Contents

2 In This Issue

3 Sing Gift of Peace, Sing Peace!
   Dr. Fred Kimball Graham

5 Global Music in Christian Worship
   Jeff Clouser

12 Jazz Notes on Worship
   Rev. Cliff Aerie

14 Book Review: From Glory into Glory, Reflections for Worship
   Gregory Chestnut

15 Anthem: In the Darkest Hour
   Composed by David F. Stone

19 Congregational Song: One Poet’s Approach to Writing Hymn Texts
   Jacque Jones

22 CD Review: Organ Music of Judith Bingham
   Jo Deen Blaine Davis

23 Creating Inspiring Descants for Choir, Instruments or Organ
   Joyce Shupe Kull

29 Whose Afraid of the Big, Bad Committee? It’s Not as Scary as You Think.
   Megan Murray

30 Five Organ Settings from The Southern Harmony
   Arranged by Duncan Vinson

The United Church of Christ Musicians Association, Inc. is a self-supporting association of, by and for musicians serving UCC churches across the United States.
In This Issue

As has been our practice for the past few issues, we have published a free piece of music on the centerfold for you to use. You can remove those pages very simply by prying open the staples and lifting out the middle sheet of paper. Voila! An instant anthem ready for photocopying.

This issue features a choral anthem called “In the Darkest Hour” by David Stone who lives in Lee, Massachusetts. He is a member of the First Congregational Church of Lee and served as their organist while in high school. He was a musician from an early age playing piano, clarinet and saxophone, but began writing music only recently. He graduated from the University of Massachusetts in 1996 with a degree in economics. David’s composition is dedicated to his nephew who passed away in 2014.

On the last three pages you will find some interesting harmonizations of early American hymn tunes from The Southern Harmony. These are also available for your use. They were arranged for organ by our board member, Duncan Vinson, who has a degree in ethnomusicology and was the director of music at First Congregational Church of Melrose, MA for five years. More information and a blog can be found at duncanvinson.wordpress.com.

Our upcoming national conference promises to be a blockbuster event at the most affordable price you will ever find in the city of Boston. Workshops and housing will be based at Simmons College. A trolley ride on Sunday will get you oriented. Four worship services in four different historic churches will inspire you. This event is guaranteed to be well-subscribed, so make your plans early. Registration will open in January. Check it all out at www.uccma.org.

Some of our presenters include:

The Rev. Dr. Mary Luti, formerly of First Church in Cambridge and Andover Newton Theological School
The Rev. Dr. Nancy Taylor, Senior Minister of Old South Church in Boston
The Rev. Kent French, Senior Pastor of United Parish in Brookline
The Rev. Kaji Douša
Dr. Fred Kimball Graham, teacher, organist, hymnal editor, writer, scholar of hymnology, active member of the United Church of Canada
André de Quadros, co-founder of the Empowering Song approach to music education
Betsy Burleigh, chair of the department of choral conducting at Indiana University

Complete info and registration:
www.uccma.org

Worship, Music & Ministry is a publication of the United Church of Christ Musicians Association, Inc. and is issued three times a year. The journal is distributed to members of UCCMA as a benefit of membership. All correspondence concerning membership in UCCMA, changes of address and other inquiries should be addressed to the United Church of Christ Musicians Association, P.O. Box 370631, West Hartford, CT 06137. Submissions to the journal should be sent to Peter Stickney, P.O. Box 237, Newfield, ME 04056. E-mail: peter@firstparishsaco.org. Information about the United Church of Christ Musicians Association is available at www.uccma.org.

Copyright © 2017 by the United Church of Christ Musicians Association, Inc.
Sing Gift of Peace, Sing Peace!
by Dr. Fred Kimball Graham

In the first week of June 1996, the United Church of Canada published a new hymn collection. Yes, Voices United will be 20 years old this year; 2016. Most of the research that grounded the development of the book was done on the campus of the Vancouver School of Theology, where a graduate student named Susan Lukey conducted surveys of what members of our denomination wanted to see in their new resource. The mandate that emerged was very clear: give us back some old hymns, surprise us with some new hymns, definitely give us the psalms, or at least the ones associated with the Common Lectionary, and place the words between the lines of music. The title of this reflection is taken from one of the new and surprising hymns for the Christmas season. The opening line is, “Before the Marvel of this Night,” but each verse ends with a repetitive refrain, such as “Sing peace, sing gift of peace.” The succeeding verses end with: “Sing bliss, sing endless bliss” and “Sing love, sing God is love.”

The author, the Rev. Dr. Jaroslav Vajda, recounts that he had been at a seasonal party, and a new acquaintance was asking him, as a pastor, what he thought had occurred at the angels’ choir rehearsal the night before Jesus was born. The next day he wrote this poem, conjuring up what God (the choir director) might have said to the throng of angels. To paraphrase: “In view of the incredible news you will be singing to the world, be sure to put on a stunning light display, and proclaim that – with the birth of Christ, is the birth of peace. Sing peace!”

We all know what the Bible records as the angels’ message: gloria in excelsis deo, et in terra pax. Glory to God in the highest realms, and may there be peace on earth. It is not surprising then, that in the stories that we hear in the fifty days following the resurrection of Jesus, conversations about peace are plentiful, for Jesus himself embodied the way of peace-seeking and peace-making. Peace is not static; it is dynamic, and connects to life in action. It is now up to us, the latest apostles, to sing gift of peace.

But this is not the peace that we long for when we are walking along a noisy street, nor is it the peace we find on a mountain hike. Notice that minutes after Jesus grants peace to his disciples, they as apostles are sent out with peaceful spirits, sent into the world; peace is found not in relaxation, rather in service to the world. Peace is a verb.

In baptism, we were made apostles, and it is up to us to go into the world to share peace, and challenge the world to find peace.

We believe we are fuelled in peace-making by the energy of the Holy Spirit. The early apostles felt that same energy on the day of Pentecost, the 50th day of the Season of New Life (Easter) when the spirit filled their hearts. We rejoice that every Sunday is a day when we open ourselves to the workings of the Spirit, so that we may hear with understanding, that we may sing with understanding, just as reflected in the words of today’s readings, and the anthem.

Energy. It comes from breathing. The ancient Greek word associated with the breath of the Holy Spirit was PNEUMA. We get the English words pneumatic and pneumonia from this ancient root word. Pneuma-spirit: Its symbols are wind; fire; breath.

In the passage we heard from the gospel of John, we heard the words of Jesus: I do not give as the world gives. As we follow the model of the Christ, we as disciples and apostles give in differing ways. We give money. We give compassion.

But the dozen church musicians gathered in your midst today give in an entirely differing way: they aim to inspire, and cause breath to be taken in to support the careful
choice of texts and melody. They become reality through sensitive and appropriate accompaniments, through rhythm and pitch, and prayerful singing; and praise filled singing. Through sound, they give an element of identity to the community.

Every Sunday morning Christians get a refresher course in how to seek out and reaffirm the peace that only God can bring to human hearts. The recipe is so familiar we hardly think about it. Gather with others. Listen for the word from God for the day. Surround the Table, either for prayers or the Holy Meal; go out. We have been reminded; we have been re-mind-ed of the love of God, our deep well for loving the rest of the world.

Often we leave the act of worship with a song in our ears. Can you imagine coming to worship and not singing? What a feast of song we have had already today!

Why is singing so important in the Christian tradition?

The American scholar Michael Hawn has reminded us that song is only an extension of speech... we often hear young children slide easily from nursery rhyme into simple melody. When we get a piece of good news, we might be tempted to smile and sing "hallelujah" in the style of Handel. Such singing is not erupting into song for the sake of singing. It is a form of extreme communication. It is kinesthetic in nature: it is a whole body experience. And it is two-way communication: inbox; outbox.

In singing a response or a song or a hymn, we articulate concepts and vocabulary about our faith. Ways of expressing our love for God, and the mandate to love one another are etched on our hearts through the physicality of it all.

As such exercises invade our minds, we begin to understand. It is almost as if, atom by atom, we are ingesting the message and meaning of the scriptures and exploring the life possibilities to which they point.

At the same time, we are giving out a message through our outbox: we announce to those around us, we communicate from our inner being to others both our love for God, and the peace of Christ we share each week.

We receive; we give – not in a worldly way, but in a spiritual way. There is a contentment in that. It is a form of peace.

Peace is such an elusive element in today’s life: we are assaulted with its opposite...we barely hear or react when there’s another mass shooting somewhere such as Brussels; we find it hard to be pro active when teens in Attawapiskat plot to end their lives; in this year of El Nino, the earth is groaning without peace.

In a recently published book for children, pictures, colours and words interpret for us the varied meanings of peace:

Peace is making new friends. Peace is listening to music. Peace is helping a neighbour. Peace is thinking about someone you love. Peace is offering a hug to a friend. Peace is being free. Peace is being who you are.*

Who are we? Whose are we?

We belong to God. We live the way of Christ. We repeat gospel stories. We bring biblical truth to our lips. And in the power of the Spirit, we sing a new song, sharing the gift of peace.

The poet and musician Robert Lowry put it this way:

I lift my eyes, the cloud grows thin, I see the blue above it;

And day by day this pathway smooths, since first I learned to love it.

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing;

All things are mine since I am Christ’s: how can I keep from singing?

Together, let us continually seek the peace of Christ. Together and individually, let us share the peace of Christ. As community, let us sing the peace of Christ. As Archbishop Oscar Romero wrote:

Peace is dynamic. Peace is generosity. It is Christian right, and duty.

Global Music in Christian Worship
by Jeff Clouser

“It is often through the gift of music that we connect with people, their communities, their needs, their gifts, and their faith!”
- Global Ministries UMC

Globalization
We live in an era of increasing globalization. The corporate world is moving beyond its traditional borders. Large numbers of immigrants and refugees are migrating between hemispheres, and technology has bridged the communication gap. Shifting boundaries and exposure to people from around the world are interacting with one another in dynamic ways. This fluid interaction has been marked by cultures, traditions, and religions weaving their way into all societies everywhere.

Reflexivity
A major feature of globalization is the scholars theory of reflexivity - “what happens 'out there somewhere' has an impact on what happens here — in our schools, homes, and churches... and what happens here reflects back on what happens there.” (Max L. Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn, and Scott Paeth, The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000) Thus global music is no longer at our doorstep but has moved in and dwells among us. It serves as one indicator of the fact that nations are coming together in worship.

