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2019Topicfor
Southwestern District Missionary Baptist Association
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<u>Topic:</u>To what extent can technology be used in worship?

The short answer is: To the extent a church feels it is a benefit or enhancement to their worship service without being a stumbling block and without creating dissension within the congregation. However, this may not be an easy thing to determine. If you asked 100 congregants, you would likely receive different answers based on the demographic you surveyed (For example: young vs. old, regular attenders vs. visitors and so on).

Of course we realized we needed more of an answer than that…

So to answer this question, let's first be clear on terminology.

<u>The definition of "Extent" is:</u>The scope, the amount, the range or magnitude over which something extends. I think we would all agree that we are talking about the amount of or to what degree we should have technology present in a worship service.

<u>The Definition of Technology is:</u>A way of accomplishing a task especially using <u>technical</u> processes, methods, or knowledge.

<u>The Definition of Worship is:</u>Religious practice offered in reverence and devotion toward God. For purposes of this discussion, I am going to broadly interpret this as any organized service we conduct. We are also including evangelism in its forms for purposes of our discussion.

Technical definitions aside, what's really being asked is "how" are we as Missionary Baptists going to sanction or allow the use of technology in our services, our studies, and various other programs of the church (i.e. Bible Studies, VBS, Christmas programs, special singings etc.).

As we consider this topic, we should keep in mind that each of our Churches is an independent body; meaning the decisions of or for <u>that church</u>is determined by <u>that body</u> of believers). We must be careful not to judge **a sound Bible believing, grounded in the faith Church** by the technology <u>they</u>choose to use to enhance <u>their</u> worship services just because we don't, or don't want to, use it in ours.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 14:13, *"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in **his** brother's way"*.

Some churches have been using technology in their churches for various services for years, others are just introducing new technologies.New Technology is being developed all the time, so as a church, we are making conscious decisions on whether or not to utilize them. **For example:**

P.A. Systems (Public address systems)have been around awhile. We've gone from nothing but a preacher trying to preach really loud so all could hear, to a simple microphone system (with an individual behind a large sound board in a specially built "sound room"), to wireless systems with digital voice enhancement run by an individual from his seat in the congregation using an IPAD. This is a perfect example of where any individual church is today. I know churches at every point on this spectrum.

We now have available **AssistedListening devices** for those with hearing impairments who might have otherwise skipped services because they didn't feel involved and could not hear what was going on.

Congregants now have access to Bibles on electronic devices such as **I-Pads and Smart Phones,** and the ability to access scripture as quickly as the preacher mentions it.

Some churches are using **Projectors& Screens**for multiple purposes. In the sanctuary, screens might be used for welcome messages, to display the words to songs or scriptures used during the message, announcements and so on. Other churches only use these during services like VBS, Sunday school, Christmas Programs or other services where they are useful. (I.e. Missionary Presentation).

CD / Music playersaid in special singing services. At Cross Roads, our Christmas music is downloaded to a computer, and piped through our sound system. This allows the song leader to readily flip from song to song, change the tempo of the song, or the key the song is performed in. Technology today also allows us to utilize electric instruments in our services like electric guitars and organs.

Through the use of **Multi Media**such as Facebook or church websites, churches are offering live feeds of services, recorded sermons online, church beliefs, announcements, calendars of events and so forth. The Southwestern District Association has its own website where it posts historical records of the minutes, sermons, a directory of churches and links to them, among other things.

Some churches have **copy machines, Wi-Fi capabilities, computers, printers**and other office machines**.**

Not a fan, but some churches use **theater type lighting effects (colors and strobes) and smoke machines** as part of their music programs (none in our association that I know of).

And, it's sad to say, but **Security System** technology has become necessary in many of our churches. We use cameras, alarm systems and other forms of security technology to protect our property and members.

We're sure there are other forms of technology that we haven't addressed here, and that you have probably thought of. For sure, there are new technologies on the horizon that none of us have thought of, but may be faced with. Much of which is over our heads…Some of us have to ask our children or grandchildren how to use our new smartphone!

Every week at Cross Roads MBC, we produce a bulletin. One of our youth, 17 yr. old Bro. Chris Buchanan, wrote an article about how technological mediums have nullified the minimal aspects of personal accessibility in witnessing. (By the way, those are his words not mine…) He also said in his article (and I'm quoting here)"Man is now unbound in how far his voice can echo across the free world…we now have multiple means of evangelism. The opportunity to personally speak to others about the Gospel has by no means passed us by, but we must also be able to take up the fight on another front—a **digital front**. Victories were never kept by always using the same tactic under the impression that, 'It worked last time, let's do it again!'" End quote….

You know how kids are today, they can play a computer game with someone anywhere in the United States and abroad. Bro. Chris has used this technology to witness about his Jesus. Chris expressed wisdom beyond his years… and he obviously is a very capable writer at 17!

In his article, Brother Chris actually presented both sides of one aspect of the technology argument. And we want to take that further.

