

Popular Music Divine Services in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: Concept, Rationale, and Participants¹

Abstract

Various forms of popular culture have become increasingly entwined with the religious practices of long-established mainline Protestant Christian churches around the world. Many churches now find themselves gazing towards the realm of popular culture, and popular music in particular, as a possible avenue through which to remain culturally relevant and to reconnect with younger age groups. This article explores the creation and establishment of alternative popular music divine service formats within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The article accounts for the general character of these service formats and the principal rationale for their creation and establishment. Based on a survey that was distributed at several of these events during the course of 2013–2014, the article also explores the thoughts and views of people who participate in these events.

Introduction

Past decades have witnessed the emergence of a vast body of scholarly literature focusing on the ways and extent to which various forms of mass-mediated popular culture, such as television, film, popular music, computer games etc., have become increasingly entwined with contemporary, both more novel and traditional, forms of religious expression (e.g. Forbes and Mahan, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lyden and Mazur, 2015). When it comes to the impact of mass-mediated popular culture on the religious life and practices of Christian churches and communities, the research to date has mainly focused on the appropriation of various forms of popular culture in evangelical Christian settings, particularly in the context of the United States (e.g. Hendershot, 2004; Luhr, 2009). Far less attention has so far been devoted to the ways in which such appropriations also have become increasingly common within long-established, mainstream, or “mainline” Christian church settings around the world.

Following the continued general decline of traditional institutional religion throughout much of the Western world and the accompanying general erosion of traditional mechanisms of religious socialization, many long-established “mainline” Christian churches are currently struggling to retain the interest of younger generations. In light of these developments, it has become increasingly important to investigate how the regeneration and revitalization of these types of churches relates to their willingness and ability to adapt to the broader popular cultural environment of today (cf. Lynch, 2010, 552). This article focuses on the appropriation of various types of popular music in divine service settings within the context of the institutional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (henceforth referred to as the ELCF).

In recent decades, the religious landscape of Finland has undergone largely the same types of broader processes of religious change that have also come to mark most other Western liberal democracies. While the ELCF still retains the position of majority church, it has experienced progressive long-term decline by all conventional sociological indicators since at least the early 1970s. Church membership rates have slowly but surely continued to drop (from 83.1 percent of the population in 2005 to 72.8 percent of the population in

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2015), church attendance has declined sharply, traditional mechanisms of religious socialization have been progressively weakening, and young people in particular have become less and less interested in church teachings and activities (e.g. Gallup Ecclesiastica 2011; ELCF 2016).

The ELCF has not stood idle in the face of these challenges, however (Moberg, 2017). Quite to the contrary, mirroring similar more recent developments in the other Nordic Lutheran majority churches and the Church of England in Britain, as part of its growing efforts to activate its members and stem further decline, the ELCF has increasingly started to put a stronger emphasis on its function as “public utility” and “civil service” provider (e.g. Kääriäinen et al., 2005, 166–177; Moberg, 2017). In its efforts to remain culturally relevant among its members at large, the ELCF has started to gear its services and activities to special target groups and “niche” audiences. More broadly, these efforts connect to the ways in which the church has openly come to recognize how it “retains the features of a public utility and exists, for the most part, for those who prefer not to choose, but who are nonetheless grateful for a form of religion which they can access as the need arises” (Davie, 2015, 135).

In its attempts to respond to the changing religious sensibilities and attitudes of the Finnish population at large, the ELCF has consequently developed a range of new services and provisions geared towards more specific target or “niche” audiences (Moberg 2017, 134). As part of these efforts, recent years have also witnessed an unprecedented active and purposeful engagement with the contemporary media- and popular cultural environment on the part of the church. These engagements partly stem from a growing recognition within the ELCF of the ways in which different types of popular music in particular have come to provide important loci for the formation of social networks, communities, friendships, and the forming of personal and (sub)cultural identities. Like many other traditional institutional Christian churches, the ELCF has now come to view popular music as a central avenue through which to reconnect with younger age groups (Moberg 2015b; Mikkola, Niemelä and Petterson 2007, 128–136). This has, among other things, resulted in the creation and establishment of several alternative divine service formats that substitute traditional church music with various forms of popular music.