Global Music
Global music is defined as any music found in the Christian Church worldwide. It is music from the non-Western world. Songs are often sung in the vernacular and performed in accordance with the music traditions of that particular culture. Global music may incorporate distinctive non-Western scales, modes, and/or musical inflections.

Global music may feature distinctive traditional ethnic instruments such as the kora (West African harp), the steel drum, the sitar or the didgeridoo, wind instruments developed by the indigenous tribes of Australia. Examples of popular forms of world music include the various types of non-European classical music, e.g. Japanese and Chinese koto music, Indian ragas, Tibetan chants), Eastern European folk music, e.g. the village music of the Balkans, Nordic folk songs and the many forms of folk and tribal music of the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Oceania, Central and South America and Indonesian.

Reflect Globally
Psalm 100 provides a good example of a type of worship: “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.” Such texts teach us to look outside traditional and contemporary styles of worship and begin to incorporate music from all of God’s people.

Think Globally
According to Roberta R. King of Fuller Theological Seminary, there are three key principles to consider.

Music Is Intimately Linked to a People And Their Culture
Global music reflects the culture from which it is drawn. When the Church gathers together in worship, people bring musical genre that speak directly to them. There is a need for meaningful worship using global music. No single music style will be adequate. We may not be ministering to the wide range of worship needs in the ever-changing cultural make-up of our congregations. We must make sure the music ministry embraces the increasing diversity of music available for bringing people into the presence of God.

Global Music Sounds and Traditions are Expanding the Church Music Repertoire.
Once considered exotic, musical sounds and traditions from around the world are more common in places where new musical “voices” are welcomed. God’s Word plus

Jeff Clouser is the music director at Palmyra Church of the Brethren in Palmyra, Pennsylvania. He received his certification in church music from Virginia Wesleyan College. This article first appeared in ACDA’s online journal ChorTeach.
faith are being expressed in a broadening array of cultural musical styles. For example, African churches offer a holistic type of worship in which music performance practice includes dance and drama at the same time. Singing worshippers stand, move, and clap with a melody. Incorporating global music into worship fosters several art forms communicated in multiple ways.

New Theological Expression Contained in Global Song Lyrics Engender more Expansive Understanding of the Nature of God

One of the richest contributions of global music lies in the theological content of song lyrics. The content of song texts is profoundly embodied in ways that encourage honoring God in majesty and holiness. Such texts also promote intentional hearing of the biblical narrative in ways that evoke a revitalization of Christian faith. The texts also foster learning to praise God in the midst of suffering.

Connect Globally

Including global music in worship services is just one way to learn about different cultures and to understand how people all over the world worship God. In singing songs from other cultures in addition to a church’s current favorites, you are creating a worship environment that is welcoming to those from other cultures/countries.

Unite Globally

A growing trend in this country is for hymnals and hymnal supplements to include global and indigenous songs from Spanish, Asian, and African cultures, etc. The editors of these hymnals attempt to maintain the original style of music from these particular faith communities. In doing so, global music provides a platform for creating unity in the midst of diversity. Embracing global music and other communities of faith truly brings glory to God and his work around the world.

Hymnals/Songbooks

Let Us Arise, Hänssler-Verlag
Global Praise 1, General Board of Global Ministries, GBGMusik
Global Praise 2, General Board of Global Ministries, GBGMusik
Global Praise 3, General Board of Global Ministries, GBGMusik

For Everyone Born: Global Songs for an Emerging Church, General Board of Global Ministries, GBGMusik
Put Your Arms Around the World: Global Songs and Activities for Children, General Board of Global Ministries, GBGMusik
Set Free: A Collection of African Hymns, Augsburg Fortress
Sing! A New Creation, Faith Alive
Global Songs for Worship, Faith Alive
Come, Let Us Worship, Faith Alive
Korean-English Hymnal, Word of Life Press
Sound the Bamboo, Christian Conference of Asia

Hymnals Containing Global Praise Music

UMH - The United Methodist Hymnal (1989)
PH - Pilgrim Hymnal (1986)
ELW - Evangelical Lutheran Worship (2006)
TWC - The Worshiping Church (1990)
GTG - Glory to God (2014)
TH - The Hymnbook (1955)
CH - Chalice Hymnal (1995)
WR - Worship & Rejoice (2001)
BH91 - Baptist Hymnal (1991)
BH08 - Baptist Hymnal (2008)
CC - Community of Christ Sings (2013)

Hymnal Supplements

The Faith We Sing & Worship & Song, United Methodist
With One Voice, Lutheran
Wonder, Love, and Praise, Episcopal
Sing The Faith, Presbyterian

Share Globally

A reason for learning music of other cultures is not to imitate them or try to become like them but rather to expand our resources for worship and heighten our awareness of the sacred music traditions of other faith communities. One danger in introducing new music from different cultures is forcing music on worshipers. This rarely leads to cross-cultural awareness. The challenge is to allow worshippers to become aware of the richness and beauty inherent in the music of other cultures.

Teach Globally

A worship leader is responsible not only for choosing music that reflects his or her church’s music preferences but also for selecting music that represents the culture of other faith communities. Global music should be authentically introduced and explained. Altering the music may result in defeating its intended purpose—people reevaluating their culture and welcoming new sounds and new ideas.

Introduce Globally

Narrow the gap between the congregation and the choir because in the global Church, the congregation is the most important choir. Everyone, the congregation included, should learn the music, not just the choir. Find international songs that are similar in style to what the congregation is accustomed. Andrew Donaldson (former President of The Hymn Society and acclaimed composer, conductor, and expert in global worship music) explains: “If “Amazing Grace” is a familiar tune to the congregation, then a good compliment to it is the Korean folk-tune ARIRANG (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkMLj4bmtSo).

Finding global songs that match what the congregation is accustomed to singing will help them learn new songs easier and make them more open to the idea of expanding their repertoire. Use the appropriate instrument(s) that would normally accompany the music; however, keep in mind there are times when global music is sung without any instrumentation at all. When teaching unfamiliar rhythms to the congregation, teach the syncopations one rhythm pattern at a time for a number of weeks in worship using your voice rather than an instrument. Make repeats more interesting and meaningful through dynamic and stylistic contrast with varied intensity.

Global Style

When using global music in church, consider the form, content, and the context of the song. Global songs come in many forms that are familiar, such as folksongs, call and response, liturgical prayers, and strophic hymns. Giving the congregation information about the original context of the song can help them make a personal connection to it. If at all possible, have the congregation sing these songs in the original language. In the words of Andrew Donaldson, “what must not be
lost is the marriage of words and music that gives the song its strength. Look for translations which express and delight in the melody and its rhythms (rather than work against them) and whose words will bear repeating.”

React Globally

When the congregation is singing the songs of other countries, a broader experience is created for those involved. Singing the songs outside your community provides opportunities to pray for the world on a regular basis. People are often able to find hope, unity, and inclusiveness in global song. Hearing and singing songs from all over the world that offer praise to God gives a glimpse of universal hope. Singing the songs from other cultures has the potential for breaking the barrier that causes them to feel unwelcomed in church.

Expanding Globally

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) enacted liturgical reforms requiring regular services of the Roman Catholic Church be performed in the vernacular. This action allowed local languages and music to be incorporated into the liturgy. As a result a number of “folk masses” appeared and global music began to flourish on many continents. Global music gained popularity in Europe and the US with visits from the Mama Beyeke Chorale during the 1980’s.

Marie Beyeke-Bofi aka Mama Beyeke

You may be surprised to learn that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is well-known throughout the world for its innovation in music. Out of this rich cultural context, Marie Beyeke-Bofi, with her melodic voice and artistic leadership, and known to the ecumenical church of the Congo as “Mama Beyeke” arose to transform the worship experience in the life of congregations throughout the Congo. As more and more congregations were able to experience the Mama Beyeke Chorale, the ensemble began to receive invitations from across the Congo to perform. Also, the singers went on to gain international attention as they were invited to perform in Germany and the United States. In the late 80’s Mama Beyeke’s choral group traveled to the United States and performed at The Disciple of Christ General Assembly. The choir also recorded the album A Spiritual Journey through Music: Original Congolese Hymns.

Mama Beyeke’s choirs performed not only with their voices but with their bodies. Movement of the body was incorporated into the performances, which included gestures with the hands, fists, arms, and legs. She knew how to engage the choir members, calling forth the best from them in terms of artistic expression. Mama Beyeke will be remembered as a gifted choral director, composer, singer, evangelist, and teacher. Although she died in 1996, her legacy lives on through the voices of new generations of disciples who have incorporated her artistic style and music into their expression of worship and praise. You can listen to a sample from one of her albums at http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/globalministries/legacy_url/8032/Track-3.mp3?1419970226

Sing Globally

The following suggestions are offered for use in worship to enable God’s people to pray together in the universal language of music. The songs were chosen for possible use as service music or congregational song rather than as choral anthems. This music can serve as a bridge in worship for God’s people throughout the world. The following list was compiled by Rev. Debra Tyree* under the leadership of Jorge Lockward.**

AFRICA

Liberia

A va de laa mioo (Come, One and All): Global Praise 3, Song #51/52

The congregation can quickly learn this communion song. It can easily be taught through a call and response pattern between the choir/song leader and congregation prior to the worship service. Consider singing stanza 1 as a part of the Invitation, stanzas 2 and 3 just prior to distribution of the elements and stanza 4 after all have been served. It could be led by a song leader, choir, or by the celebrant if he/she is comfortable singing alone.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Na nzela na lola (As Long As We Follow): Global Praise 3, Song #154/155

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc83nBx4RD0

This song has many uses in worship, with the option given to create two additional stanzas. The leader’s part will be most effective when sung by a song leader. The choir will give confidence and security to the congregation as they join their voices to sing the “All.” Uses include singing stanza 1 as a response to the reading of scripture. Stanzas 2 can be used anytime as a response to prayers, to a difficult time in the life of the congregation or community, and also with themes of ecology, or for creating additional stanzas. Consider teaching the choral harmonies to your congregation over several weeks. Sung a cappella in parts by a congregation, this song would be quite inspiring. Add hand percussion to give rhythmic vibrancy.

