I would like to welcome you all to this groundbreaking event.  Help me appreciate the person standing next to you.

As we are running on a clock, I will quickly run through the format for today and introduce the first talk.

Immediately after the first talk, I will hand over the next section to Pastor and those who will assist him with the strategic meeting including

1. Sir Edmund - our secretary
2. Dr Bola - Moderator
3. Dr Emily - Time keeper.

After this we will have prayer time and anointing and then, we will have a special session and a session where Dr Ebube will address us briefly.

In this session we will consider perhaps not all but some of the essential attributes of a successful music minister.  The talk is titled ‘TIMBRE’. Can anyone help us to define timbre without looking it up from your phone? Timbre which is another word for musical quality and in a single word is asking for us to pay more attention to the quality of our ministry and not the quantity.

Now this retreat is my final assignment as the choir director that God led me to do, even though I am still going to be working closely with the new choir director and the new worship team and the technical department all in the background.  It is therefore incumbent upon me to indeed by God’s grace to lay a solid foundation or blueprint if you like that we can fall back to whenever the need arises. Psalm 11:3 says if the foundation be removed, what shall the righteous do? So, will I be attending rehearsals? As much as possible - yes, will I take charge of rehearsals, yes but only when invited and given the permission to.  Otherwise, I shall more or less be in the background and dealing with us on an individual basis.

So, this talk, geared towards a spiritual talk is equally as well as a practical talk on how as a music ministers we can move up to higher heights in our ministry and be a more blessings to our church.  Because of time, I will focus on two key areas but first of all to give context to this talk, I start by considering this thing called TIMBRE.

Timbre refers to the quality of music and typifies subtle but yet very distinct nuances in music that make sounds different and distinguishable from each other.  A simple (doubtless controversial where my wife is concerned) illustration to buttress this is for instance at home even when the place is not very quiet yet still possible to recognise when the baby cries because of the quality of the baby’s voice is so distinct.

How does all this apply to us as music ministers.  A lot of the time I discover that musicians particularly instrumentalists and also vocalists are interested mostly in volume and “Hearing themselves”.  This is one aspect this talk attempts to address. So what this talk attempts to establish and make us see is that volume is the least of our priorities as music ministers.

The quality of the music will be seen in the various highs and lows of a song and  not just volume alone. As long as we are paying attention to the right aspects of our singing, we never need to worry about volume because everything else falls naturally into place.  I watched a music training tutorial video and all the speakers kept stressing on the listening skills what is called ear training and harmony required to get it right in music. This is why I stress in this talk the importance of getting things perfectly as on original records. I will tell you the reason why it is important to do this.  Before we get into the meat of our discussion, I shall give us one more illustration to illustrate timbre. How many of us own an iPhone. How many of us with iPhones wish we had a non-iphone? Why is this the case? It is simply because apple have paid great attention to the quality of their products. In essence quality is unmistakable.  Quality makes you stand out. However, the reason I brought this example to bear is to illustrate the fact that quality comes at a high price and we shall be exploring this as well in this talk. In the case of the iPhone, the price comes in the design effort paid to make the product high quality as well as the high price paid on the side of the buyers as a result of a high quality product. To be sincere customers are paying for the design of the iphone.  Apart from the design it is exactly the same components used in iphone as is used in other devices. So it’s the harmony of the components the way they work together in harmony that differentiates them one from the other. Good thing other manufacturers are also to pay attention to design and producing equally or almost equally quality products even if apple got their first and earned a name for themselves. I decree that the quality of your life this year will bring you to greatness in the name of Jesus.

But how can we bring about this quality to our lives and ministry. Remember this is also as spiritual talk so let us read two passages that lead us to the two key areas we will be addressing on this all important topic.  Note that especially because of the spiritual nature of this topic it is not just applicable to us as choristers but as Christians. This message of quality is so fundamental that it is the purpose Jesus came down to add quality to our lives and to remove the noise and distractions and give us clarity and focus.