This article focuses on three of the most widely established of these popular music divine service formats: the pop music service format or so-called Pop Mass, the heavy metal service format or so-called Metal Mass, and the so-called Dance + Pray electronic dance music service format (in this context the word “mass” refers to services that include the Eucharist). The article is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a participant observation-based first-hand account of the main concept and general character of these divine service formats. The second section explores the main rationale behind their creation and establishment, highlighting in particular how they are all based on an explicitly instrumentalist approach to the popular musical aesthetic, or the notion that various types of popular music can be “used” as conduits for certain predetermined, agreed upon, and “accepted” purposes (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012). The third section then moves to discuss the religious dispositions and views of people who attend these services in light of the results of an 18-question survey that was distributed among attendees at five popular music divine services in Finland during the course of 2013–2014. The survey constituted the first ever (and as of this writing remains the only) larger-scale inquiry into the views and thoughts of people who participate in popular music divine services in Finland. Through focusing on the concept, rationale, and participants at these events, this article aims to

provide a fuller picture of what no doubt counts among the ELCF's most notable recent forays into the field of popular culture.

Concept: popular music divine services in the ELCF

As already noted, during the past decade several alternative divine service formats which substitute traditional church music with different forms of popular music and, partly, their associated aesthetics have developed within the ELCF – three of which are explored in this article. With the exception of the musical element, however, these services closely resemble traditional or conventional divine services in almost every other respect. Apart from occasional minor changes, they normally follow established ELCF service sequences and formulas. The mode of participation at these services also largely conforms to established custom: they are nearly always held in church buildings, the general atmosphere is solemn and subdued, participants remain calmly seated in the pews for most of the duration of the service, the official ELCF hymnal is used for collectively sung hymns (although they are accompanied by a different type of instrumentation), the sermons are delivered in much the same fashion as they would be at a conventional service, and the interior of the church building remains unchanged (although some form of stage lighting is sometimes used). Thus, while these services partly diverge from established tradition, and while they no doubt provide attendees with alternative “divine service-experiences”, they nevertheless remain recognizably Lutheran (Moberg 2015b). As will be discussed in more detail below, the Dance + Pray electronic dance music service format does, however, depart from established custom in many notable respects.

In contrast to conventional divine services, these popular music services tend to be held in evenings or afternoons and frequently also on weekdays rather than Sundays. The choice of time is principally motivated by a desire to attract younger people who are deemed less likely to turn up for conventional Sunday morning services. Overall, these popular music services have all been expressly geared towards younger generations. In this respect, they form part of the ELCF's current and more general strategic efforts to activate young people (however vaguely defined the category of “young people” or “youth” may sometimes be in official ELCF discourse). Indeed, this focus on young people is an important one as the ELCF has now openly come to recognize that its future fate and regeneration has become increasingly dependent on its ability to attract and activate younger generations. The popular music divine service formats that have been created in recent years are thus all based on the notion, or perhaps hope, that younger people would be more likely to attend church if only the music used during divine services would correspond more closely to their own popular cultural tastes and sensibilities.

The Pop Mass

Pop music services or so-called Pop Masses have been organized in several parishes throughout the country for over a decade. This was the first popular music divine service format to become established on a nationwide scale although Pop Masses are still most regularly organized by parishes in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The Pop Mass can generally be described as quite restrained when it comes to the extent to which it accommodates different pop music styles and their associated visual aesthetics. Indeed, the category of “pop” music covers such a broad spectrum of styles that it typically ends up very difficult to provide a clear definition for (e.g. Marsh 2017). The music featured at Pop Masses, and which is solely used to accompany liturgy and collectively such hymns, is usually

provided by a four to six piece band and is best described as low-tempo “soft pop” with an almost “ambient” or “lounge-music” type of character. The drumming tends to be light and easy-going. Keyboard sounds usually predominate over the guitar, which tends to be either acoustic or, if electric, non-distorted. Pop Masses, therefore, do not make any attempts to connect more firmly with any particular or more distinct pop music aesthetic or subculture. Rather, their characterization as “pop” services largely derives from the fact that all music is provided by a live pop music worship band instead of an organist. Apart from the musical element, Pop Masses thus closely resemble conventional services and normally also attract roughly the same amount of participants, usually between 40–60 people.