Sierra Leone

Some man dey ask me say (Someone May Ask Me Why): Global Praise 3, Song #179

This work will engage the children of all ages. It would work equally well after the Greeting or as a response to the Sending Forth. Teach this song to your congregation, and you can employ it any time you are using the theme of “Jesus: Light of the World.” Begin with an improvised drumming pattern. If needed, a leader could sing the first two phrases, up through “What’s it that makes you to shine?”, with the entire faith community responding “I will just tell them that it is Christ Jesus that makes me to shine.” Encourage the congregation to clap as they sing “I will shine.” Everyone will enjoy singing on the repeats. Children and youth enjoy the repetition and the feel of clapping against the triplet rhythms. Your toddlers and pre-schoolers can easily sing “I will shine” with the congregation.

Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Christmas)

Wonani kupswalwa ka Jesu/How wondrous the birth of Jesus: (Global Praise 3, #122)

Zacharias M. Uqueio (Mozambique) composed this work which is filled with joy around the story of the birth of Christ. The original text is in Xitswa, a language spoken in Southern Mozambique, as well as Zimbabwe and South Africa. An English paraphrase is provided to help share this wonderful song with everyone. There are many possible uses for “How wondrous the birth of Jesus” in worship and concert settings. Congregations will quickly learn this infectious melody. Even the youngest pre-school singers will join in singing the refrain! Use it as a hymn of Praise in the Christmas season or as an
anthem on Christmas Eve or services in Christmastide. Consider asking the choir (of any age) to sing the first stanza, inviting the congregation to join in the refrain. The congregation should be able to sing the remaining stanzas after hearing the first stanza.

ASIA/PACIFIC ISLANDS

Pakistan

Prabhood Lay lay mujhay (O Lord Jesus, Enfold Me): Global Praise 3, Song #164

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98EawzYB_oY

Sung as a response to prayer or in between prayer intercessions, the refrain of this work will soon become a “heart song” of the congregation. Consider singing the refrain and a stanza as a response to prayer or as a part of a time for personal dedication to Christ. Because of the repeated pattern of the stanza, you can also consider singing the stanza in a call and response pattern to teach the congregation the music. For a first experience, consider having the congregation learn the refrain with a song leader and choir singing the stanzas. As the congregation learns the stanzas, they will join in the singing. Faith communities with liturgical dancers may want to ask the dancers to interpret the text.

Bangladesh

Esho hae Probhu (Come, O Jesus Christ): Global Praise 3, Song #129

The opening and closing phrases of this song from Bangladesh use the same melodic line. This line could be taught using your hand to show the descending pattern of the melody. A song leader or the choir could sing the second through fourth lines of the song with the congregation joining on the first and last phrases. Appropriate for both the season of Advent as well Passion/Palm Sunday, this “jewel” could also be used in worship as a call to prayer or as a part of an evening worship service.

Indonesia

Haleduya! Pujilah Tuhan (Hallelujah! Praise the Lord): Global Praise 3, Song #1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98EawzYB_oY

Focus on teaching the first two lines to the congregation during the gathering time prior to worship (Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord forevermore, praise the Lord, hallelujah!) The second portion of the song is melodically the same with slightly different rhythms to match the new text. Sing as the opening to worship, adding the percussion as noted in the score. This would also work wonderfully as a congregational recessional. Use while the congregation moves from place to place prior to or after a gathering of the community. The percussion will keep the pulse for the congregation as it sings and walks.

Cambodia

Au prea v obey / Our Father, Who Is in Heaven (For Everyone Born, #11)

A setting of the Lord’s Prayer by Cambodian composer Barnabas Mam which was originally accompanied by flute, the addition of a light accompaniment of guitar or piano will support congregational singing. Consider introducing the prayer to your congregation in a variety of ways. A soloist could sing the prayer or a song leader could line it out phrase by phrase. The doubling of the melody by a flute or an organ flute stop would be helpful to the congregation when teaching the melody. You could also tell the congregation that the first, second and last melodic phrases are the same. Have them learn that phrase with you. When they learn the third phrase, they will be able to sing the prayer with the help of a song leader, flute and light accompaniment. Consider adding small finger cymbals or bells at the end of each phrase since doing so will add variety. Children will learn this prayer quickly. What a great way to help them learn the Lord’s Prayer!

China

Alleluia (set to a Chinese folk melody) #42

in Global Praise 3

Ask the song leader to teach by lining out in a call-and-response pattern, a response to prayers for the people, community, or the world. You can also sing this song as an “Amen” based on a Chinese folk melody. This short “Amen” could be used in a variety of ways in worship. Does your church have a time in worship when the congregation greets each other? Invite them to greet those around them, then call the congregation back to order by singing the “Amen” together several times.

One way to teach the song is to ask the choir or song leader to line out the first three measures for the congregation, inviting all congregants to repeat the phrase. Lead the next three measures in the same manner. In worship, consider introducing the melody by playing the top line of the music score on a flute, recorder or other C instrument. As your congregation becomes comfortable with the melody, the choir/praise team could sing the second vocal part; however you will want to reinforce the upper melody with the help of a song leader or instrument.

Japan

Don’na tokidemo, (Put Your Arms Around the World) Global Songs and Activities for Children, #16

A song from the pen of Junko Takahashi and Schin’ichi Takamarni shares their deep belief that God is omnipresent. The text can be easily understood by anyone. Consider singing this song as a part of your prayer time. Sing stanza one prior to the prayer. Close the prayer time by singing stanza two. Use a simple accompaniment, perhaps guitar. If available, add a flute or recorder on the melody to support the singing. The first phrase incorporates the same text for both stanzas. You could choose to have the congregation sing one phrase with a soloist or the choir singing the remaining lines of the stanza. Transpose as needed to best fit the singing range of your congregation. If used as part of an intercessory prayer, set up the pattern by asking the leader to say “The Lord is with us” followed by the congregation saying, “Anytime and anywhere, know that Jesus’ love is there.”

Philippines

Hindi ko maisip / Far beyond our mind’s grasp (Global Praise 3, #50/51)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFvHh6vaF50

This work will be lovely for communion. Stanzas one, two and three could be sung prior to the distribution of the elements as a part of the invitation. You will want to sing stanza four to complete the hymn after everyone has been served. While the congregation may want to sing the entire hymn, a choir or a soloist could also sing the stanzas of the hymn. Another way to engage the congregation is to teach the last four measures of each stanza to the congregation prior to the service. Invite them to join in the singing of those four measures as directed by the song leader. It may be that after hearing the first three stanzas, the congregation will want to sing stanza four with the choir/soloist. Churches
with presentation capabilities could add a slide/video presentation involving pictures of a variety of breads, grapes and pictures of “feast” tables from around the world. Consider adding pictures of ministries that your church is engaged in as a part of sharing how your “lives are altars glowing” with God’s spirit in stanza four. Another option to consider is to ask your dance ministry to “dance in” the elements as you sing the first three stanzas.

EUROPE

Albania

Perëndi plot madhështi (God of All the Universe): Global Praise 3, Song #88/89

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ut95Y_ph-U

The refrain of this song is a perfect response any time the people of God need to say thanks in worship! Consider singing this after the expression of the joys of the community, as part of a praise medley in worship, or as part of the offering. With so few words in the refrain, this song is easily sung in the native language or English.

France

Glorie à Dieu / Glory to God (Global Praise 2, #90) - Christmas

This text comes from the familiar Christmas text found in Matthew 2:13-14. Sing this prayer for peace and joy throughout the Christmas season. Consider employing the song as an Introit on Christmas Eve and the Sundays of Christmas. Glorie à Dieu is easily learned by a congregation. Choirs will enjoy singing it in three-part canon. If you teach the song to all choirs, you have an instant multi-choir anthem. Teach in either language, remembering that some choirs will enjoy singing it in both languages. Sing in unison in one language and then choose the other language when the choir begins to sing in canon. If singing multiple languages is difficult in your situation, sing the opening words, “Glorie à Dieu/ Glory to God,” in the alternate language. Perform the remaining text in the preferred language in your setting.

Spain

Una Espiga: (UMH #637) - Communion

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3deoGUNkI

Sing stanzas one and two as the Communion elements are brought forward and the table is prepared before “The Great Thanksgiving.” Sing stanza three as the bread is broken and the cup is offered following “The Lord’s Prayer.” Stanza four could be sung just prior to serving the congregation.

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Haiti

O Ségnè, nou pôté rêmësiman (Loving God, We Come with Thanks): Global Praise 3, Song #92/93

Do we recognize the many gifts we have received from God? This song invites everyone to see the harvest God has prepared. The final stanza cries out for God to receive and accept us, closing with thanksgiving for God’s love. Your congregation will quickly learn the melody, especially if you add guitar and hand percussion. Once the congregation has learned this work, use the last portion of stanza three as a response anytime a thanksgiving is appropriate.

Brazil

Pelas dores deste mundo / For the troubles and the sufferings (For Everyone Born)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71_bEjrgWzA Make Justice a Reality for the Entire World

In August of 1963, Martin Luther King proclaimed that “now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children” in his address at the march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. As we hear about and witness the pain and oppression in the world today, let us sing and cry aloud together, “Hasten your salvation, healing love!”

MIDDLE EAST

Lebanon

Salamun Kullaheen (May Peace be with You): Global Praise 3, Song #83

Passing the peace takes on new meaning as you sing this melody from Lebanon, greeting one another in the name of God. If your congregation does not pass the peace, use after the confession and pardon of sins. The song could also be sung, alternating between the celebrant and the people. The celebrant sings “May peace be with you” with the congregation answering “God’s peace be now with you.”

Lebanon, Palestine, & Israel

Ayyuhal masslubu zulman (So Much Wrong): Global Praise 3, Song #157/158

A song whose text embodies the sorrow of injustice, his work could be used as a response to the tragedy of injustice around the globe. Alternatively, use on Good Friday. Add a single hand bell playing the tonic of each chord noted in the score. The melody would be beautiful when played on alto flute or recorder as a part of the introduction. A song leader could lead the stanzas, with the congregation singing the refrain. The refrain could also be used as a response to scripture or prayer. Discuss with your liturgical dance leadership the possibility of adding liturgical dance.
could then sing the refrain as a response to a weekly mission moment. Stanza three would work well to conclude Communion. Many churches sing a closing song or response to the Benediction, so try using “In Mission Together” for that purpose.

