

## **“Our Search for a Worship Pastor”**

**November 8, 2023**

After eight years of service as our pastor of worship ministry, Jonathan Waggett resigned his position on October 10, 2023. As with all good ministry leaders, we miss him dearly as he served us so faithfully. Please see my post [“Why We’ll Miss the Waggetts”](#) as my way of speaking on behalf of a thankful congregation.

### **Kayl Whitaker**

Before his departure, Jonathan planned the Sunday morning services through the end of the year. To implement these plans, Jonathan secured Kayl Whitaker as a supply worship leader. Different from a potential “interim” who would cast vision and plan services, Kayl’s supply role is simply implementing pre-planned services. We acknowledge Pastor Jonathan’s departure preparations as a stroke of sound, pastoral leadership—for which we are grateful.

Any time a church loses a public leader, there is an organizational and ministerial transition that takes place. Kayl is here to help with that transition. Keeping him and his ministry healthy is a key to success. Be sure to encourage and support him (and his wife Leighanne) as he spends time here at Coats Baptist. As an act of appropriate generosity, our church will compensate Kayl with a weekly honorarium according to the services he provides. Learn more about Kayl [here](#).

### **Worship Pastor Search and Committee**

With Kayl in place, Coats Baptist is ready to search for their next worship pastor. And as we do, there are two ideas we must keep in mind - the *need* for the search, and the *stress* of the search. Both ideas inform the search rationale as delegated to the committee.

The first is our *need* for a worship pastor. To be sure, churches do not need full-time, hired personnel to lead their music ministry. However, there is a certain point of developmental proficiency and capacity that is reached (think in terms of size, scale and speed) in which the ministry merits full-time leadership. Pastor Jonathan brought us to that point, and we need not go backward. At the same time, the music ministry is the single most integrated ministry of the Sunday morning gathering. In a very real sense, the preaching and the singing (music) make the service what it is in both style and substance. Both therefore, deserve and demand leadership attention to which able churches should staff appropriately.

Now as a point of clarity, practically speaking, the one leading the music ministry does not necessarily need to be a pastor. To be sure, churches do not need “worship pastors” but rather pastoral oversight of the music ministry as I will argue below. It is not necessary for the music ministry to be discharged by a pastor(s), as musical ability is not a qualification for the pastoral office. However, because those leading the musical elements of a corporate worship gathering are in fact discharging a ministry of the word through song and thus functioning within pastoral lanes, it is prudential for those persons to be pastorally qualified though they themselves may not actually be an ordained pastor. Having such a person lead the music sends the right theological signal to the congregation.

The second idea, the *stress* of the search, is brought about by our need for pastoral oversight. In our current [staff pastor model](#) of polity, pastoral ministry is a hired service and thus a financial expense. We have no space for the lay-pastor. Ideally, there would be a lay-pastor (from a plurality) to oversee and shepherd the ministry, until we could name an interim pastor/leader internal or external to the church. But that is not our reality. And as a result the worship ministry goes without a pastor when the “worship pastor” position is not filled. Such calls for the urgent need of positions such as “supply worship leaders”, and the likely forthcoming “interim worship leader” in the months to come. Though such positions are needful from a musicality standpoint, (as inferred above) they are all the more necessary to fill a pastoral vacancy.

But some may say, “Even without a worship pastor, could not our other pastors, or even our senior/lead pastor, shepherd the ministry?” Though it would not be ideal (stretching one or two pastors very thin) they most certainly could provide the oversight (1 Tim. 3:1), *if* they were afforded the opportunity to assemble the team. However, in times of pastoral vacancies, our current polity structure (and culture) outsources pastoral ministry to committees, who are appointed by a nominating committee, who may or may not align with pastoral vision for said name ministry.

In short, we need a worship pastor for two main reasons—someone to *lead* and someone to *pastor*. The first is more understandable due to the caliber of our ministry. The second however is more of a consequence of polity. Our current pastors are of the conviction, as many know, that a plurality of pastors (both staff and lay) would remedy this second reality (and help the first!), to the health of the ministry and the flourishing of the church. We can only pray as we continue to slowly lead Coats Baptist in that direction until the sheep truly see such a structure as “green pastures.” (Psalm 23:2)

With those two factors in mind—the *need* for and the *stress* of—on Sunday, November 5, 2023 our church populated a seven-member search committee in accordance with our policy manual. Five members were appointed from the congregation at large, while an additional two members were appointed from our music committee. These seven members in total will now commence their search for our next worship pastor. Members of this team are: *Andrea Abate, Sarah Goforth, Sharon Milton, Bonnie Pope, Staci Smith, Mike Thomas, and Jordan Womick*. Please pray for unity, wisdom and perseverance as they begin their search. They and your pastoral staff will keep the church abreast of developments throughout.

### **Beginning the Search**

Where does the search committee’s conversation start and their work begin? The temptation is surely to jump into resume collection, crafting vision, making contacts, and so forth. But I believe the work must start with a more upstream discussion. The work of the committee (and for the church) begins with a clear, unified understanding of what the church should be doing when they come together for worship.

To call a worship pastor is in fact to speak into that understanding, as he will lead in shaping the gathering. Afterall, the worship pastor serves in tandem with the preaching pastor to conduct the worship service with quality and intentionality. With a clear view of the Lord’s Day gathering, then, the search team will have clear visionary parameters within which to conduct their work.