The Metal Mass

As its name suggests, the Metal Mass is a special divine service format where all music, accompanying both liturgy and collectively sung hymns, is provided by a live heavy metal music band. Similar to the Pop Mass format, apart from the musical element, Metal Masses also largely conform to established ELCF service conventions. The church building interior remains unchanged and the general mood is quite subdued and solemn. However, while most of the people who attend tend to sit calmly in the pews, it is not unusual to see some attendees engaging in headbanging or other types of heavy metal-associated practices such as raising their fists in the air in sync with the beat of the music. The Metal Masses usually attract somewhat larger numbers of attendees than a conventional Sunday morning service, usually between 50–80 people.

Similar to the Pop Mass format, the music featured at a Metal Mass is exclusively used to accompany liturgy and collectively sung hymns. The organ has simply been replaced with heavy metal adaptations provided by a live heavy metal band. In comparison to Pop Masses, however, Metal Masses are loud events characterized by the sound of aggressive drumming and heavily distorted electric guitars. The heavy metal arrangements that the musicians have created for the liturgical parts and the traditional hymns align most closely with the musical and sonic conventions of the so-called doom metal sub-genre. Doom metal is generally characterized by slow tempos and long and repetitive sequences of simple riffs, which serves to afford the music an eerie, ominous, and indeed “doom”-like quality. Although Metal Masses resemble conventional services in most respects, the experience of attending one nevertheless differs considerably from the experience of attending a Pop Mass. At a Metal Mass, the music is not relegated to a supportive role where it merely serves to provide instrumentation for liturgy and hymns. Rather, even though the music is indeed only used to accompany liturgy and hymns, it is simultaneously deliberately brought to the fore, often to the extent that it almost drowns the collective singing.

Since the introduction of the format in Helsinki in the summer of 2006, Metal Masses have become regularly organized by several ELCF parishes in different locations around the country and have now been organized at least once in each of the ELCF’s nine dioceses. From its inception, the Metal Mass format generated a great deal of public attention and was generally well received in church and mainstream media alike. As the format continued to develop, it also became ever more consciously marketed as a particular type of alternative church service with clear connections to a particular form of popular music, its aesthetics, and associated subculture. For example, the Helsinki-based creators of the format were quick to create their own metal aesthetics-inspired official website and social media profiles. In addition to this, they also produced an advertisement video and released

an album version of the Metal Mass on a major record label (Kaiku Entertainment/Warner Music).

Dance + Pray

In early 2012, electronic dance music was introduced within the ELCF through the creation of the so-called Dance + Pray service format. In contrast to earlier already established popular music divine service formats, Dance + Pray was created with an expressed intent to accommodate as much of electronic dance music culture and visual aesthetics as possible in order to provide church-goers with a Lutheran worship experience that was truly unlike any other. Dance + Pray was not, however, intended to develop into a regular event but only to be held occasionally. For this reason, the format has remained firmly in the control of its creators and developed its own organization and production and management team. Whereas any parish is free to create its own Pop- or Metal Mass, a Dance + Pray service has to be commissioned from the group that manages it. Considering the amount of technical equipment and specialist personnel required, Dance + Pray services have only been held a total of three times as of this writing (March 2017). The times they have been held, however, they have drawn exceptionally large numbers of predominantly young participants. For example, over 600 people attended the first ever Dance + Pray service in the city of Turku in early 2012.

Similar to Pop- and Metal Masses, Dance + Pray services also include all main elements of a Lutheran high-mass: initial blessing, confession, prayer, sermon, the Eucharist, and the Priestly Benediction. In addition to this, however, they also include a range of elements that one would normally find in electronic dance music club settings such as various types of atmospheric stage-lighting, strobe lights etc. Rather than serving to induce a sense of calmness and sober attention, the visual stimuli employed thus instead work to induce feelings of exhilaration and excitement (Moberg 2015b).

At a Dance + Pray service the church altar is covered by an almost empty stage on which there stands a simple temporary altar framed by a rig of lights. A DJ-table with different types of technical equipment such as laptop computers, turntables, and mixing boards is visibly located beside the altar-stage. On the wall beside the altar-stage there is a large screen on to which pictures, prayers, and Bible-quotations are projected. Dance + Pray services have so far also featured a few professional dancers. These elements all work to temporarily transform the church-space in order to deliberately create associations with extra-church spaces such as dance clubs and live music venues as part of a more general effort to bring the whole event into closer alignment with a particular form of popular music culture and its associated aesthetic. While most participants remain seated in the pews during the actual service, there is also the possibility to stand and even move around.