Savior of the Nations, Come: (Global Praise 3, #121)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqKpdIFF5LE

Mary Jackson’s setting of Martin Luther’s text, “Savior of the Nations, Come” is for unaccompanied three-part voices and four handbells. Stanzas one and two have been set in this arrangement. Additional stanzas are available in most hymnals (UMH #214) and could easily be added. Possible uses: a call to worship or introit, a call or response to prayer, or an interlude between the reading of the Old Testament and New Testament lessons. One might sing stanza one before the prayer, then continue softly singing the last two measures, “Come, Savior, Come” as an ostinato beneath the prayer. Sing stanza two at the close of the prayer. If singing the ostinato as a soft support for the prayer is not a possibility, ring the open 5th (D-flat and A-flat) using handbells as ostinato.

Summarize Globally

There are many reasons why churches should be singing songs of faith from around the world. The challenge is finding ways to let congregations know that the opportunity exists for incorporating global music beyond their traditional style of worship. I believe now is the time for Christian churches, worldwide, to come together and sing with one voice in praise to God, even when that voice includes many languages and cultures. As the church plans for effective ministry of music employing global music in worship, Roberta R. King asks us to consider the following questions:

Does our music express and reflect the diversity of peoples who worship with us?

Does our music welcome newcomers in our midst?

Does our church music encourage each cultural or socio-economic segment of believers to authentic worship?

How do we incorporate global music in ways that go beyond tokenism or exploitation of merely exotic sounds?

How do we employ global Christian music in ways that are respectful and honor Christ and the Church universal?

A Few Global Leaders


C. Michael Hawn. University Distinguished Professor of Church Music and Director of Master of Sacred Music Program at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. Has received numerous fellowships for the study of global hymnody and worship. Conducted research and taught in forty countries. Author of “Gather into One—New Songs of Celebration Render”. https://www.smu.edu/~media/Site/Perkins/PDF/People/HawnBio.ashx

I-to Loh. Formerly, teacher of Asian and Global Church Music, Ethnomusicology and Worship at the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music in Manila and at Tainan Theological College and Seminary. Editor of Sound the Bamboo. http://www.hymnary.org/person/Loh_I

Swee Hong Lim. Deer Park Assistant Professor of Sacred Music at Emmanuel College, and Director of the Master of Sacred Music Program. Director of the Chapel for Emmanuel College. Director of Research for the Hymn Society and a leader for global seminars and conferences dealing with sacred music. Prolific hymnody composer. http://www.hymnary.org/person/Lim_SH1


http://www.hymnary.org/person/Sosa_PD?
tab=tunes


Hilary Donaldson. Congregational song expert. PhD candidate at Univ. of Toronto. Developed a video series aimed at helping song leaders introduce new hymns to their congregations. Developed “Break into Song”, a series of how-to videos to empower church leaders in teaching new music. http://www.breakintosong.ca

Resources I

Global Ministries of the UMC. http://www.umecmission.org/Find-Resources/Global-Praise


The Impact of Global Christian Music in Worship

http://www.brehmcenter.com/initiatives/globalworship/conversations/the_impact_of_global_christian_music_in_worship

http://www.hymnary.org/person/Robert_R_King


Hilary Donaldson. Congregational song expert. PhD candidate at Univ. of Toronto. Developed a video series aimed at helping song leaders introduce new hymns to their congregations. Developed “Break into Song”, a series of how-to videos to empower church leaders in teaching new music. http://www.breakintosong.ca

Resources I

Global Ministries of the UMC. http://www.umecmission.org/Find-Resources/Global-Praise


The Impact of Global Christian Music in Worship

http://www.brehmcenter.com/initiatives/globalworship/conversations/the_impact_of_global_christian_music_in_worship

http://www.hymnary.org/person/Robert_R_King


Hilary Donaldson. Congregational song expert. PhD candidate at Univ. of Toronto. Developed a video series aimed at helping song leaders introduce new hymns to their congregations. Developed “Break into Song”, a series of how-to videos to empower church leaders in teaching new music. http://www.breakintosong.ca

A Definition of World Music, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_music

Music that Makes Community, Inc., connects a network of practitioners and leaders who share a practice of paperless song leading. Partner with hosts to produce conferences and workshops which teach effective song leading. Create resources for building a repertoire of songs for paperless song leading. http://www.musicthatmakescommunity.org


One World Music. A leading team-building company that uses the performing arts to engage, enlighten, and transform organizations of all kinds. Through hands-on music making with drums and other percussion instruments, strategies are developed which inspire leadership and promote change. http://www.oneworldmusic.com


Resources II


Nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to foster intercultural awareness and understanding through in-depth encounters with the world’s performing arts traditions. Sponsors educational outreach, performances, and cultural programs abroad.


Top quality, award-winning multicultural music books, recordings, and choral music for educators, community outreach programs, and music lovers.


http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/miller%2D9780415808231/

Known for its breadth in surveying the world’s music and strong pedagogical framework, this textbook takes students around the world to experience the diversity of musical expression.

Used with permission of ACDA’s online journal, ChorTeach, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2016.
Musicians should never forget that we’re blessed. We have a special gift that people can enjoy through us. We’ve had the good fortune to receive this and pass it along to others.

—Ed Thigpen

Drummer, Ed Thigpen, who died a few years ago performed with some true jazz greats, particularly pianists Billy Taylor and Oscar Peterson. While I never met Ed, or heard him perform in person, I remember listening to him on records as I was growing up. He had a great sense of swing, and, as the above quote illustrates, a great spirit with a sense of purpose in sharing his music as a blessing.

I have been blessed by the creative artistry of musicians, particularly in the church. What I’ve appreciated about the church musicians I’ve collaborated with is their devotion to inspiring worshippers with a sense of God’s greatness through instrument and voice. Martin Luther wrote, “Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.” He went on to say that music is a gift and grace of God, not a human invention. While music may originally be God’s invention, we musicians are called and challenged to inspire God’s people through the creative presentation of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic re-inventions. God did not limit musical invention to one particular style, which for me affirms the expansive possibilities of music in worship, especially jazz.

In previous articles I’ve shared thoughts about the “why” of jazz in worship, how to begin fashioning a jazz ministry, and how great works of jazz can be brought into the worship experience. One challenge that has stymied many a church wanting to incorporate jazz into its worship is how to arrange jazz hymns so people can actually sing them. Jazz “invention” is uniquely rhythmic with its syncopated emphasis and is stylistically oriented to a solo voice. How then is it possible to get an entire congregation singing in unison in the jazz idiom without everyone getting tangled up in the syncopation?

Let’s step back to take a quick historic glance at the evolution of hymn singing. The Church has a wonderful legacy of hymnody: ancient chants, Plainsong, Gregorian Chant. The Reformation and the advent of the organ established congregational singing as a key component of worship. Great hymns of the Church were composed and have been sung throughout the past five centuries. Today’s hymnbooks carry on the tradition of four-part vertical harmony that has typified our singing since the time of J. S. Bach.

Since the 1960s there has been a movement to contemporize the Church’s music. The simplicity of having a couple of guitars in worship playing folk songs has evolved into amplified praise bands blending hymn tunes, new compositions and rock ‘n’ roll to energize a younger worship demographic. While much of this music is geared more to performance, contemporary praise music has created a catalogue of songs that most people (young and old) find singable. Many songs, however are simplistic—musically and theologically. As pastor of First Congregational Church in Binghamton, New York I formed a praise band in 1997. Collaborating with two very talented co-directors, Amy Liberatore and Ethelyn Enos, one of our biggest challenges was to find music that had a progressive theology. We often found ourselves editing the lyrics to make the songs more inclusive and theologically true to our UCC sensitivities. Fortunately the three of us were able to compose our own music. Today, twenty years later, “Joyful Noise” continues to share worship leadership at the church even though I am no longer the church’s pastor.
While praise music focuses on new songs, I submit that we have an extensive repertoire of hymns just waiting to receive extra attention from jazz musicians. The challenge, of course, is to create a jazz arrangement that stays true to the vision of the original composition with a “swing” feeling that can be sung. There’s nothing worse than worshippers trying to sing a congregational hymn and not being able to find the beat . . . or having the hymn played in a “square” lowest common denominator style. So, here are some important considerations for arranging hymns in the jazz genre.

1. **Affirm the integrity of the hymn—its melody and lyrics.** While every hymn has a variety of interpretive possibilities it’s important to acknowledge the hymn’s musical framework and intrinsic character. Then ask yourself, what is the creative kernel in this music that begs to be explored?

2. **Use your imagination.** Look outside the familiar. Burst the musical box that may hold the hymn prisoner to time and tradition. What would this hymn sound like with a different beat or changing the meter? How can your instrumentation make it sound new and fresh? How about a tempo change?

3. **Remember your congregation.** Your job is to provide hymns that are singable and draw people into the heart of worship. Hymn singing should be a catalyst for inspiring each person to connect more deeply with the Holy. On any given Sunday not every person may like every hymn, but the beauty of worship is that we sing together.

4. **Use the arrangement not only to inspire but also to educate.** Prior to playing it in worship consider providing a brief introduction—the story behind the hymn, its composer and/or lyricist, the context of the arrangement, how it fits into a jazz genre. Get people creatively invested in the hymn.

5. **Whatever the instrumentation of your ensemble make sure you have a vocalist that can lead congregational singing.** Demonstrating the melodic and rhythmic feel will go a long way in helping the congregation feel comfortable as they experience a new dimension to their worship.

The beauty of jazz is that it can take just about any hymn and, with a little imagination and creativity, make it sound entirely new without losing the essence of the original. Included here is my arrangement of one of the most popular hymns of the Church—Beethoven’s Hymn to Joy, which we most commonly sing as “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” I’ve used this arrangement in churches on many occasions and it always takes people by surprise at first when they learn they’re about to sing in 5/4 time. Let’s return to the five steps I’ve mentioned and see how this fits together.

1. As I was preparing to arrange this hymn one thing was absolutely clear. However it is sung, it must be done with a joyfulness that emanates from the heart. I remember, on more than one occasion, singing this hymn at a church where the tempo was slow and plodding. This hymn does not need to be played fast, rather with a lightness and buoyancy that breaths life into it.

2. I began to look for ways to syncopate the melody without complicating it and suddenly, 5/4 just leapt out at me. It seemed a natural fit. But 5/4 is almost never used in hymns. So the arrangement needed something to establish a framework and provide consistent propulsion throughout. What better instrument to use than the double bass (or bass guitar). I looked at the hymn harmonically and began to see a recurring chord pattern that allowed the bass to sustain the riff then switch to a new pattern during the second motif, then back to the bass riff which can be used effectively as a vamp between verses.