There are 3 Ps in quality we will look at today which is Preparation, Patience and People. Let’s turn our bibles to  1 Cor 12:12-22 and also Phil 2:1-12. Just look at the quality of the name of Jesus, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

With preparation I am sure we are aware how much this is important as music ministers but I will highlight on a few manifestations of preparation in this talk.  Note that no one takes preparation more seriously than God Luke 2:25-32, Revelation 13:8 (KJV) And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God had already rehearsed everything and done it perfectly before he set everything into motion and that’s why he knows the end from the beginning. Jesus himself in Mark 1: 35 And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.  We see here how Jesus immersed himself with prayers in preparation to minister. Even the night Jesus was betrayed the scripture declares that in his prayers, his sweat were as drops of blood signifying he died even before he died in the place of prayer. There is no way I can emphasize the importance of preparation and this is the reason why as ministers of God every aspect of our lives from the way we talk, how we treat ourselves, our family members, our spouses all contribute to our performances in church, these are the things we really, really have to get right and we have to prepare these things and set them in order before we come to minister. Matthew 5:24 (KJV) Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

There are two things I will like to buttress on preparation first is the fact that whenever we come out to minister then the focus is no longer on ourselves but on what God wants to do in the lives of people.  Now that could also be you and more often than not it is. However, if we prepare adequately because we have already received from God, we can minister to others without minding about ourselves. This now brings us to see that as music minister, we are on a very high pedestal similar to pastors and therefore your ministry can never been taken lightly .  Romans 12:3-4 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office. There were times when people comment about people in choir perhaps due to their immaturity or whatever.  I seem to be afraid to comment about choristers as I am very cautious to talk about men of God simply because of the mantle being carried by the office. But how does all this apply to our Hope connection choir and the two areas I wanted to address under preparation. Firstly when we are out on stage we need to be attentive and as much as we love to be blessed by our ministration we need to be aware of our immediate surrounding.  1 Cor 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

When we are on stage we need to be attentive to each other and most importantly attentive to Pastor Amos, the Worship leader and whoever is leading whether it be preaching, call to worship, praise and worship or special ministration.  We need to always keep an eye on all these people in the midst of our ministration this is very crucial to make sure we are getting their instructions.

At this time let me quickly address the use of mics and the way volume should be controlled during worship, as well as the new worship leadership structure we are establishing.  So, I promised to talk about volume and quality and most importantly the use of mics. So let me please use this opportunity to correct this occurrence. I have permitted this to go on because I fully appreciate that we haven’t addressed it formally which I am doing now.  Another reason why I can understand why this has happened is because when there is lack of communication there is always a breakdown of trust. I know that Ebube may not be outspoken to say regarding the sound system I know what I am doing but because I communicate and interact with him I can vouch that he is completely competent and he knows what he is doing up there 200% times over.  As such when it comes to mic let us not shake them or hit them to know if they are working and start frowning our faces when it seems that they are not working. Let me give you the formula to overcome the issue of mics not working as a music minister. It is very simple. The first thing you need to do is come to church early and test that your mic is working. Since we as yet are still working on individualistic mics, we can test all the mics that have been set out to see that they are working.  I assure you that they will not stop working before you come back out for praise and worship.

Secondly, when you go out there give yourself and the mic as well as others time to pick up and adjust. Also realise the the output of the sound you hear is as a result of tuning of your ears.  You need to give yourself time to tune in to the music and believe you me it requires practice and patience. So you see this is where patience and preparation comes into play. If the worst case scenario comes into play just go ahead and worship God according to your preparation and keep trying to listen to yourself and others.  In the passages we read earlier in 1 Cor 12 and Phil 2 the three things come out. Worship God as you have practiced regardless of the output sound be patient with the sound system and with others to ensure that you harmonise. If you are making a mistake in your singing, if the mic output is not loud enough you will be glad that indeed the mic is not out however if it is because you are in tuned with others you will be able to adjust accordingly without having to stop in the middle or being afraid of singing.

