



sound ministry

the MINISTRY PAPERS

the forgotten hero

Working long hours is all part of the job. Well maybe, but this I know for sure: The sound person is often the first to arrive and the last to leave. And more often than not this goes unnoticed. Getting there early to set up microphones, leads, doing a system check, cleaning around sound desk and sometimes repairing audio equipment, all takes time.

Then when everyone else arrives we are usually expected to know what's happening. Our space is often used as a storage or minding facility. We are sometimes viewed as an usher to help people with their concerns or questions. On top of all this, we are expected to have a good mix happening before church starts!

If something goes wrong we are automatically looked upon to get it fixed. At the end of it all we are there to pack up the gear, have a recording of the talk ready, have the desk normalised and be ready to meet new people. Just because a lot of this goes unnoticed, does this mean then, we are less important than anyone else serving the congregation? The answer is NO. And is our importance the biggest question? An even bigger NO...

Just because others might not see what goes on behind the scenes, doesn't mean that you go unnoticed. But does getting noticed really matter? Our motivation for doing sound should be the desire to support & build the body of Christ by doing our part. It should be the desire that people hear God's word clearly. Most of all, God sees everything. He knows what you do and serving him is the most important thing of all.

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help your sound ministry leader introduce you to what it means to serve as part of our **sound ministry** team.



read Ephesians 4:11-16

1. What role do the people listed in verse 11 have in common?

2. What was God's purpose in giving these gifts? (verses 12-15)

3. As a result, what should be happening in a church?

- to prepare (verse 12) _____
- until (verse 13) _____
- then (verse 14) _____
- instead (verse 15) _____

4. How does the body of Christ build itself up? (verse 16)



5. How might sound ministry be able to help 'build' towards the purposes outlined in question 2?

6. What else can this passage teach us about the place and role of sound ministry?

7. What personal challenges are you aware of in terms of playing your part in this ministry team?

8. What role will being actively involved in a small group play in enabling you to carry out this ministry well?

imitating Christ's humility

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" **Philippians 2:1-5**



1. What is Paul saying would make his joy complete?

2. How should we serve others?



3. List practical ways through our sound ministry that we can look to the interests of others?

what's the big idea?

There's a well argued case that most people are only really capable of walking away from a sermon carrying one central theme. If the preacher doesn't give one, then the listener will make one up for themselves. No matter how hard the preacher might try to get five separate points across in a talk, generally when asked what the talk was about, a member of the congregation will convey the single concept they took out of the talk.

At church we try to cater for the listener by preparing messages that convey one big biblical concept or one Big Idea, that will be clear and challenging to all who listen. To take it even further still, not just the sermon but the entire church service should be shaped around expressing that biblical concept, to try and ensure the seed of God's word is firmly implanted in the heart of the listener. This means:

the preacher: needs to convey the big idea to everyone involved in the service

the leader: needs to point towards the big idea with everything they say

the musicians: need to be playing songs that convey the biblical concept being taught

the singers: need to sing the words meaningfully, modeling understanding of the big idea

the SOUND PERSON: needs to ensure the message is audibly delivered to the congregation

the prayer: should be in response to the concept God's word is teaching

Communication between all involved, therefore, will be vital. All of this going well, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the seed of God's living word will be sown in the hearts of the congregation!!

mixing...

Mixing is not about making each sound as good as possible on its own, then blending them all together and hoping the result will sound good. That is like taking 24 of your favourite colours and pouring them all together into the same bucket. What do you get? A grey mess, every single time.

Mixing is about thoughtfully combining a number of different sounds together to form a cohesive whole. It's a delicate balancing act. It's about the right amount of volume, EQ and effects.

As a sound person at church it is our job to make sure that the songs are sung at a good volume and balance. If the song leaders' volume is loud enough, it should help people in the congregation to sing louder, because they don't feel too noticed. But if the volumes aren't sufficient, then people are more reluctant to sing.

It's also important to have good volume for items being performed. If the item can't be heard then people are distracted (wondering why they can't hear it) and spending more time trying to hear it than thinking about the message that the item's trying to convey.

The right balance between singers is also critical, especially if there are male & female singers singing the song in parts. If the balance isn't right, then people won't be able to hear the song leader they're meant to be following.

With these few points in mind, for starters, the bigger picture becomes clear. Effective sound ministry is about much more than knowing how to use the equipment. It's about knowing what's going on in the service—who's doing what—and bringing it all together. That means preparation will count for as much as skill. And communication too—especially with the service leader, who is also trying to bring everyone involved together. This is something we'll come back to.



what did Jesus do?

"I would like to ask all musos (sound personnel)... to seriously contemplate the reason for your existence and the measure for your success". (Patrick, audio magazine, 2002, issue 21)

Do you ever think about the reason for your existence or for caring about the quality of sound at church? How do you measure your success or the success of the sound ministry at church? Patrick goes on to say *"if you are expecting to get paid for what you do, then orientate yourself towards the God of audience enjoyment. It won't hurt to put the audience's enjoyment of your performance (mix) at the very top of your priority list. The measure of your success is surely the price paid at the door and the number of people attending"*.