As Brother Chris said, through the use of computers and social media, we can reach a whole new audience. We have opportunity to witness to friends and loved ones we don't often see, and even total strangers.   We can share links to sermons, church beliefs, pictures of our church activities to others who may be seeking a home church thereby encouraging them to visit and worship. This can be done

quickly, simply, without a lot of effort. **On the other hand, using this technology doesn't put a face on our witness.**It lacks the personal, emotional connection to another human being. You can't see or feel a person's passion through an e-mail. So although technology in evangelism can be expedient, **it should never be a replacement for one-on-one witness and communication.**

The use of screens in churches is becoming more popular, and those who advocate the use (besides those advantages already mentioned), argue that they elevate worshipers' heads out of hymnals and up toward the front which amplifies the volume during the songs. Screens also free the worshipers' hands, encouraging praise. Screens are easier for those with weak eyes to see. The words in hymnals for people with sight issues often blend in with the musical staff. For those visiting, or the unchurched, screens remove the learning curve required to read music, some people are just visual learners. Screens can also eliminate the need for a printed bulletin, since announcements and welcomes can be visually presented. If scripture verses are presented on the screen, congregants can more easily keep up with those referenced in the sermon.   For special occasions, like VBS or missionary presentations, it eliminates having to provide printed material or set up a heavy, bulky, manual screen. Proponents would argue that worship is the same, that simply adding screens has no negative spiritual effect.

Opponents argue that simply by having screens visible on the wall, they affect the worship and the reception of the sermon. They argue that images on the screen distract and interrupt the focus on the message. That the technology becomes the focus of attention, instead of it merely being in the background. Congregants eyes are naturally drawn to the changing pictures, and their mind may wander to real life places or times, wonder what scene will be next, notice how often the scene changes, look for errors or typos etc. Having to prepare what appears on the screen does not allow for representation of spontaneous changes, led by the spirit. From a music standpoint, opponents argue that not having the musical notes on the screen, limits the service to songs the congregation knows how to sing, rather than learning something new using music they can read and follow. They will say that there is something sacred, traditional and moving about holding a hymnal in your hand.

This same argument is made for holding a physical bible in your hand, rather than using a smart phone or tablet.   Although these electronic devices are more portable and faster to use, the congregant loses the chance to learn their bible, where specific scriptures are, underline favorite verses, make notes in the margin, and make that bible their "own". Electronic devices often fail….mad scrambles can take place in a pulpit for a bible in the case of a power outage knocking out the church's wireless capability.

So, how much should a church use technology?

In the days of the early church, Christians partook of the Lord's Supper (<u>Acts 20:7</u>), prayed (<u>1 Corinthians 14:15–16</u>), sang (<u>Ephesians 5:19</u>), read Scriptures (<u>Colossians 4:16</u>), and gave offerings (<u>1 Corinthians 16:2</u>). Basically, they used whatever they had that would honor God the most. There was nothing in their worship practices that is a direct rebuketo the use of modern technology.

In order to discover if we should use technology in worship, we must know what the purpose of worship is. The Bible gives guidelines in <u>Hebrews 10:19–25</u>:

"[19] Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, [20] By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; [21] And having an high priest over the house of God; [22] Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) [24] And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: [25] Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

In a church worship service, then, we are commanded to:
1. Draw near to God with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith
2. Hold fast the profession of our faith, of our hope, without wavering
3. Consider one another to promote "love and good works or deeds"
4. We are to exhort or encourage one another

These should be the basic qualifiers for technology in worship. If technology can draw the church closer to God in faith, remind individuals of the hope that lives in them, encourage them to serve others, and generally exhort God's people, then it is appropriate.

At the same time, we must consider the needs and convictions of the people in the church. It is not loving to indulge in technology if it does not serve the needs of others.There is nothing sinful about modern technology. Using a device to project lyrics on a screen is not wrong. However, some congregations—and individuals within other congregations—prefer to use hymnals. There is nothing wrong with either preference. There should be peace within the body, and we are all called to make every effort, *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*(Ephesians 4:3). Dialogue, wisdom, and compromise are needed in

churches dealing with this issue.

Our worship is to be God-focused, and it follows that everything in our worship services should be designed to promote a focus on God, and it should be edifying to the body. The apostle Paul stated, *"²³ All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. ²⁴ Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."* (1 Corinthians 10:23–24).

Romans 12:10 says, *"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;"* This is a good filter for every aspect of technology in worship. Is the audio too loud? Too soft? Are the sermon or song lyrics available in print form for those who need them? It is a sign of love and maturity to give up personal preferences in such trivial matters if another option will bless someone else.

To conclude, it is impossible to give specific, universal guidance as to the use of technology in worship services. Those mentioned are some basic ideas to consider. The purpose of the worship service is to learn about God, worship Him, and build up the church. It is not to entertain a passive crowd or to be "edgy" for the sake of "edginess." In choosing technology, it is important to consider the needs and expectations of the congregation and then to serve one another in love. If technology can accomplish that, we are free to use it. If not, we should prayerfully consider what would best honor God and benefit the people in the church.To quote an article I read while researching this topic, it said "Technologies cannot guarantee that congregants will be a church, only that they can do church."

Respectfully submitted by:
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