Thirdly as already discussed if all else fails let us sing according to each other harmonising according to preparation.  We can see how that preparation and teamwork is key and teamwork is the people aspect. There are many reasons why this can happen.  Sometimes it is as a result of interference in which case there is very little that can be done but if we prepare adequately and give attention to ourselves we can overcome these challenges because despite the volume discrepancy there is an effect known as resonance which simply works like magic in fact it is how we are able to to have the magic of how all telecommunication works including the mobile phone we take for granted.  Once we are able to reach resonance in our harmony what happens in science is called constructive interference or in biology positive feedback. Whereby because the waves are in perfect harmony help to augment each other without any extra effort from the original wave source. In summary, whenever we use the mics let the volume of the mic be the last thing on your mind rather focus on the harmony and the lead singer.

At this point we are getting tired, I have already addressed 80% of my message the remaining 20% just borders around the Worship leaders ministry.  So currently, I am leading this ministry and among the worship leaders in order of hierarchy include Lizzy, Bola, Fola, Christy, IJ and Andrea. So this is basically because we want order when raising songs in church. This is separate from praise and worship on Sundays and Thursdays.  The worship team ensure that a song as directed by the spirit can be sung at any point and time during the service. The rule goes like this that the praise and worship team will take direction from whoever is the highest on hierarchy on stage. When it comes to raising songs will come from the worship leader as well as the any person appointed by the worship leader or anyone the worship leader gives go ahead.  For instance last Sunday, I was leading worship however, Lizzy had a song which she had already started. By right we were meant to have communicated before going ahead but it’s fine because there may not be a lot of time to move from one song to another the most important thing for the praise and worship team is that we are attentive to the leader and at the same time the pastor to know when to continue, stop or change a song.

While addressing the worship leaders, I also want to address volume during service worship.  The instrumentalists are most affected and need to take correction for this. Instruments should as much as possible play on background of voices and not overshadow them.  For vocalists, those with loud voices are the most valued members of the choir because you have greater dynamic range than the rest of us and are therefore the most flexible however because you have great power you also have a great responsibility to be able to control that volume and know when to keep it low as well as to increase it.  For the most part you will need to be singing on a reduced volume to accommodate people like Masiye, myself and Andrea with smaller dynamic ranges. At the same time those with softer voices should also try and strain their voices also to be a little louder. So we are doing very well sometimes however, Shade and my Wife are much softer than they ought to be, so please take note of this. work on that but more importantly. For the worship team singing songs during ministration i.e. whenever Pastor is on stage should remember that we should never be louder than pastor to drown his voice we have to actually whisper what we are singing and hope that it will come out. One important role for worship leaders is to start a song that Pastor or whoever is on the stage is attempting to start. This is one place instance where the lead worship singer or anyone else in the praise and worship team can raise the song on a strong note.

One correction that I need to take personally in addition to all the ones that have been raised in the passed is the fact that sometimes I take the mic into the church which is not right.  Sometimes my wife also asks me to give her a mic which I have done in the passed but now I want it in such a way that the mics are either used on stage or in the choir stand and no other area.

One final note about getting music accurately according to the original album; loudness as instruments and vocalists and finally getting songs on time. For music accuracy. For musical accuracy, it forms a baseline for you to freestyle. It shows that you have done your homework and actually prepared for the song.  That is one reason why I don’t mind if there is something we disagree on because it shows that you have done your homework and listen. That’s why I don’t mind another listen sometimes am right on other occasions am not. Nevertheless if I insist it should be done so I expect that we shouldn’t drag the issue further than necessary especially considering the fact that it takes me a long time to prepare for songs just so that we can save time and get songs out quickly.  For loudness it has to do with the dynamic range of the sound system. And at least for the last four years I have been studying sound signals as a major part of my PhD, so I think it is fair enough to say I can say a few things about sound loudness and dynamic range. On getting songs on time. We are doing very well with this. I honestly cannot appreciate you guys enough on this. It shows commitment and preparation. For those sending recordings as well, I know it is hard to send this recording but trust me it also goes a distance to help us to prepare.  You guys are more than awesome! I cannot thank you enough. A round of applause for ourselves.

The rest of this talk is going to be completed by everyone of us and Pastor Amos in our strategic meeting but please do not forget Preparation, Patience and People.  Thank you very much!