

Presbyterian Church at Tenaflly

Opportunities for Outreach Through Worship

The Session's Vision for Future Development

At the Session meeting in March, elders were briefed about the imminent retirement of our band leader, Ray McCarthy. This major change of music personnel prompted us to embark on a review of our worship. Session tasked a small group to assess the options going forward and to report with recommendations at the April meeting of Session. The group members were:

Marilyn Coats-Thomas (Co-Chair of Worship)
Jeanne Lambert (Co-Chair of Worship)
Cathy Coppolino (Session Elder and Cantor)
Christina Young (Chair of the Personnel Committee and choir member)
Pastor Martin

At the April meeting, Session unanimously endorsed the recommendations of the strategy group, which are contained in this report and are brought to the congregation at the June 2nd meeting for endorsement.

The Longer History of PCAT Worship – how we got to where we are now

During the ministry of Craig Rule a contemporary worship service with band was created, replacing one of the two traditional Sunday morning services. At this time the previous Sunday pattern had been of two more or less identical traditional services. The first service became a completely different experience through the style of presentation and the contemporary band music.

The early contemporary service in the chapel was successful at drawing in many families, some of whom are still part of the PCAT congregation today.

For a number of reasons, it was felt desirable by the Session to combine these services towards the end of Rev. Rule's ministry, creating a single Sunday morning blended worship service which included band, cantors, choir and organ.

After initial losses due to the departure of those who felt it difficult to accommodate contemporary worship/band music, the congregation stabilised and our worship settled into a comfortable pattern. In many ways the blended worship has served us well over the years, particularly during Dr Lindner's ministry and the time of Anna Lim as Director of Music. Anna Lim was able and motivated to work with choral, organ, band and contemporary worship music, and undertook a considerable amount of preparation time to handle the flexibility and detail required to work with band and cantors towards achieving the complex demands of contemporary worship songs.

During the vacancy and the time of Covid, the recorded worship pattern focused on band and cantor inputs, there being no possibility of gathering the choir to sing safely. During this period the balance of repertoire necessarily veered towards more contemporary band material as there was no choir presence to lead other repertoire.

As we emerged from Covid in 2021 and returned to in-person worship, we sought to rebalance the content of the worship blend, incorporating choir, organ, hymns, band and contemporary worship music.

We consolidated the choir by following through on the Session's decision to resource an SATB line-up of four section leaders, with funds to pay for the vacant tenor and alto section leader posts coming from the music endowment.

Where We are Now in 2024

Strengths

We have many positives in our Sunday worship content, with continuing strong contributions from our volunteers and professionals. We have managed to rebalance the musical content and have attempted to encourage the congregation's sung participation by introducing achievable congregational material in a variety of styles. This has included simple sung items such as the Kyrie Eleison, Doxology and Sung Amen which are sung every week, and two songs which are sung at every monthly Sunday morning communion service. There is still a long way to go in encouraging congregational singing! In addition, we continue to have cantor solos and choral anthems.

We also introduced a monthly Intergenerational Worship service which is created with the presence of children in mind. This has been running successfully for more than a year.

There are a number of challenges in the current situation:

- There are many components to balance in a truly blended service which gives both band and choir/organ an equal presence – it is challenging.
- The end result is satisfactory but is “neither one thing nor the other” in terms of style.
- Band musicians can feel underused.
- Choir can feel underused.
- It is challenging to incorporate choir and band together in the layout of our sanctuary, leading to a situation of “now it's band” and “now it's choir”. This is not a true blend.
- Nine paid musicians is a lot for a single service – it is hard to justify the current level of expenditure for a single service upon the retirement of the current band leader, especially given the tight margins of our current budget situation.

Opportunities for the Future

There are probably as many separate preferences as there are attenders at worship, and it would be fair to say that there are a range of views as to what the future of worship might be at PCAT!

The Session feels that there is a “glass ceiling” on the growth of the congregation by maintaining a single blended service every week. In particular, it restricts our opportunities to reach out to (i) those who would like a shorter, more contemporary service and (ii) those who appreciate a service which goes a bit deeper and is of a more spacious and reflective character, with choral music and sermon.

At this time when our financial resources are under pressure, and a vacancy is arising in the band leader position, it seems unreasonable and unaffordable to appoint a new band leader for the longer term to our current single service pattern. However, there is a strong case for maintaining the music budget but deployed in a different pattern of worship geared towards outreach and growth of the congregation amongst a wider range of people and preferences.

Essentially, this proposal is about investing in outreach and growth through widening opportunities for worship rather than maintenance of the status quo.

Proposal

Create two Sunday morning services that are distinctive in style and target of participants, but which are not mutually exclusive (some may choose to attend both or switch between the two)

Proposed Rehearsal, Worship and Hospitality Pattern on most Sundays

9.30am Service in the Sanctuary (rehearsal from 8.45am and after the service for forthcoming weeks)

This service would be led by the Pastor, band musicians and cantors as scheduled, and would have a relaxed, informal and free-flowing, interactive style especially suitable for children and those who find a longer service difficult. It would last for 30 minutes.

Between the Services there would be a shared coffee hour in the church house. 9.30am attenders are invited to stay, 10.30am attenders invited to come early. Choir have their usual coffee break after rehearsal but with other members of the congregation present too.

Youth participants in the service (eg volunteer youth band potential) could stay for relaxed session with youth leaders at this point too.

