carter, Charles Harlow, Jimmie Lawson, Ray Morris 5/11/97