3. While I saw the new arrangement as being quite singable I knew, that without adequately setting up and introducing the hymn, the average person in the pew could easily become disoriented. The bass vamp introduction sets the tone and with the staggered entrance of the drums and piano creates a firm structural foundation. The 5/4 time signature works wonderfully to hold everything together.

4. Then to make sure that folks feel comfortable I provide some verbal instruction. As the musicians vamp, repeating the first four measures, I encourage the congregation by offering a tongue in cheek statement such as: “This doesn’t sound like Joyful, Joyful does it? And if you listen closely you’ll hear that there are five beats to a measure.” I’ll sometimes actually count the beats out—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, reassuring everyone that it will be easy to sing. Then I invite worshippers to listen as the band plays it through once, usually with a sax or trumpet playing the melody. After playing it through once I’ll invite everyone to stand as the rhythm section continues to vamp.

5. Here’s where song leadership comes in. Either I, or a vocalist will sing along with worshippers using a microphone. Having audio support for the singer is vitally important for the people in the pew and the instrumentalists. At the end of each verse I might encourage the congregation to take a deep breath as the band continues to vamp. Then it’s on to the next verse. During the past several years of playing this arrangement people have expressed their appreciation for singing it in a new way and being verbally encouraged throughout the hymn.

I invite you to use this arrangement in your worship. You will notice that there is no written keyboard accompaniment or drum chart. This arrangement is written for jazz musicians who refer to it as a lead sheet. If the music leadership of your church does not have a jazz background I encourage you to find musicians in your community who feel comfortable playing in worship. A good rhythm section and horn player will take this chart and give it life. Add a vocalist/song leader and you’re good to go. I hope you’ll pass this music along as a blessing to be shared.
Book Review: From Glory into Glory, Reflections for Worship

by Gregory Chestnut

From Glory into Glory, Reflections for Worship by Susan Palo Cherwien.

Morning Star Music Publications, MSM-90-42, 2009, 364 pages,


I first discovered this delightful collection of short meditations a few years ago while attending a workshop with Susan Palo Cherwien at the Montreat Worship and Music Conference. The book has since become one of my favorite resources for choir devotions, liturgy, hymn festivals, and my own personal reflection. Indeed the author originally wrote the work to be read aloud at hymn festivals and has included very effective hymn festival outlines in the back of the book. Each festival outline is developed around a creative theme and specifically chosen hymns are paired with the readings. There is also a Hymn index with references to nine leading hymnals and even a choral music resource index making this book essential for anyone planning hymn festivals.

The author suggests that the readings are not intended to be poetry, yet they are lined as such. Hearing the author read the works herself, my memory is seared with how slowly and thoughtfully she read each phrase. It seemed as though she was enjoying the way the words felt in her mouth, letting her mind think about how a singer might deliver each phrase. This allowed the listener time to let the words soak in and the thoughts to be absorbed.

The book is divided into 30 sections; some sections are geared for use in the church year, others more general and always very creative. Most sections include between five to nine readings. Some of the sections most appropriate for choir devotions are One Joyful Choir, Wonder Love Praise, In Our Music, The Thousand Voices and The Song. My church has used some of the sections as liturgy for special seasons including, Pilgrimage, Revealing, Healing and Peace, Follow Me: Lent, God’s Friday, Shout for Joy, and Christus Rex.

I find the readings to be a well balanced mix of biblical and historical references, well-researched science, references to classic literature, nature, and much more. I believe there is something for everyone in this book.

And just to wet your appetite...

IV Vibration

When we sing in community
our voices amplify each other
strengthen each other
we become part of a cosmic symphony,
of the morning stars singing together,
of the forest trees shouting for joy,
of the stars crying out.
We breathe together
we literally form a conspiracy
con - spirare
people breathing together
people of the same spirit.
We amplify each other
strengthen each other
become more than we can be alone.
We vibrate together
with what we sing
truth
beauty
wonder
love
praise
and by singing godly stories
we become,
as precious people and as community
more godly.
And by singing out divine acts
we vibrate more with
the energy of the divine.
And by singing together of Christly things
we become more Christly.
Nothing disappears without a trace.

Wonder.
Love.
Praise.

“Vibration” from From Glory into Glory by Susan Palo Cherwien. Copyright © 2009 Birnamwood Publications (ASCAP), A division of MorningStar Music Publishers, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Gregory Chestnut is the Minister of Music and Fine Arts at First Congregational UCC in Sarasota, Florida and is a board member with a focus on workshops for UCCMA.
For Simon, In loving memory.

In the Darkest Hour

Words and Music by David F. Stone

February 2014

John 13, 14

Copyright 2014 David F. Stone
In the Darkest Hour

Let me wash your feet.

Soon I go from here.

Cherish these words that I speak.

to my father's house.

When darkness yields to morning, the fear and gloom subside.

In the light I shine for all mankind from which no one can hide.
In the Darkest Hour

I will come to you, in your darkest hour, when hope's death seems complete.

From that darkest hour, a new age will spring.

Blossoms of love and of peace. For Death can't conquer hope, and Death won't conquer me!

I will surely arise, and stand before your eyes, to welcome in the new day!
In the Darkest Hour

When darkness yields to morning, the fear and gloom subside.

In the light I shine for all mankind from which no one can hide.

I am there with you, in your darkest hour, when hope’s side,

death seems complete.
Writing is a deeply personal undertaking. It becomes even deeper and more personal when you write about your faith. Head, heart and soul are all employed in writing a hymn. If I thought about it too much, I probably wouldn't write hymns. Taking the words of faith and putting them into other peoples' mouths, where those words can change hearts and shape souls is a frightening and humbling undertaking. Yet I and others do it, all the while hoping that the Holy Spirit is at work with us. Equal doses of humility and courage are required.

I started writing hymns for the oddest of reasons: I became fascinated with the metrics. When I learned that 9898 meant that there were 9 syllables in the first line and 8 syllables in the second line, I became intrigued with the task of fitting words into those syllabic limitations and making the words make sense. My first efforts were, to say the least, primitive. I could match the syllables, and more or less have some meaning in the language. However, under closer scrutiny, I realized that the accents didn't work and the lines didn't rhyme. The light dawned – there is more to hymns than just syllables. I was hooked.

Of course, those early efforts were never going to leave my house, so the content was not really important, right? Wrong. Much as I was happy to sing my own material in the shower, what was the point of writing a congregational song if no one else is going to sing it? On the other hand, while I had been a writer in various genres all my life, I had never written on matters of faith, and never in a million years expected to be doing so. What could I possibly have to say about faith - I with my degree in theatre, my years of working for the government, my computer processing skills and my present employment as a fundraiser?

In the course of this process, I discovered two things about myself. First, I write to figure out what I am thinking. When I begin writing a hymn, I don’t always know what it is going to say and how it is going to end. I figure out the message and the ending in the process of working through the information I have. Sometimes that takes a long time and sometimes it happens quickly. Second, I am a story teller. While I would be terrified to sit at a fireside and tell a story, I am happy to take a Biblical narrative and weave it into a hymn so that congregational singers can retell the stories they are hearing. Both of these discoveries have helped me to understand my own writing process.

Over my twelve years of hymn writing, I have solidified some guidelines for myself. Early on, I found I needed some boundaries – boundaries that would allow me to write with integrity while exploring the craft. These are the ones I have adopted through my experience. I use them to create the space in which I write. They are in no particular order, as I think each is important. Full disclosure – I have broken every one of these rules, often repeatedly. But each time I have broken them, it has been intentional, the result of a creative choice. Knowing full well that each writer should make their own set of guidelines, I share mine with you.

Pray. This is a good place to start. A healthy dose of humility is in order – we cannot do God’s work without God’s help. Wisdom, openness, inspiration, discretion and the gentle touch of the Holy Spirit are good things to respectfully request when writing about God.

Texts should be Biblical. Some texts may be totally Biblical, re-telling Bible stories or paraphrasing specific verses. Others may start with a specific verse and expand beyond that. But I strongly believe that every song text should have its roots solidly in scripture. I have written texts that speak broadly about God, but cannot point clearly at least one particular verse; I confess to a level of discomfort with these texts. I hold out the hope that someone with greater Biblical literacy than I possess will someday point out the verse where they originated, and I will be absolved.

Write in the third person plural. I truly believe that congregational songs are meant to be sung by the congregation, singing as the one body and, with that in mind, I think that the third person plural is the preferred way to write hymns. Regarding my full disclosure above, this is
the rule I have probably broken most often. I have written multiple texts in the first person singular; usually attempts to have the singers “walk around in the shoes” of a Biblical character. But those exceptions aside, I still firmly believe that I am writing songs for the congregation.

Include a call to action. It is all very well to talk about faith, but our faith should move us to actions, be they small or large. Appropriate to their topic, hymns should, among other things, encourage kindness and generosity, call for understanding, urge justice and advocate for peace.

Make texts singable. That may seem like pointing out the obvious but it is not always the case. Combinations of words that trip up the tongue, or a long stretch of multiple syllable words are problematic. They can cause the singer to stumble, drawing attention to the words themselves rather than to the message they carry. I always sing (privately) my texts out loud before I let them out of the house. Then I am ashamed of asking a group to sing them so that I can listen. I can tell pretty quickly if I am leaving my singers tongue tied.

Have confidence in my own poetic voice. I am in awe of many hymn writers, living and dead, whose words have helped to shape and continue to shape my soul. While I aspire to write as they did and do, I remind myself that I have a voice, my own unique voice, and that I need to be bold and courageous in using it, not bending it to align it with the voices of others. Not everyone will like or agree with my voice, but that is the risk I, and any other writer, take. Along with this, I do not actively seek out or study the work of other contemporary writers. When their work comes to me, in the course of a hymn related project or event, I read it, sing it, savor it, and learn from it.

Don’t give God a gender. As a woman of a certain age, I grew up with the imagery of God as Father, and to a certain degree that vision is still written on my bones. I love old hymns and while I resist those that are heavily saturated with masculine language, I still sing heartily those which, with a lighter touch, evoke masculine images. But I don’t write that way. As my faith has matured, I have moved away from those beliefs. Cerebrally, sat least, I believe that God is all genders and no gender. Unfortunately, the English language has no pronouns (yet) that communicate that, making that a challenge for the writer. No easy answers here; just a call for creative thinking.