10.30am Service in the Chapel

This service would be led by the Pastor and Liturgist along with Director of Music, Choir and any other instrumentalists and cantors as scheduled. The feel of the service would be liturgical, but not rigidly traditional. It would have shape and flow and be designed to draw people into reflection and praise through the genre of choral, organ, piano, and instrumental music. It will harness the excellent chapel acoustic and the resources of the chapel piano, organ, and the new sound system.

Joint Services are proposed to ensure that we don't end up with "two separate congregations" who never meet.

- Monthly Intergenerational Worship in the Sanctuary similar to present format with band, choir and cantor inputs
- Joint festival day services in the Sanctuary – eg Pentecost and Easter – with band, choir and cantor inputs
- Joint summer season services in the Sanctuary at 10am with no choir as at present, but with keyboard/instrumental/cantor inputs.

Sunday Schedule Summary

Chapel

9am Choir rehearsal with Director of Music

10.30am Choral Service in Chapel

Sanctuary

8.50am Contemporary Musicians rehearse

9.30-10am Early Service in Sanctuary

10am Further band rehearsal for later weeks

10am Joint Coffee Hour in Church House

Church School/Youth Ministry during the time of the 10.30am service

Joint Service Sundays

- There would be a joint music rehearsal at 9.30am in the Sanctuary
- 10.30am Worship
- Coffee Hour would follow the service.

Practical questions

- How do we avoid creating “two congregations”?

This is an important question and one that exercised the congregation in the past. This proposal includes deliberate joint worship opportunities and coffee hour to address this. Other social events and gatherings would continue to address this.

- How would we handle welcome teams?

We are currently re-formatting welcome teams. Although each of the services will initially be smaller, and therefore require a little less management.

- How would we handle streaming?

The ideal will be to have both services streamed, which is now possible following the installation of streaming equipment in the chapel. We will need to work on the scheduling of the tech team to cover this, and to avoid overstretching our volunteers.

- How do we handle separate communions?

The early service would have a very simple communion, but we would need a couple of elders on duty. It may be that two elders would be sufficient for the second service in the first instance.

- What would happen with our cantors?

We would continue to use our cantors as they are available and willing, in appropriate ways across both services and in the joint monthly service and joint festival day services.

“Outreach Potential” Perspectives

An idea has arisen to use the 9.30am service as a way of involving young band musicians from the congregation and local community. If we were to recruit a band leader who could draw in and inspire young people, this service could be an important way of building connections and strengthening our church’s relationship with teenagers in this area. This outreach would be in addition to the natural appeal for younger families to bring their children to a short and interactive service.

So too, the second service has an appeal to those who seek worship and engagement in a deeper and more reflective style. We know that there are members of our church and local community who would not consider attending worship with contemporary band, but who are very interested in something more lyrical, choral and instrumental. There are also seekers who want deeper reflection and stimulation in their journey of faith and life.

Because both services would approach the same theme on any one Sunday, it is possible that some may enjoy sampling both services. This would be possible without any sense of repetition. Instead, there would be an experience of “going deeper” by attending the services one after the other.

Having two weekly services in different styles allows us to extend our “menu” and expand our currently limited outreach potential, whilst emphasising “one congregation” in shared monthly and festival worship and in shared coffee hour, social and mission events.

How would the proposed worship schedule look across a year?

Annual Worship Schedule: example based on 2024 dates and future pattern of worship applied
(all musicians at joint services)

January 7 th	9.30am and 10.30am services – Communion at each
January 14 th	Joint intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
January 21 st	9.30am and 10.30am services
January 28 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
February 4 th	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
February 11 th	Joint intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
February 18 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
February 25 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
March 10 th	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
March 17 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
March 24 th	Joint service for Palm Sunday at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
March 31 st	Joint Service for Easter at 10.30am in the Sanctuary

April 7 th	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
April 14 th	Joint intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
April 21 st	9.30am and 10.30am services
April 28 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
May 5 th	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
May 12 th	Joint Intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
May 19 th	Joint service for Pentecost at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
May 26 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
June 2 nd	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
June 9 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
June 16 th	Joint Intergenerational service for Youth Sunday at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
June 23 rd	Music Sunday Joint Service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
June 30 th	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
July 7 th	Joint Summer Communion Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
July 14 th	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
July 21 st	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
July 28 th	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
August 4 th	Joint Summer Communion Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
August 11 th	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
August 18 th	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
August 25 th	Joint Summer Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
September 1 st	Joint Summer Communion Service at 10am in the Sanctuary (no choir)
September 8 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
September 15 th	Joint Intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
September 22 nd	9.30am and 10.30am services
September 29 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
October 6 th	Joint Communion Service with Grace and Love at 11.30am in the Sanctuary
October 13 th	Joint Intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
October 20 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
October 27 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
November 3 rd	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
November 10 th	Joint Intergenerational service at 10.30am in the Sanctuary
November 17 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
November 24 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
December 1 st	9.30am and 10.30am Communion services
December 8 th	9.30am and 10.30am services
December 15 th	10.30am Joint Nativity Service in the Sanctuary
December 22 nd	9.30am and 10.30am services
December 29 th	10.30am Joint Gate of the Year Service in the Sanctuary

Be brave!!

Where proposals for change are made the temptation is often to leap to reasons “why not” rather than reasons for making changes. In this case, we urge the congregation to support the Session in this proposal which uses our situation of relative strength to be courageous and enterprising and aim to create opportunities for outreach and growth for the future.

In the name of the PCAT Session, June 2024