The visual dimension of Dance + Pray services is intimately connected to its aural dimension. At these services, all music is electronic and provided by DJs. Dance + Pray therefore does not feature collectively sung hymns in the conventional sense. The services held so far have featured music composed specially for the occasion that mostly conforms to so-called house and trance styles.

Finally, every Dance + Pray service culminates with approximately 45 minutes of pure dancing. At this point the service as such is effectively over. The music picks up in intensity as the DJs take over, the priests start dancing on the altar-stage, inviting the participants to follow suit. The dancing-phase is central to what the Dance + Pray format expressly strives to achieve: to encourage and cultivate joyful wordless and bodily worship (Moberg 2015b).

Rationale: an instrumentalist approach to the popular musical aesthetic

In this section, we move to explore the rationales that underlie these popular music divine service formats. Generally, it would not be unfair so say that all of the popular music divine service formats that have been created within the ELCF have only been prepared to go so far in their appropriations of popular music and their associated aesthetics. Indeed, they all remain firmly grounded in an instrumentalist approach to the popular music aesthetic.

Dating back to the appropriation of popular music styles by evangelical groups in the United States from the 1960s onward (e.g. Howard and Streck 1999), popular music has played a central role in the renewal of Protestant Christian expression and worship practices worldwide. Indeed, as is illustrated by the global expansion of the Christian popular music industry (e.g. Hendershot 2004) and the emergence of transnational music-centered churches like Hillsong (e.g. Wagner 2014), the past five to six decades have witnessed a range of significant transformations of the general “soundscape” of Protestant Christianity (cf. Moberg 2015b).

But although the use of popular music in Protestant church settings has now become commonplace, it has nevertheless remained firmly based on what Kahn-Harris and Moberg have referred to as an “instrumental” approach to the popular musical aesthetic (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012; cf. Wagner 2017). This is to say that Christian churches’ various appropriations of popular music traditionally have, and still tend to be, governed and justified by the notion that various types of popular music can be “used” as conduits for certain predetermined, agreed upon, and “accepted” purposes, such as to aid Christian worship and/or serve as tools for evangelistic outreach and proselytization (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012, 98). This notion also remains a central ideological tenet of the Christian popular music (e.g. Howard and Streck 1999) and Worship music (e.g. Wagner 2017) industries as it provides the most central means through which “Christian” popular music is distinguished from its “secular” (i.e. not-explicitly-“Christian”) equivalent or counterpart. This instrumentalist approach is thus based on the view that no form or style of popular music is inherently “secular”, but rather that any form of music, “popular” or other, can be “redeemed” and be “used” for various predetermined religious purposes (e.g. Howard & Streck 1999: 8–13).

This instrumentalist approach also typically aims to police the transgressive properties of popular music. When considering the nature of popular music as a social and cultural phenomenon, it is useful to openly recognize, as Partridge (2014, 5) does, that “Popular Music is fundamentally transgressive. It may articulate faith, hope, and love in largely innocuous and mundane ways, but it often, though not always, tends to do this from within the contested spaces of the modern world”. As he goes on to point out, conservative religion’s age old suspicion towards popular music should therefore come as no surprise considering how “within the cultures of popular music, the power of the hegemonic sacred is weakened, interrogated and challenged” (Partridge 2014, 5–6). Attempts to appropriate popular music to aid Christian worship are thus typically accompanied by the establishment of a range of “safety mechanisms” designed to discipline the transgressive potentials of the music and to thus provide some kind of “reassurance” that its anarchic power will not take over (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012, 93; Moberg 2015b). As will be illustrated below, the popular music divine service formats that have been created within the ELCF are also grounded in this, by now well-established, instrumentalist approach. This is, however, much more evidently the case with the Metal Mass and Dance + Pray formats since they both

appropriate controversial forms of popular music that are widely associated with transgressive practice.

Beginning with the Pop Mass, the official webpages of the Espoo parish union (the “home” of the Pop Mass format) provides the following description of these events:

The Espoo Pop Mass is an ordinary evening-service where the collectively sung hymns and other music is accompanied by a band in a “poppy” way. The service is administered by the Espoo pastors along with visiting pastors, who are often, among other things, invited to deliver sermons. Participants range from young people, young adults, and young families to working people and seniors.²

While this general description does not attempt to provide any justification or actual rationale for the Pop Mass format as such, it is nevertheless worth noting how Pop Masses are described as “ordinary” services with a pop music flavor. The musical element is therefore not highlighted as having any value in and of itself, but is rather downplayed.