Avoid archaic language. Don’t get me wrong. I love Shakespeare. I love the King James Version of the Bible. But we already have a canon of congregational songs that employ their language. I choose to write in contemporary – though dignified – language with the words arranged in a natural speaking order. I won’t say it isn’t tempting to shuffle a word order to allow for a really amazing rhyme, but it is a temptation I try to resist. I shunned the use of contractions for a long time but I do now use them, albeit judiciously.

Remember the Trinity. It is impossible to cover everything on a topic in one hymn. Writing requires about making creative choices to focus the material and to make a point. In a Trinitarian church, the congregation needs to sing a repertory that includes the three entities of the Trinity. I have tried, over my total corpus to speak of and to all three, sometimes all in one song and sometimes spread out over multiple texts. I tend to neglect the Spirit, and have to remind myself from time to time, that the Spirit, while perhaps more challenging to talk about, is no less important than our Creator and our Redeemer.

Work with an underlying tune. A wise composer once advised me to always work with an underlying tune, even if it is not the tune intended for the text, and I have (usually) followed her sage advice. Even when a poet’s meter is solidly constructed, differences between verses – especially involving sustained vowel sounds and hyphenations – can bedevil a composer writing for a text. Working with an underlying tune helps to iron out these inconsistencies.

Experiment with different meters. Some meters come very naturally to me – 8787 and Common Meter especially – and I have a tendency to default to them. Sometimes I have to make a conscious effort to seek out and use other meters. Here again, using an underlying tune can help.

Don’t try to force creativity. Sometimes the words race through my head so fast that my typing fingers cannot keep up. At other times, nothing is happening. Sitting with a pen and paper in front of me when my stomach is hungry and my brain is not functioning will not make a text come to life. It is time to concede, walk away, eat something, and think about something else.

And the corollary – don’t rush the finish. I cannot tell you how many times I have said “This is PERFECT!!! Print it!,” pressed the “save” button, and opened Outlook to send it to its destination. Then I have paused to say, “Well, let’s give it one more day,” turned off the computer and walked away, only to return to it the next day and say “Who wrote this junk!??!!” Creativity takes time and patience. It needs clear eyes and a rested and renewed mind. Sometimes a fresh look will cause me to rearrange some lines, or replace one word with another that is more evocative. And then it really is perfect – or perhaps I should say that it is less imperfect. Having slaved over a text, and being eager to complete it and impatient to move on to the next project, I have to remind myself that is not a good reason to rush to the finish.

Strive to say old things in new ways. There are many images that we use and re-use because they are Biblical and have stood the test of time. But is it a waste of God-given creativity to not look for new images and new metaphors? Along with this, I try not to use the same words repeatedly in the same hymn – unless it is done for a purpose. We have a rich language and we should put it to work. To do otherwise is to be a lazy writer and God deserves better.

Don’t settle for cheap rhymes. Some rhymes come easily and others are monumentally challenging. From time to time, I say to myself, “If you are going to make a rhyme, make it a good one.” Many hymn poets are moving away from writing only hymns that rhyme. I feel I have permission to do that, but have not been able to take that step yet.

Ask for help. I am not a musician. I do not compose hymn tunes and I can only just barely read music. Much of my relationship to hymn tunes is by ear. Given this limitation, I often reach out to my friends who are church music professionals, to play and sing what I have written. I tend to think of many tunes at a faster tempo than was intended, or to embellish them with too much of a lilt (blame it on my years as a dancer). Musicians can slow me down (for the sake of the singers) and make me more sensitive to the music I am using, while pointing out possible pitfalls. I have also been the beneficiary of help from other hymn text writers, who have been willing to read my texts and comment on them.

Everyone is busy and I try not to abuse the time of busy people, but we all pay it
forward from time to time. I am deeply indebted to those who have generously shared their time and expertise with me and I hope to be able help others when needed.

**Remember that song texts are poetry.** Talking about God, by definition, requires metaphor and simile. But I try to be bold and go ahead and use alliteration, anaphora, tautology (the Psalms did it), parallelism, paradox, hyperbole, and all of the other tools in the poet’s tool box.

Words are a wonderful thing – use them extravagantly, and with during flourishes, but in a way that will complement the message of the text and touch the soul of the singer, without drawing undue attention to the poet’s craft.

**Pray.** This is where I started and this is where I end. This prayer is a prayer of gratitude – gratitude for music, for inspiration, for the writers who have gone before and for those who will follow, and gratitude to God for having been invited to do this very special work.

It is entirely possible, readers, that many of you will disagree with some or all my guidelines and I would be shocked if that was not the case. I share them in the spirit of encouraging that conversation while also of assembling thoughts than in making their usefulness, I keep them anyway – I can always get rid of them later.

**Hymn Writing Process**

As I said in the beginning, writing is deeply personal and I suspect that my writing process is also uniquely mine. There is no reason why the process should work for anyone else. And it is liquid – it changes over time and according to what I am writing. With those caveats in mind, I am sharing with you an overview of my approach.

**Step 1 – Decide on a topic.** Early on I took my themes from hymn searches. In a manner of speaking, they gave me an “assignment,” to work with. I still love assignments but I have also found that I can find my own inspiration.

**Step 2 – Do a brain dump.** I write down everything (and I do mean everything) that pops into my mind about the subject at hand. I write down the lucid with the trite and the inspired with the tedious, forcing myself not to self-edit at this early stage. And I usually do this on paper.

**Step 3 – Consolidate this brain dump into a word processing document and continue to add to it.** I re-type all my notes on my laptop, adding new thoughts as they come along. The end result becomes my working document.

**Step 4 – Do Biblical research.** I am fond of the Oremus website though there are other searchable Bibles online. Using key words from my notes, I search for relevant scripture and copy those references into my working document. When in doubt of their usefulness, I keep them anyway – I can always get rid of them later.

**Step 5 – Do wider research.** If I am writing a text for a particular church (as in the case of a hymn search or commission) I research that church. I read their website, particular looking for their mission statement and core values. I try to find out what hymnal they use. If they are available, I look at bulletins for recent services. All of this will tell me something about the congregation for which I am writing. I always strive to write with personal integrity, but within that, I want to write for the congregation that will be singing the song. Also under the category of research, I do not look at other hymns on the same topic, as I would prefer not to be influenced by them.

**Step 6 – Group the ideas.** This is most easily done on the computer. I read through all the material in my working document and see what is related and what is not. I am always surprised at how easily the ideas fall into clusters. Many scribbles have common threads and can be pulled together. Grouping the phrases also helps me to organize my thoughts on the topic.

**Step 7 – Identify a key phrase.** In my process, this is a critical step and often has a significant effect on the final product. There is no magic formula here – it is a gut thing. I can almost always settle on a key phrase that I know I want included in the text. If it is rhythmic or can be made rhythmic, then its rhythm may determine the ultimate meter of the text – and help me find the underlying tune that I will use while writing the text. While it is not foolproof, I cannot overstate the influence of this step. I can still throw out this idea and go back to the drawing board, or I can follow it through to completion.

**Step 8 – Edit.** Now it gets serious. This is the point at which I begin putting the words together and figuring out what I want to say. Conversely, I begin to edit out things I do not want to say. This is a process of assembling thoughts than in making lines metrical and rhyming, though some phrases fall naturally into meter and rhyme.

**Step 9 – Wordsmith.** At this point (for no particular reason other than it works for me) I begin to move back and forth between computer and paper. I will edit for a while on my laptop, then print a copy and work on the paper copy for a while. When the paper becomes too cluttered with notes and changes, I go back to the computer and work for a while. Then back to paper. Each time I go back to the computer, I “grandfather” my prior document, so that I can go back to something if I need to – this frees me up to delete things from my document, knowing that I can recover them later if needed. This process can go on for several days, often with me forcing myself to put the work away and come back with a fresh view a day later. Then the paper-to-computer-to-paper cycle starts again. All the while, I am keeping the underlying tune in mind, as it is the skeleton upon which I am building. And for what it is worth, when I am working on paper, I strongly prefer working with a fountain pen.

**Step 10 – Enrich the language.** Around this time I bring out my rhyming dictionary and my thesaurus. I have good paper ones though I often prefer the more nimble online versions. These are instrumental resources.

**Step 11 – Add music.** I am not a musician, but I can navigate my way in Noteworthy Composer, so I put in the melody line of my working tune and I add the words. This creates a visual of the text, layering and interleaving the verses so that I can see their parallels or lack thereof. This also highlights where I am dividing syllables, helping me to see if I am placing awkward sounds onto sustained notes. If problems are fixable, I fix them.

**Step 12 – Go back to the poem itself and finish the process.** There have been a notable number of times when I have thought a text was finished, only to find myself later re-arranging the lines in a verse, or switching lines from one verse to another. During this final round of editing, there are opportunities to think out of the box. Sometimes, experimenting with a change that is outrageous or counterintuitive can help to affirm that the original was right in the first place, confirming that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Another favorite
technique is to dramatically change the font that I have been using, forcing me to see the text with new eyes. Words pop out that have been there all along, but I haven’t “seen” them in recent readings – and they may need some attention. Ultimately, of course, I change the document back to my old reliable but very safe and classic Times New Roman. Having done all this, at some point I declare the text done and (modestly) declare it to be good. I sign my name to it, document its themes and scriptural references, and send it on its way, accompanied by a prayer of thanks for guidance, creativity, and for being entrusted with this important work.

Writing a congregational song is a process of putting together a complex puzzle. The pieces are words, rhythms, accents, rhyme, imagery and (perhaps most importantly) message. To complicate things, this is not a static puzzle but a puzzle with moving parts – some are slippery, some are awkward, some are recalcitrant and refuse to cooperate. Adding complexity, hymn writing is a combination of writing from the heart and writing from the head, balancing the words of faith with the technique of the poet and the gifts of the composer. My hope in writing is that some of the songs I write will turn out to be heart songs for singers. If someone sometime, sings one of my texts the way, accompanied by a prayer of thanks for guidance, creativity, and for being entrusted with this important work.

The CD has ten pieces. The first work is Jacob’s Ladder, a Parable for Organ and Strings, a four-movement work: “Leaving Home under a cloud,” “Anxiety Dream,” “Entr’acts: Falling into a Deep Sleep,” and “Jacob’s Ladder.” Organist Tom Winpenny (Assistant Master of the Music at St. Alban’s Cathedral, UK) and The Dmitri Ensemble (an eleven-member string group, conducted by Graham Ross) are featured. Neither the organ nor ensemble were the “soloist” but an equal duo. “Jacob’s Ladder” has rhythmic drive and energetic eerie passages. It begins softly and crescendos to loud organ and string ensemble sounds ending in a dynamic cluster of tonalities. This work was commissioned for the 2008 American Guild of Organists National Convention in Minneapolis.