Obviously we don't get paid at church and doing sound ministry is a bit different to the worldly perspective. Can we, however, relate in some areas to this story? Can our view of doing sound be clouded by our own selfishness? Can we be seeking to gain recognition? Can we sometimes orientate our thinking towards the 'god' of audience enjoyment?

If so, we need to come back to the fact that we are here to serve God. We need to come back to the need to live selfless lives in response to what Jesus did for us. We need to be selfless in the way we go about doing sound and the way we interact with the musicians. Being a servant like Jesus, giving ourselves, can be easily applied even to the task of getting fold-back volumes right. Would he turn all the volumes to a particular setting than leave them there? Or would he go to the front regularly to consult the band and to listen? Serving like Jesus means effort.

What would Jesus think is the most important thing through the Front of House (FOH) speakers? What would he see as most important for the congregation, especially in the Bible talk? I think he would have sufficient volume for the people to hear the talk otherwise they'll learn nothing if they can't hear what's being said. What's important to you? Is your view—is your sound—the same as Jesus'?

for the good of others

"Everything is permissible" - but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" - but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." 1 Corinthians 10:23-24



1. What principle does Paul set down for how to serve others?



2. List things, in our carrying out of sound ministry, that may be permissible but not beneficial.

3. In what other ways might sound ministry not be constructive?

4. Why will it be important to lock in this 'for the good of others' attitude to our ministry?



switching microphones on & off

Managing the use of microphones is so important, it needs its own special mention. It's crucial that, whenever mics are being moved, their volume is turned off. This will avoid those extremely distracting noises. But it's just as important, of course, that the mics are turned up ready to go once someone starts speaking. That means being constantly alert. Kids talks, prayers, bible readings, interviews... any time someone speaks... be ready to turn the mic off, if it's being moved, but then promptly back on again. You need to be aware of what is happening out the front. There's nothing worse than when someone is moving a mic and all you hear is clunk, scratch, err etc. It's also important to have the mic volume up to a **decent level** before the person starts talking, praying or reading, otherwise the first—often critical—words are missed and people can get confused about what is happening. This is also distracting.



Remember, sound is as much about what people don't hear as what they do. Sound ministry is at its best, in one sense, when it's completely unnoticed.

making a commitment

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. **Hebrews 10:24-25**



1. How can we spur one another on?

2. What are some in the habit of doing?



3. *Why is it important to be committed to church if you're going to be involved in sound ministry?*



ideas for discussion

the role of the sound person

- be there at least 1 hr before the start of the service (the goal is to have things 'set' before the musos start practising)
- write notes on your program so you know what's needed when
- ensure sufficient volumes through FOH and fold-back
- liaise with band about fold-backs & other issues
- record the talks (& copy as needed)
- play background music before and after and in breaks (plan ahead—liaise with the service leader about what's appropriate)

things to watch out for

- guitar channels: guitars are often being plugged or unplugged, so keep an eye on the guitarist and communicate with them.
- always watch the front: communicating with singers or leader and being aware if someone has a problem or concern—it can be hard for them to get your attention if you're not watchful.
- volumes for items being performed: note settings from practice.
- sufficient volume for people using the mics during prayers etc. Be on the ball. Volumes vary greatly from person to person.

weekly checks

- it's our job to look after the equipment and do regular inspections to ensure the continuous working order of the gear. If anything needs repairing contact the sound ministry team leader.
- before and after each service pack up any unused leads or equipment, tidy up the sound area, close and lock all equipment.
- remember: it's essential to turn off all equipment!!



listen, listen, listen...

Clearly, if there's one thing vital to your sound ministry — or make that two — it's your ears. Sound ministry, it seems obvious to say, is about listening: listening to the mix, listening to eliminate feedback, listening for just the right volume, listening to get everything just right.

But what's less obvious to say about sound ministry is another aspect of listening: listening to everyone who is playing a part in the service. There's sometimes an image of 'the sound guy' as someone alone in the corner not talking to anyone, just twiddling dials. Nothing could be further from the right image for effective sound ministry. It's definitely a team ministry. It definitely demands communication. You need to listen to what everyone needs.

The problem is, of course, no-one else is thinking about the sound side of things. The kids talk people are worried about remembering their lines—not whether they'll even be heard. The person on prayer is checking their notes, not thinking about whether the mic will be in position. The singers are worried about being off-key rather than whether they're off-mic by standing too far away...

So although you need to listen, you also need to go asking first, because chances are others won't think of sound needs. Be proactive. Start with looking through the program for the day and spot what you can of what might be needed. Then speak to the service leader about any special requirements they're aware of. Then try to get around to all the various participants. It takes time, which is why you need to be there early. It takes a lot of patient listening too, often with people feeling strained. Remember also, once you've listened, you can also throw in some quick advice, such as how to use mics properly. People need constant, gentle reminders about the basics of sound.

Your ears are definitely the tools of the trade: as much with people as with the equipment.