The case is quite different when it comes to the Metal Mass format, which is expressly justified on the basis of an instrumentalist approach. On their official webpage, the Helsinki-based originators of the format provide the following general rationale for the creation of the format:

Witnessing Christian heavy metal music has existed ever since the 1970s. For over 30 years. It is about time for this art form to serve other ends besides being played on fans’ stereos or during concerts. The Metal Mass is not organized for its own sake or for the sake of any artistic ambitions. The music is a tool for bringing forward the message.³ ([http://metallimessu.com/info/miksi-juuri-metallimessu/.](http://metallimessu.com/info/miksi-juuri-metallimessu/))

At another point they go on to state that

When you come to the Metal Mass, you come to a divine service. It is not a concert, not a spectacle, nor a gig. It is a divine service.⁴ ([http://metallimessu.com/info/mita-metallimessu-on/.](http://metallimessu.com/info/mita-metallimessu-on/))

The rationale starts out by pointing out the fact that “Witnessing Christian heavy metal” has existed ever since the 1970s. Here the creators are making a reference to the phenomenon of “Christian metal”, which can generally be described as a “Christianized” form of heavy metal that aims to rearticulate central heavy metal themes and aesthetics through an evangelical Christian frame for a Christian audience (e.g. Moberg 2015a). In highlighting this fact, the rationale aims to achieve at least two things. Firstly, through underlining that several decades have now passed since Christian faith and practice was first wedded with heavy metal music, the creators wish to align the Metal Mass with an already established practice. Indeed, they state, it is “about time” this “art form” is put to wider uses. Secondly, in doing this, the creators also wish to underline how even a highly transgressive and controversial form of popular music like heavy metal can be used to aid Christian worship and be used as a form of proselytization. The instrumentalist approach of the creators then

² Author’s translation from the Finnish original.

³ Author’s translation from the Finnish original.

⁴ Author’s translation from the Finnish original.

finds further expression in the statement that the “Metal Mass is not organized for its own sake or for the sake of any artistic ambitions” but, rather, that the music provides a “tool” for communicating the Christian message. Lastly, it is also worth noting that the creators are particularly careful to underline the religious and worship-oriented character of these events. This, then, provides an as clear as any example of how Christian appropriations of popular music are typically accompanied by the establishment of a range of “safety mechanisms” (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012, 93) designed to curb the transgressive properties of the music.

A largely similar rationale is provided for the Dance + Pray format. On the organizers’ official dance music aesthetics-inspired webpage, the creation of the service is justified as follows: “Dance music plays an important part in the musical life of Finns and it is therefore natural that dance music is also played in so-called gospel-circles”⁵ (<http://www.dancemessu.net/dance/mika-on-dancemessu.php>). Similar to the rationale provided for the Metal Mass quoted above, the organizers highlight electronic dance music’s history in “gospel-circles”. Here we see another reference to the broader phenomenon of Contemporary Christian Music, which has come to encompass nearly every form and genre of popular music. As the organizers go on to explain:

The Dance + Pray service is a real Lutheran service. The message of the church is unchanging and the service follows the formula of a Lutheran service, but a trance-element is also present. In the words of the Bible: there is a time to mourn and a time to dance. We want to bring joy to the Lutheran service. We are, however, of the opinion that the traditional Sunday-service also has its place. At the dance service the altar-space is created through a rig of lights and video screens and turntables assume the function of the organ. The night culminates as we dance and praise God in church.⁶ (<http://www.dancemessu.net/dance/mika-on-dancemessu.php>)

As the creators emphasize, Dance + Pray is a “real” Lutheran service that just includes a “trance-element”. This choice of words is most probably not incidental since it serves to provide reassurance that Dance + Pray services will indeed first and foremost be approached as religious and “Lutheran” events, as opposed to “trance” events. The organizers further underline that the format is in no way intended to replace the conventional Sunday service, but only to serve as a supplement to it. In interviews with media, the organizers have also repeatedly stressed how the service is chiefly designed to appeal to younger generations (e.g. YLE 2012)⁷. Even though Dance + Pray differs from the Pop- and Metal Mass formats when it comes to the degree to which it has adopted trance music and its associated visual dimension and aesthetics, it nevertheless remains based on the same instrumentalist approach in that it expressly strives to adopt and “use” the music for purposes that are external to the emotional and transgressive logic of the music itself.