The rest of the CD is organ only. St. Bride, assisted by Angels illustrates the story of the Celtic goddess Bridig, who is reborn as St. Bride. She visits the Nativity and witnesses the rebirth of time. This has a particularly interesting prelude: “The Road to Emmaus.” Bingham uses the colors of the organ and Winpenny’s musicianship to tell the story in Luke 24: 13-35. The dissonances illustrate the unawareness of Christ’s death and then its sadness. Calming harmonies appear with a peaceful recognition of Christ, who is risen.

Another outstanding work is The Annunciation and Birth of Christ, inspired by a painting by Georges de la Tour. This improvisatory-like single-movement piece depicts two scenes: a quiet reflection of a candle flickering while the angel’s wings approach, then the overwhelming realization of Mary’s responsibility. Bingham’s use of a flute and strings on the organ with Winpenny’s technical artistry make it easy to visualize the beginning of the scene. Mary’s realization becomes clear when the drama in sound and tonality increases.

Ancient Sunlight is in three parts: “Infancy,” “Betrothal,” and “Annunciation.” “Infancy” is very interesting – simple arpeggios resemble an Aeolian harp. Clearly the quiet use of flutes and strings reflect the tenderness of a baby.

Into the Wilderness is a response to Christ’s temptation by Satan. This is the longest single movement on the CD (10:17). Satan’s appearance is depicted in fleeting and dissonant sounds that use the mixtures while Christ’s calming appearance is heard in flutes and string chords.

The organ at St. Albans Cathedral is a three-manual instrument first installed by William Hill in 1861. It was remodeled and enlarged by Abbott & Smith in 1885. John Oldrid installed new organ cases in 1908 and Henry Willis revoiced the instrument in 1929. In 1962, Harrison & Harrison rebuilt the organ and then returned in 2007 to refurbish and restore the wind reservoirs and renew the soundboard, which was completed in 2009.

All the music on this CD was recorded in the composer’s presence at the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St. Alban’s, UK.

Jo Deen (Jody) Blaine Davis is the president of UCCMA.
Who among church musicians has not wanted to add an uplifting descant to the final verse of a hymn, and looked in vain for the right setting?

[A caution: when writing original descants, one must carefully check for public domain hymns—and there are quite a few—or ask permission, which means planning ahead.]

Besides necessity, what might inspire us to try our hand at creating descants? Here is a short list: Descants are joyful; they provide a festive touch, perhaps with a trumpet! Singers love them; descants can create excitement and inspiration in the congregational singing; they can illuminate the words of a stanza; instrumentalists are pleased to get something besides an un-transposed hymn (their expression says, “For me?”); descants freshen up an old favorite hymn, in fact descants are best used with well-known hymns; and, importantly for us, descants are fun to write. Writing original descants is a vehicle for beginning to create music in a small, but useful way.

So, why not give writing descants a try? Primarily, the purpose of this article is to empower the reader to begin to compose descants and thus to know the indescribable joy of creativity.

Suggestion: To keep the ideas flowing (as in all creative work), do not be harshly judgmental of yourself. There is a significant difference between accurate evaluation of one’s work and paralyzing criticism.

First, a word about the term: The word, “descant” (spelled “discant” in early forms) has several meanings, reaching as far back as the 12th Century, when it was an added part above a cantus firmus. For our purposes, descant will simply mean a composed or improvised upper part added to a hymn tune, as the melody is sung by the choir or congregation.

Let’s consider David Willcocks’ last-verse descant and arrangement on “Once in Royal David’s City,” (Irby). The carol is a traditional part of the Lessons and Carols Service sung annually by the King’s College Choir, Cambridge; it would be helpful to listen to a version sung by this choir, perhaps on YouTube.

Example 1: Once in Royal David’s City (Irby), last verse: descant and arrangement by David Willcocks.

“Once in Royal David’s City” arranged by David Willocks from “100 Carols for Choirs.” Copyright: Oxford University Press 1970. Extracts reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.
Characteristics of an effective descant, using examples from “Once in Royal David’s City”

This descant:

- seems to grow out of the melody and harmony of the setting; it belongs as part of the whole.
- is uplifting to the spirit, building to a climactic point of one highest note (in this case two, caused by repetition, but resolving differently — see the last two phrases, at the crescendo).
- adds to a festive occasion, such as its typical use at the beginning of the beloved Service of Lessons and Carols, building from a treble solo, with the choir entering on verse 2, and joined by the congregation from verse 3.
- enhances the meaning of the text (note the growing excitement of the last phrase with its vision of heaven).
- can help the congregation sing better (any confusion defeats this prime purpose).
- is beloved by treble singers; their joy is contagious.

Specific musical attributes in the Willcocks example

The descant melody:

- has an independent musical line with its own interest and shape. (although independence is often desirable, good descants may also be wedded more closely to the tune. See examples 5 and 6.)
- has rhythmic and melodic contrast, harmonic interest (e.g., upbeat, hymn-tune = 2 quarters, descant = dotted quarter and eighth note).
- moves when the tune stands still and vice versa (measure 1).
- moves upward to E while the hymn tune stays on G (measure 1).
- honors word accent there and at “oxen standing by.”
- is affected by the form of the original melody (for example: Bar Form AAB, AABA, ABA, the presence of a refrain). There is the option of varied treatments at repeated phrases. In phrase two (not shown), the melody and descant remain the same, but the words are different and the accompaniment is harmonized differently.
- is deceptively simple throughout.
- employs passing tones, (measure 1), emphasizes consonant intervals including 3rds and 6ths, and adds a touch of dissonance, such as the accented suspension (or appoggiatura) in measure 3, beat 3, and in the last 2 beats of the penultimate measure.

[Look at other famous Willcocks descants, such as: “O come, all ye faithful,” “Hark! the herald-angels sing” and “The first Nowell” from the collection 100 Carols for Choirs, Edited and Arranged by David Willcocks & John Rutter: Oxford University Press 1970.]

Vocal issues with descants: “But I do not have a highly trained boy soprano section!”

Some suggested solutions:

- Use “light voices,” designate two or three voices (possibly only one clear voice) on the highest note.
- Ask for little or no vibrato just for a brief time.
- Employ vowel modification toward “ah” on higher notes.
- Encourage good breath support; after preliminary warm-ups, work up to effective range builder exercises. Keep descant range/tessitura lower for mature voices.
- Double the descant with a flute or other C instrument, even a trumpet.

Knowledge of theory issue: “Can I succeed without being trained in harmony?”

It is possible to write intuitively, based on how the descant sounds with the rest of the parts. One should at least, however, acquire a knowledge of cadence chords in keys up to 3 or 4 sharps or flats. It is helpful to know something about basics, such as: chord progressions; factoring out chord tones from a given chord; doubling roots and 5th s of chords, 3rds less often except in minor triads; cadential patterns; and secondary dominants. With limited theory knowledge, one might at first choose shorter hymns, write only for a hymn refrain or use hymns with easily recognizable chords that change less frequently (slower harmonic rhythm). Whether parallel octaves and 5ths are admissible depends on the style and whether one is doubling another part. Contrary motion usually eliminates the problem of parallels.

It is also possible to write well in two-parts with the melody alone. One is likely, though, to find this can result in a different harmonization from the one given. Although essentially beyond the scope of the present article, hymn reharmonization can definitely be a part of descant writing. (See example 3, next page.)

Are you ready to begin? Essentially all you need is a good, fairly recent hymnal for locating tunes and texts and checking copyrights.

[In compiling this mini-course in composing descants, I have used The Hymnal 1982 extensively because of its precise copyright listings and because it contains a significant number of hymns with descants, which I have listed at the end of this article. Other recent denominational hymnals, several of which I also consulted frequently, likely contain most of the suggested hymns, plus information on copyright holders as well.]

The following examples are taken from public domain hymns unless otherwise noted. For your first efforts, it is helpful to review the list of musical features in the Willcocks descant for techniques you may want to include in your examples.

Composing your own descants: Tips for getting started, including examples of techniques for creating descants plus suggested assignments, to comprise a mini-course for your writing.

Tip 1. Start with the hymn melody and depart. It is easy to find the descant starting note and helpful when lack of rehearsal time is a factor (as is usual).

Example 2: Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing (Sicilian Mariners) (see next page)

Suggested Assignments:

Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life (Germany) Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation (Westminster Abbey) Jesus, Lover of My Soul (Aberystwyth)

Start with the hymn melody and depart from it after a few beats, continuing for at least the first line of the hymn. Keep going if possible.

[In these assignments, you may find the suggested texts with other tunes; try to use the hymn texts given at first. Feel free to write complete descants with
each assignment or to try the suggested technique and move on.]

Tip 2. Use imitation in descants.

Example 3: The God of Abraham Praise (Leoni or Yigdal) N. B. (see below) Two-part imitative writing results here in the necessity for reharmonizing the hymn tune.

Suggested Assignments: Imitation The Lord’s My Shepherd (Crimond)
Jerusalem, My Happy Home (Land of Rest) Use imitation for at least a few beats.

Tip 3. Study a few canons.

Example 4: Study a setting of Tallis’ Canon (The Eighth Tune) in The Hymnal 1982 (# 43). The hymn may be sung as a four-part canon with entries one measure apart on the upbeat.

Suggested Assignments: Canons only (no descants needed) Iona Gloria (Iona)
When Jesus Wept (William Billings)
Dona nobis pacem (traditional canon)
It is helpful to write out the parts in canon in order to observe the resulting harmony.

Tip 4. Compare independent descant lines versus those that follow the flow of the hymn melody.

Example 5: Look At To God with Gladness Sing (Camano) by Richard Proulx in The Hymnal 1982 (# 399). Also see Example 13 on p. 28: Descant for two trumpets on: All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name (Coronation). Both achieve a certain independence of line.

Example 2: Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing (Sicilian Mariners)

Example 3: The God of Abraham Praise (Leoni or Yigdal) N. B. Two-part imitative writing results here in the necessity for reharmonizing the hymn tune.
Example 6: The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended (St. Clement) (see next page)

Suggested Assignments:
Comparing independent descant lines versus those that follow the flow of the hymn tune. Festal Song (tune only)

Achieve an independent descant melody against Festal Song for at least the first four measures. Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding (Merton)

Work more closely within the hymn tune line of Merton, using passing tones, other non-harmonic tones, or rhythmic changes to provide interest in the descant melody.

