



WEST SHORE
FREE CHURCH

Sound Philosophy

Thank you for your interest in our church's Philosophy of Worship and how that shapes our choices related to music and sound.

I also want to thank you for choosing to worship with us, and for taking the time to learn how we as a church approach sound. Corporate worship is vital to the life of Christ's church. Everything we do in regards to sound is to serve the congregation as a whole, foster an environment of passionate worship, and allow music to be a fruitful tool. To best grow towards these goals, here are several factors to consider in the pursuit of building a worship environment that is engaging, undistracting *and* safe.

Understanding Decibels

Decibels (db) are a unit of measure of the sound pressure level (SPL). It is important to understand the difference between peak and average (RMS) db readings. Peak is the highest SPL reached without a time-constant applied and will read higher. RMS is an average reading and closer resembles how the human ear responds to noise.

We monitor the SPL of each service with an industry standard calibrated decibel meter to ensure it is at a safe level both for the congregation and for ministry partners who are exposed to a longer period of sound. These are RMS readings weighted dbA with a slow response time. There are a number of conditions that contribute to the reading which include the number of musicians as well as number of attenders in a service. Our desired maximum reading is 92db (+/- 1 db), however the majority of the music is closer to 86-87 decibels. This is well within the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, which allow for 6 hours of exposure at 92 dbA. Our time of singing typically totals around 20-25 minutes per service and our staff and volunteers will typically experience up to 2 hours of exposure. For more information from OSHA please visit <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/noisehearingconservation/>

Our Approach to the Mix

“Mix” refers to an audio technician's blending of the sound levels of instruments and singers from the stage. With the proper tools, training and guidelines, West Shore audio technicians are committed to providing safe and creative blends for our worship services. Our “mixes” enable the congregation to hear clearly and to engage with worship music. At West Shore, our goal is to lead and mix music that serves across generations and to a wide demographic. The style of music here at West Shore will normally fall under the genre of “Modern Contemporary Worship”, and this is a factor for how we mix.

One aspect of our approach to mixing is to monitor the congregation's singing. We have noticed a direct correlation between volume and engagement. When the volume is consistently lower, the congregation sings less and is less engaged; when it is on the higher end of our decibel range, the congregation sings more and is more engaged. We have also established a lower volume from where it has historically been (around a 5 decibel drop from the start of 2016) to a level we believe is good and safe for all generations, while still encouraging active congregational engagement. Based on evaluating different mix levels and the sound level emanating from the congregation, this level is one we believe both supports and encourages the congregation to sing, while leaving space for the congregation to be heard. We also seek to have dynamics or an ebb and flow, where there are times of lower band/mix dynamics, or even acapella (just the voices) singing so the congregation's full volume can be heard. Other situations call for the band to encourage the congregation to raise their voices as the dynamics and volume increase.

Alternative Options:

We understand it is not possible to accommodate every attendee's sound and music preferences. To come alongside those that are looking for some alternative options while still engaging in corporate worship, we offer the following options to consider:

1. With this statement is a map of the sanctuary showing the places where the sound volume is lower based on the acoustics of our Worship Center. You can use this to help select a seat better suited to your preferences.
2. If you find there is not a seat that suits your preference, earplugs are available at the Welcome Center in the lobby upon request.
3. For those who require additional hearing assistance, wireless hearing assist packs are available upon request at the tech booth.

The Bible tells us that our worship is to be both loud (Psalm 33:3, Psalm 47:1, Psalm 150:5) and soft (Psalm 131:2, Psalm 37:7, Psalm 33:30) and we do our best to honor these commands. Our heart is to be intentional, faithful, and Christ exalting as we strive to have the best balance of volume, dynamics, and mix for our church. Our prayer is that the things we put our hands to, would ultimately bring glory to God and disappear from sight (and sound) as we behold God's glory in Christ together. Beyond decibels, song choices, and mix preferences, our hope is for you to engage with God through corporate worship in a deep, real, and unhindered way.

In Christ,

George Romanacce

Worship Pastor