The views of participants at Pop, Metal, and Dance + Pray services

In this section we move to discuss the results of an 18-question (Finnish language) survey that was distributed among participants at five different popular music divine services in five

⁵ Author’s translation from the Finnish original.

⁶ Author’s translation from the Finnish original.

different locations in Finland during the course of 2013–2014.⁸ The survey was developed and distributed in collaboration with the Church Research Institute in Finland. It was developed on the basis of a qualitative pre-study that involved extensive participant observation at a large number of popular music divine services in different locations throughout the country. In addition to popular music divine services, the survey was also distributed at three Christian popular music festivals. The survey generated a total of 822 valid responses. The amount of responses received from participants at popular music divine services accounted for roughly 25 percent (N= 208) of the total amount of all responses to the survey. In the following we will be focusing on this portion of the results only. The popular music divine services surveyed included two Pop Masses in different locations in the city of Espoo (located in the Helsinki metropolitan area); one Metal Mass held in Helsinki and one in the city of Turku; as well as one Dance + Pray service that was arranged in conjunction with the 2014 Vappugospel-festival (roughly translated as Gospel Mayday Celebrations) in the town of Kouvola. Since the participants at the Vappugospel Dance + Pray service were participating in a wider whole-day event, their responses will be accounted for separately.

The main aim of the survey was to gather basic information about the people who attend these events, including such things as their religious affiliations and religious sensibilities, their involvement and participation in different types of church activities, and their views on issues relating to music in church settings. Essentially, the survey was designed to generate a general profile of attendees at these events. What follows is a general account of the main findings of the survey.

Age and gender

The majority of all respondents at the Pop- and Metal Masses surveyed were between the ages 18–24 (32.1 percent), followed by respondents aged 25–34 (22.3 percent), and respondents aged 35–49 (19.6 percent). The corresponding numbers for the Dance + Pray service were somewhat different given the youth-oriented character of the Vappugospel-event: aged under 18 (38.9 percent), aged 18–24 (30.8 percent), and aged 25–34 (13.1 percent). People aged 18–34 thus accounted for over half of all respondents surveyed at these events. The larger majority of all respondents at the Pop- and Metal Masses were female (64.9 percent) and the vast majority of all respondents were members of the ELCF (93.8 percent). A small majority of respondents at the Dance + Pray service were also female (55.7 percent) although a lesser portion of respondents were members of the ELCF (75.9 percent).

Previous experience of popular music divine services and reasons for participating

One fifth (20.4 percent) of all respondents at Pop Masses surveyed reported having participated in a Pop Mass more than ten times prior. This high number is best explained by the regularity at which Pop Masses are organized, especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Around a fifth of respondents (22.1 percent) at the Metal Masses surveyed reported having participated in a Metal Mass once or twice before, while 16.8 percent reported participating for the first time. Considering that the Dance + Pray service surveyed was only the third ever to be held, only a few respondents reported having participated at a Dance + Pray service before.

The survey also included a question about the factors that impacted mostly on respondents' decision to participate in the event in question. The factors "Religious

⁸ English translations have been provided for all excerpts from the survey.

offerings” and “Musical offerings” emerged as the most important factors across the sample, with half (49.5 percent) of all respondents citing “Religious offerings” as a “very important” factor, followed by 44.8 percent citing “Musical offerings” as a “very important” factor. 39.7 percent of respondents also cited “Good atmosphere” as a “very important” factor for participating in the event.

Self-reported frequency of church attendance

With regards to their self-reported frequency of church attendance in general, among all respondents at both Pop- and Metal Masses, 41.5 percent reported participating in church services “once or twice per month”, while 29.7 percent reported participating “a few times per year”. A third (32.2 percent) of these respondents also reported participating in “the other activities organized by the parish on a weekly basis”. Only a small portion (7.6 percent) reported participating “rarely or not at all”. The results among the respondents at the Dance + Pray service were largely similar. The main thing to note about these results is that they generally reflect the frequency of church service attendance among the active or moderately active members of the ELCF. These findings thus clearly suggest that a significant portion of all respondents at these popular music divine services can be described as belonging to what could be termed the active, practicing minority of the church.