## **The Lord's Day Gathering**

Christians love Sunday. The Lord's Day gathering is the focal point of the Christian life. As the cross of Christ is at the center of the gospel, so is the corporate worship of God's people to the Christian experience. There is no rhythmic practice more significant to a Christian's personal growth and public witness than gathering with God's people as the local church in covenant together. It is the heartbeat of the local church.

In our modern context, there are no few opinions of how Christians should think of the church. Whether we're on a search team for a pastor or simply sitting in the pew as serious-minded Christians, we need to know what the church should be doing when they gather together. So then, let's consider a few major ideas to help answer the question, "How should we then think of the Lord's Day gathering?"

### **1. The Gathering Is Regulated by Scripture**

How then are we to worship? Or said another way, what are we supposed to do when we gather together? That's a great question, and fortunately one that our Protestant forefathers have thought through before. Churches committed to seeing themselves shaped by the Word (such as Coats Baptist) often hold to what Protestants have called the "regulative principle." That is to say, Scripture "regulates" how God's people are to worship him.

The principle sees five basic elements of corporate worship: *read* the Word, *preach* the Word, *pray* the Word, *sing* the Word, and *see* the Word (ordinances). As God is the object of our worship, He reserves the right to tell us the *what* and the *how* of our corporate worship gatherings—in his Word. As a consequence, we rightly distinguish the elements regulated by Scripture with those informed by culture: the length of the service, the attire of those attending, the aesthetics of the venue, and so forth.

When churches choose otherwise, "worship" tends to be reduced to simply the time of singing, in the minds of the congregation. Rather, singing should be thought of as one of many (five) means of true worship. Perhaps most unfortunate, churches open their services to the incorporation of a variety of elements from skits to smoke, yet the sheep are no better for it. What we win people with is what we win them to. Though style may attract interest and accommodate preferences, substance feeds the soul and sustains the church. As the younger generation will tell us, they are looking for authentic Christianity. Yet we should not put style and substance against one another, but direct them to work together. Remember this formula: Theology of Lyrics + Quality of Music + Variety of Selection = Unity in the Church. A worship pastor must lead in all three areas.

### **2. The Gathering Is Overseen by Pastors**

Everything that happens during a worship service is teaching God's people—rightly or wrongly—about how he is to be worshiped. Over time, services begin to shape our souls. Therefore, the integrity of the worship service is a primary responsibility of the overseers/elders/pastors, whom God has set over the local church to lead, feed, care for and protect the sheep (Psalm 23; 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pt. 5:4). Though the term "worship pastor" is well intended, *all* of the pastors really are worship pastors.

Leading God's people in worship is a pastoral responsibility best discharged by a plurality of pastors. However, the pastor charged with expounding God's Word in the worship service is at the helm of that leadership. The preaching pastor, by virtue of the time and task of preaching, communicates and applies the Word to which he will call God's people to respond. Christians worship by the Word and never more so as they sit under the Word preached.

Though the service is overseen by pastors, that is not to say the congregation should not participate. By their very presence they are participating! Healthy shepherding will accommodate mature lay persons to lead certain elements of the service. Their incorporation is both a means of leadership development but also a strong edification of the church body as a whole. Elements such as singing, reading and praying are all open to the members of the congregation for which pastors can employ them to participate, in decency and in order. (1 Cor 14:40)

### **3. The Gathering Is Designed for Christians**

The people of God have always been a gathering people (cf., Neh. 8:1). Gathering has a way of identifying God's people, marking them out as distinct from the world as is expressed in the NT as church membership (cf., 1 Cor. 5). The Christian life is never understood as an individual endeavor, but a public, corporate, communal experience. It's not a solo-sport, if you will. As God's people gather, community forms and people begin to live life together. A rightly ordered church gathering for a rightly aimed Lord's Day, allows for obedience to God's commands (e.g., "serve one another," Gal. 5:13; "stir up one another," Heb. 10:24), and consequential ministries to form (e.g. small groups; benevolence). The church and the Christian always go together.

Some churches think of their Sunday service primarily as an evangelistic event, and design it as such. Contrary to such popular trends, Scripture describes the Lord's Day gathering as being first for Christians. Albeit true that we should want and expect lost people to attend, and be looking to engage them in conversation when they do, the Lord's Day service is first for the people of God to gather and worship. (Paul seems to infer such in 1 Cor. 14:23-25.) We do well then to think of the gathering as having a discipleship intention with an evangelistic dimension. Such shapes the flow of the service and the culture of the morning. Jesus is building his church and doing so by his Word (Matt. 16:18; Rom. 10:17). How we shape our services is directly informed by our desire to be shaped by Scripture. What the service is to achieve will drive its content and design.

Sunday is coming for us all. Let me encourage you to prepare now both your body and soul for the next Lord's Day gathering. When it comes, let us be mindful of our actions and words. As we enter the worship space, may we guard both our minds and our mouths as to help and not hinder the worship of others. May we ready ourselves to read, pray, sing, preach (listen), and see (ordinances) the Word as we are shaped by it this coming Lord's Day.

### **A Concluding Thought**

Our search committee will soon begin their work in seeking our next worship pastor. It's no small thing. He will be the one responsible for pastorally leading us to sing, to praise, to *worship* through song in the corporate gathering, as he joins the pastoral team. His first competency will be to the music ministry; however, his primary calling is to the pastoral office. (1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9) We are careful not to take this search lightly. Please begin now to pray for them, encourage them, and want God's very best for Coats Baptist. It's *all about Him*.