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## Quail Springs Church of Christ will add service with musical instruments

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Mark Henderson, teaching and preaching minister at Quail Springs Church of Christ, recently shared information about the church's plans to add a worship service that will include musical instruments. The new service, which begins Sunday, is a break from Church of Christ tradition.

Henderson said the decision came through lengthy prayer and study. Even so, about 300 people left the church, 14401 N May, in opposition of the change.

Here Henderson tells why and how the decision to add the new worship service was made, along with the congregation's hopes for the future:

Q: Please explain the position that Church of Christ congregations typically take regarding using instruments in worship services.

A: Historically the position was — and there's different parts of it — but I think the primary piece of it was that there is no New Testament authority for using instruments in worship.

You have a lot of Old Testament references to it, but when you look at references you might attribute to worship in the New Testament, you don't see them mentioned, and people interpreted that silence as intentional. Therefore, it was restrictive.

So, the position was it's wrong to use instruments in worship because if you use them, you're basically adding to what the New Testament teaches — it's unauthorized.

So the historic position has been there's no authority to use instruments in worship, therefore we don't do it, and those who use instruments are sinning and really out of step with God, and therefore we don't fellowship with them.

Q: When did your church decide to begin offering this service?

A: The decision was made here, I believe it was announced last March, March 2007. The elders said they had been through a period of discussion and prayer and study, and had come to the conclusion that we would add an instrumental service. For the last several months, we've been just talking through some different issues and working out some logistics, when would it happen, what would the schedule look like and things of that nature.

Q: What kind of response have you received from, first your congregation, as far as offering this service, and then from the Church of Christ congregation at large?

A: In the congregation it's been difficult. I think just about any pastor will tell you that significant change in a congregation is difficult. So we had some people who have been very enthusiastic about it and other people who have been very resistant to it. It's been a painful and difficult process. One good example of what we went through in 2007 was the day that one of the elders announced that they arrived at this conclusion, that we were going forward, that this would be a part of our future, a certain percentage of the congregation broke out in applause and a number of people got up and left in tears. And so it's been like that.

As far as other congregations of Churches of Christ, we've received very little direct feedback from them. It's not a popular choice among them, but we're not having difficult conversations or getting mail from them.

Q:What will happen Jan. 27? Do you have certain instruments that you will allow in the service?

A:We had done an activity here in the past that we called Worship Night. It would usually happen on Saturday night when we did it, so we already had kind of a band. And we have a worship style here, even in our a cappella service, we've tended toward more contemporary Christian worship music. So in some ways we weren't really re-inventing the wheel; we were just further developing what we have done before. Our typical band is going to look like a drum set, a keyboard and usually two or three guitars. We have some other gifted musicians here that we will incorporate, depending on what kind of music we're doing.

Q:How did you respond to those congregation members who were upset about this particular change?

A:You just do the best you can. We, the other leaders and I, would meet with anybody who would meet with me. I had conversations with individuals that might last two hours-plus and really whatever it took to try get to a level of comfort and understanding, we would try to do. Sometimes you could, and sometimes you couldn't.

Q:What do you hope to accomplish with this worship service?

A:There are two things that we really hope will come from this. One is we want to keep more of our people that were leaving to go to instrumental churches. One of the ways I would describe it is the way we handled it doctrinally. We essentially said you are free to worship with instruments and you are free to worship without them. From just a doctrinal biblical standpoint, we, for a number of years, have treated this as a nonissue. And so to me it seems like we were giving our people freedom to leave. We were saying you're free to worship with instruments — just not here. So one of things we're trying to do is for those people who really connect more with instrumental music, even of our own people, we're trying to give them a greater opportunity to stay and to worship and to serve and be a part of the church here.

The other thing we're trying to do is to reach some people that we've been missing. We don't do polls and surveys or exit interviews with people who are guests here, so all I can share is anecdotal evidence from some of our members. It's interesting: One member will say, "I brought a guest, and they didn't have any concerns about our worship style. They said the singing was beautiful, and they couldn't believe how impressed they were with the a cappella worship." And another member would say, "I brought a guest, and they really liked the church and everything, but they're asking us what's the deal with the musical instruments, and I really can't get over this worship style."

My hope is that we're going to do both really well and that either group can come and say "I connect with that. This is a place where I can worship and serve."

Q:So to your congregation, this is about tradition and doing something different?

A: This isn't unique to Churches of Christ, but it happens in our churches where your tradition bumps into what you believe about freedom in Christ. In a situation like this, for some time it's an area where we believed we had freedom, but we wouldn't practice that freedom primarily because of our tradition. Then you get to a point where you say we're missing some people we believe we could reach. We're raising generations that leave us because they just don't buy this anymore, so maybe we ought to practice the freedom we believe we have. That's really what it came down to for us.

Q:Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: One thing I would say about this is it was really a personal decision, not just for me but for our congregation and our leadership. I think in Churches of Christ, every congregation is going to have to chart their own course on this. One of the good things we have in churches of Christ is congregational autonomy; we don't have a denominational headquarters. We don't have anyone to tell us what we can and can't do. Each congregation has to decide on their own. We went through a painful process to make this decision. You know when we started this process, our average attendance was in the 900-950 range and by the time we finished, we were in the 600-650 range. And those numbers represent people and friends and family members, so we don't take it lightly, and others shouldn't either.

The other thing I would say is this is about us and what we believe, before God, is the best way for us to move into the future. We don't make any judgments about any other congregations about what they should or shouldn't do. Each one will have to chart that on their own as they're responsible for their decisions before God, as well.

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