Religious identity

The survey also included a question on “religious identity” where respondents were asked to report the degree to which they identified with a set of statements on religious identity on a five point Likert scale, ranging from “does not at all correspond to me” at the one end to “corresponds well with me” at the other end. The figure below displays the portion of respondents who chose the alternative “corresponds well with me” and thus identified the strongest with each of the alternatives provided (the Dance + Pray responses in parentheses):

I am Christian:	79.6% (84.3 %)
I am Lutheran:	67 % (47.1%)
I am religious:	47.8 % (71.6 %)
I am a born again Christian:	11.7 % (43.0 %)
I am religiously conservative:	6.3 % (25.3 %)
I am religiously liberal:	23.3 % (6.0 %)
I am a seeker:	20.9 % (10.7 %)
I am an atheist:	1.8 % (0.0 %)

These results lend further support to the interpretation that the people who participate in these events mainly belong to the active minority of the church. The fact that a much larger portion of respondents at the Dance + Pray service self-identified as markedly more religiously conservative than the rest of the sample and also identified more strongly with the statement “I am a born again Christian” is principally explained by the revivalist-oriented character of the event that the Dance +Pray surveyed service was held in conjunction with.

Thoughts on the role of music in religious settings

The survey also included a question about respondents’ thoughts on the role of music in their own personal religious lives as well as a question about their thoughts on the role of

music in the context of religious practice more generally. To the question “How important is music in your religious life?”, 39.8 percent of Pop- and Metal Mass respondents reported it to be “very important”, while 48.3 percent cited it as “quite important”. A notably higher portion of all respondents at the Dance + Pray service chose the alternative “very important” (70.8 percent).

The answers provided to the question “How important do you think that music is in religious activity?” were largely similar, with 44.1 percent of respondents citing it as “very important” and 48.3 percent citing it as “quite important”. Reflecting their answers to the previous question, a notably higher portion (61.8 percent) of the respondents at the Dance + Pray service chose the alternative “very important”.

These questions were followed by a set of questions about what types of music respondents’ would be most interested in hearing at religious events that were most important to them. The following figure displays the percentage of responses to each alternative provided for the multi-option question “What kind of music would you wish to hear at religious events that are important to you?” (Dance + Pray responses in parentheses):

Traditional church music:	84.7% (55.8 %)
Classical music:	69.1 % (40.7 %)
Pop music:	78.4 % (83.9%)
Rock music:	80.2 % (79.3 %)
Punk and heavy rock:	47.2 % (39.5 %)
Rap and hip hop:	32.4 % (68.5 %)
Electronic music:	31.4 % (54.5 %)

An important observation to be made from these results is that the alternatives “traditional church music” and “classical music” was chosen by the vast majority of all Pop Mass and Metal Mass respondents. At the same time, the vast majority of all respondents also cited both “pop music” and “rock music” as types of music that they would like to hear at religious events that are important to them. In comparison, the other alternatives – all of which are more closely associated with their own respective popular music subcultures – were chosen by a significantly lower portion of all Pop- and Metal Mass respondents. The notably higher portion of respondents at the Dance + Pray service who chose the alternatives rap and hip hop and electronic music can at least partly be explained by the much lower general mean age of that sub-sample.

Respondents were also asked about their views on the current use of music in ELCF settings. The figure below displays the portions of answers provided to the question “Which of the following statements best reflects your view on the use of music in divine services and other types of church activities in the Evangelical Lutheran Church?” (Dance + Pray responses in parentheses):

1. The use of music in divine services in the Evangelical Lutheran Church is good and should be kept as it is. 28.6 % (30.5 %)
2. The use of music in divine services in the Evangelical Lutheran Church is too restricted and the church should

consider expanding it. 58 % (53.7 %)

3. The use of music in divine services in the Evangelical Lutheran Church is too old-fashioned and should be replaced by newer forms of music. 13.4 % (15.9 %)

Generally, these results lend further support to the widely held assumption that the music used in traditional church settings no longer completely corresponds to the sensibilities of younger generations. However, as the survey results clearly show, respondents are still very much interested in hearing both traditional church music and classical music in church settings. As can be seen from the responses to the questions cited above, only a smaller portion of all respondents were of the opinion that the music used in church settings was too old-fashioned and that it should be replaced with newer forms of music. The results therefore clearly point to a more widespread desire among respondents for the church to expand its musical repertoire while simultaneously holding on to its traditional musical practices and conventions.

