

# MUSIC DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Wellesley Hills Congregational Church, Wellesley, MA

November 2022

## MUS-D COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Angela Bahns, co-chair

Becky Williams, co-chair

Andrew Altenbach

Steve Groff

Anne Lysaght

Beth Ross

## OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY FINDINGS

A congregational survey was distributed in July and August 2022. We received 163 responses; some were partial responses. Below is a summary of the survey results. Percentages are based on the fraction of the total sample that answered each question.

### Our congregation values music.

The majority of the congregation has had experience playing an instrument (80%) or singing with a choral group (67%) in the past although most are not currently participating in a musical group. 82% of parents with kids at home said they might be interested in having their kids participate in a choral or bell choir at church.

### Music is an essential part of worship.

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*83% of respondents said singing traditional hymns on Christian holidays touches their soul.*

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Other popular responses to our question about which aspects of our music program lift your spirit to worship God were the music sung by the choir or vocal soloists, the organ prelude/postlude, regular worship hymns, the bell choir and chamber orchestras.

### Most people (74%) completely agreed that our current musical offerings are meaningful and relevant to them.

Some agreed with the statement only partially (25%) or not at all (<1%). The reason cited most often was feeling that we are too traditional in our music program (21 respondents). However, there was disagreement about whether

our music is too traditional or not traditional enough; four respondents expressed disappointment because they perceived that we are moving away from traditional hymns.

The following aspects of our current musical offerings were rated as “must have” by the majority of respondents: Chancel choir (97%), organ (97%), congregational singing of hymns (93%), church school music (71%), Special Music Sundays (65%), chancel choir soloists (62%), and piano (59%).

### Music plays a critical or important role in faith formation and development across the lifespan.

This statement was endorsed by most respondents ( $\geq 78\%$ ) for all age groups from childhood to seniors (but it was endorsed less often for early childhood, birth to 2-years).



## **We identified five themes from the open-ended comments on the survey:**

1) Desire for rekindling a children's/youth music program and need to appeal to younger members; 2) Affirmation that excellent music defines the Hills Church and praise for John Finney; 3) Desire for diversity and variety of musical styles; 4) Importance of a strong spiritual foundation for the new music director; 5) Consideration for budget and the number of positions needed to meet our needs.

## **OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THE FORUMS AND FOCUS GROUPS**

The Music Discernment Committee hosted eleven forums and focus groups from mid-September to the end of October 2022; 43 people attended. Our aim was to give the congregation a chance to share what they value about music in church as well as their hopes for the next chapter. Below is a summary of the most consistent themes that emerged from these conversations.

### **Music is an essential component of the Hills Church.**

There are expectations that the excellent quality of the music program will continue in the future. Music is what attracts many people to the church; it is part of our identity; the church would not be the same without it.

### **Music plays an enormous role in people's faith and in their worship experience.**

Music brings us closer to God and moves us spiritually in a way that nothing else can.

### **All aspects of the current program are valued and should be present in the future if at all possible.**

The only major element missing is a children's and youth music program which many hope will be re-instituted. There was also a realization that all the needs of the church might not be met in one individual.

### **People are excited about the opportunity for growth that this transition brings to our church.**

In particular, people are excited about how the transition to the next chapter of music coincides with welcoming our new senior minister. Hope was expressed that the new director would have the capacity to grow with the church.

### **The traditional hymns are beloved to many.**

The hope is we will not abandon the traditional hymns, but at the same time many would love to see us "spice it up" a bit and incorporate more varied musical styles and cultural traditions into our repertoire.

### **Having a strong spiritual foundation is a key characteristic for the next music director.**

This is something we value about John Finney's ministry and should be a top priority in our search for a new director. Other top qualities we value in John are his kindness, ability to work respectfully with amateurs, excellence in conducting and playing, sense of humor, and his professionalism in collaborating with clergy and staff.