When it comes to the question of whether the use of music in church settings would affect the frequency of church service attendance among respondents, the survey revealed that a bit over half of all respondents would either “surely attend” (17.6 percent; Dance + Pray: 28.2 percent) or “probably attend” (34.5 percent; Dance + Pray: 28.2 percent) divine services more frequently if the church would use music that is more in line with their individual musical tastes and sensibilities. At first glance, these results would appear to contradict the finding that the largest portion of all respondents in the total sample cited “traditional church music” as the type of music that they would most like to hear at religious events that are important to them. This apparent contradiction should not, however, be overstated. Traditional church music remains widely perceived as a type of music that is deeply connected to, and often perhaps perceived to be quite inseparable from, the very character of the church as a major historical and cultural institution. The responses to this question also need to be understood in relation to the responses to the question about respondents’ views on the use of music in church settings more generally where well over half (58 percent) of them agreed with the statement that the church’s should expand its musical repertoire in divine service settings while simultaneously not abandoning its traditional musical practices.

Concluding remarks

The creation and establishment of the popular music divine service formats discussed in this article are illustrative of a growing willingness on the part of the ELCF to more actively engage with the present-day popular cultural environment, albeit primarily on its own terms. In wider sociological perspective, the creation and establishment of these popular music divine service formats need to be understood against the backdrop of the ELCF’s broader efforts to remain culturally relevant among younger generations and cater to various target audiences or other “affinity groups” (cf. Cameron 2003) as part of its increasing emphasis on its function as public utility and civil service provider. While the creation of the popular music divine service formats explored in this article clearly signals an increasing general openness to the renewal of traditional worship practices and modes of

religious expression, they can all be described as services that accommodate popular music in highly controlled, sober, and openly instrumental ways in order to bring worship practices more into alignment with especially young peoples' presumed cultural sensibilities and to thus provide people with alternative modes of what essentially remains traditional Lutheran worship (Moberg 2015b). This is further illustrated by the official rationales provided for the creation of the Metal Mass and Dance + Pray formats as discussed above – both of which are expressly based on the view that it is possible to separate the purely musical element of a form of popular music from its associated established subcultural meanings and simply “use” the music as a conduit for certain religious purposes. At the same time, the rationales indirectly also communicate a sense of uneasiness about the fact that heavy metal and trance have both, along with the global musical subcultures that have coalesced around them, become firmly culturally coded in such ways that they have come to “carry certain meanings that are difficult to dispense with” (Partridge 2014, 47). Indeed, heavy metal remains marked by its conspicuous links to Satanism and the Occult, and trance music still retains close connections to contemporary Paganism and various types of Indian religiosity. Well aware of these associations, creators and organizers have strived to circumvent the transgressive potential of heavy metal and trance by consciously downplaying any such connections, and indeed by downplaying the musical element more generally.

The results of the survey that was distributed among participants at five of these services also allows us to make some general observations about the extent to which these service formats have been able to meet their stated aims. While the survey results clearly show that these services have been successful in attracting younger people, they also clearly show that the majority of all respondents were active or moderately active churchgoers who also regularly participated in other types of parish activities and strongly self-identified as believers. The majority of all respondents to the survey thus belonged to the active and moderately active practicing minority of the church. The general conclusion to be drawn from this is that, while these service formats clearly have been able to attract younger age groups, they do not seem to have been particularly successful in attracting new people to church.

It is interesting to note that over half of all respondents reported that they would either surely or probably attend divine services more frequently if only the music featured at these events would conform more closely to their own personal tastes and sensibilities. This is a notable result considering that the vast majority of the people surveyed were *already* active church-goers and that most of them had also participated in popular music divine services numerous times before. The results thus clearly indicate that active church-goers would like the church to continue expanding its musical repertoire while simultaneously holding on to its traditional musical practices. While this might at least partly be taken to reflect people's changing expectations and increasingly individualist approach to religious practice and participation more generally, it also seems to suggest that the instrumentalist approach that typically underpins the appropriation of popular music in ELCF settings, for active church-goers at least, appears to be an instrumentalism that “works” (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012, 99).

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