Tip 5. Set the refrain only of a hymn.

Example 7: Examine “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (Royal Oak) with descant by Robert Proulx in The Hymnal 1982 (# 406).

Suggested Assignments:
Set descants for the refrains only of:
The First Noel, the Angel Did Say (The First Noel) All Glory, Laud and Honor (St. Theodulph)

Tip 6. Use single words, such as Alleluia.

Example 8: Look at: Alleluia, Alleluia! Give thanks to the risen Lord (Alleluia No. 1) in The Hymnal 1982 (# 178) or elsewhere; Alleluia No. 1 is also an example of a descant on the refrain only.

Suggested Assignments:
Silent Night (Stille Nacht) Set “Alleluia” or “Gloria” as a descant, using some hymn words from verse 3 if desired.

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus! (Hyfrydol) Set “Alleluia” in mostly dotted half notes for the last eight measures.

Tip 7. Use proper word accents.

Example 9: Look at “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (Dennis).

Note word accent on the first beat of the measure in verse 4: “When we are called to part…”

Suggested Assignment:
Puer Nobis

Use your choice of LM texts associated with this tune, such as “That Easter Day with Joy was Bright.” Set a descant for at least the first line, with close attention to word accent.

Tip 8. Try setting wordless passages or omitting some words.

Example 10: Let All Things Now Living (Ash Grove) by Katherine K. Davis (see next page)

Suggested Assignment:
O God, our help in ages past (St. Anne)

Start the descant for verse 6 on beat 4 of measure 1 and set the first line, using all words if possible, catching up as needed, and with proper word accent, on the dotted half note.

Tip 9. Try using descants or counter melodies in other voices than soprano (tenor, for instance).

Example 11: What Wondrous Love Is This (Wondrous Love) (see next page)

Suggested Assignment:
Angels from the Realms of Glory (Regent Square)

In the refrain, leave the bass in place; try placing the melody in the tenor and writing a descant in the soprano, perhaps using part of the present tenor.

Tip 10. Blast through your creative blocks by decorating only the end of a hymn, as sopranos often do, by adding a high note or two or three. (Blocks are very common, often based on fear of criticism, not lack of ideas. Develop ways to work around them.)

Example 12: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (Lobe den Herren) (see next page)

Suggested Assignment:
Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy (Arise)

Using contrary motion where possible, add a descant line to the last two bars of the refrain: “O, there are ten thousand charms.”

Instrumental Descants:

Let us look briefly at two more classes of descants. The first is descants for instruments. Instruments can, of course, join in on choral descants, or they can play the descant alone. An obvious advantage of setting a purely instrumental descant is that there is no problem fitting texts. It is also sometimes easier to achieve an independent melodic line without needing to set words.

Bach composed beautiful instrumental descants for the closing chorales of some of his cantatas. Listen on YouTube to the closing chorale, Was Gott tut, das is wohgetan from Cantata 12: Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen (Oboe and Trumpet descant; the other instruments double the choral parts).

Example 13: Descent for Two Trumpets in B-flat on: All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name (Coronation). (see p. 28)

Suggested assignments for instrumental descants:
Composing descants for a flute or other C instrument on the following hymns: Silent Night, Holy Night (Stille Nacht)
O Little Town of Bethlehem (St. Louis)

Organ descants:

An organ descant, improvised or written out, can add new inspiration to a well-used hymn. Jan Overduin (Making Music: Improvisation for Organists, Oxford, 1998, page 145) suggests that organists can “borrow notes from the alto and tenor lines,” placing them above the melody line. These lines can be embellished by passing tones and other non-harmonic tones, producing a workable descant.

In a slightly different approach, organists can start with the melody and depart, embellishing and shaping the descant from the given harmony above a very familiar tune, leaving out inner parts as the right hand goes higher. Hymns with less frequent chord changes work well with this technique.

Suggested Assignments: Add an organ descant to:
Holy God, We Praise Your Name (Grosser Gott, wir Loben dich) Crown Him with Many Crowns (Diademata)
Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty (Nicaea)

Look at lots of descants, and get a feel for which ones work effectively and what techniques are used. Those models belong in your descant toolbox.

Have fun composing your own descants! At your own pace, you can build your creative skills, perhaps leading to more ambitious musical projects!

Maya Angelou said: “Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.”

A good descant can definitely lift us up and leave us breathless!
Sources of descants for study: various denominational hymnals, church choir libraries and publishers’ resources (tip: hymn concertati in libraries and publishers’ catalogs, often contain a descant on the final stanza).


Church Choir Libraries: Look for older collections of descants; also check hymn concertati, which usually include a choral and/or instrumental descant on the last verse.

Publishers’ resources: Publishers do not typically include a separate category for descants. Again, check for hymn concertati that allow you to examine the scores online. Also check for individual descant collections.

Example 6: The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended (St. Clement)

Example 10: Let All Things Now Living (Ash Grove) by Katherine K. Davis

Example 11: What Wondrous Love Is This (Wondrous Love)

Music examples continue on the next page.
Example 12: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (Lobe den Herren)

Example 13: Descant for Two Trumpets in B-flat on: All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name (Coronation).

Organ Introduction

Hymn Public Domain. The transposed parts will work with the Oliver Holden 1793 harmonization in G. Permission granted to use descant.
Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Committee? It’s Not as Scary as You Think.
by Megan Murray

Many people probably cringe at the word committee, and experience a momentary “fight or flight” response when they are asked to join one. Who wants to give up more of their personal time to do more work? Who wants to work with strangers—or even worse, with people you already know? Who needs more stress? What will I get out of it?

A few months after attending my first UCCMA conference in Seattle (which was amazing!), I got a phone call from Jim Winfield, one of the other attendees I met at the conference, asking if I’d be willing to help on the local planning committee for the Chicago 2015 conference. I didn’t know what to expect. Perhaps I was a little intimidated by how cohesive the Seattle conference was, or I wasn’t sure what I could offer as a committee member. After all, I was only a school music teacher with a small church choir director job on the weekends, and hadn’t served on any big committees before—certainly not one planning a national conference! What could I possibly do to help? But Jim seemed to believe in me, so I agreed.

For me, it was all of those things people are often afraid of: it was a lot of work; I worked with seven perfect strangers for about two years; and the final result—the conference—was a whirlwind of activity. But I am very glad that I served on the committee, and had the opportunity to meet those seven people, for it was one of the most rewarding “work” experiences I’ve ever had. In fact, I recommend doing something like it. You might even be changed—for the better—by it.

My Top Four Reasons of Why Serving on a Committee Is A Good Thing

1. It pushed me to learn new things and to challenge myself.

Before the conference, I didn’t feel comfortable making anything more elaborate than worksheets or concert programs for my middle school music students. But once I joined the committee, that changed. I had to learn how to: format pictures and text and music (oh my!) from JPEGs and PDF’s, edit like crazy (with the help of teammate Sharon—she’s fantastic!), talk the “lingo” when ordering booklets, work with a graphic artist, and talk colors and best-looks with the tote bag company. Plus, I knew that people from all over the country would be looking at it. It doesn’t sound very glamorous, but in the end, I created some things of which I was incredibly proud.

2. I had to listen to my team, and think with an open mind and heart.

That’s not always an easy thing to do. I have a feeling that committee members feel more than a little burnt out, especially with an extended timeline of two years, when working on a big project... Meeting every month, answering emails and texts and phone calls in between, trying to meet deadlines, trying to agree on details—these can all be taxing and tedious. But I found that it was much easier when I recognized just how smart and experienced all the other teammates were. We were all chosen for different reasons, and we all had something different and special to offer: reaching out for networking, planning logistics, editing with a fine-toothed comb, making connections, centering on a liturgical message, keeping everyone together. We all had to recognize our own strengths and the strengths of each other; and then trust each other. These things take work and time, but believe me—it is work and time well spent when on a committee!

3. It was about creating something that was special for others.

Yes, committees are a lot of work on top of what we already do as church musicians and whatever other jobs we do. But, serving on this committee became less about the work, and more about what the work was for: our colleagues across the country, trying to connect to others and find new ideas. When we talked about the vendor room, for example, we tried to make it a win-win thing for the attendees and the vendors, and decided to put snacks in there. When we talked about meals, lodging, and navigating the Elmhurst College campus, we tried to put ourselves in the shoes of someone traveling from out of state and make it as easy for them as possible with signs and other little details. When we talked about the worship services, we tried to think of what was special about our own churches, and wider out into the Chicagoland area, and share those things with our guests to make the experience unique and memorable.

4. It brought me closer to some pretty amazing people.

I’m pretty sure my teammates got frustrated with me from time to time (especially with deadlines), but that didn’t stop us from becoming friends. We would often go out to lunch together after our meetings. Some of them belonged to the same church, but let me in on their “inside jokes” like I was one of their members. We made our own jokes together. A lot can happen in two years, and we were there for each other when we needed a shoulder or a friend. After the festivities of the conference each night, some of us would meet at “headquarters” to talk, and relax, and laugh—together. We shared a bond, and I wouldn’t trade it for less work!

Now that the conference is over and we are back to our own projects, we still keep in touch now and then. Some of us are even planning a combined cantata together. I don’t always reach out to them as often as I should, but I think of them often, and say a little prayer for each of them. I had never served on a committee like this before, and at first it was daunting. But it was the little things that started to become big things that mattered most. We hear about “servant leadership” in church, and indeed, serving on or leading a committee can be a lot to add on to our already busy lives. But the rewards come back to you—at least they did for me. I helped make something I was incredibly proud of. I helped strangers have a positive conference experience, whether it was stuffing the tote bags, checking attendees in at breakfast, giving directions, ordering an ÜBer car, or helping to serve Communion. And I made some wonderful friends along the way. In serving others, I ended up feeling fulfilled, and I think that’s what it’s supposed to be about.

Thank you, Michele, Jackie, Sharon, Michael, Larry, Jim and Ann!

Megan Murray is the choir director at Congregational UCC in Arlington Heights, IL and is also a music teacher to elementary and middle school students.
Five Organ Settings from *The Southern Harmony*
arranged by Duncan Vinson

1. Wondrous Love (bicineum for manuals or manual and pedal)

2. Kedron (trio for 2 manuals and pedal)
3. Dunlap's Creek (trio for 2 manuals and pedal)

Published in 2016 and released under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-SA

4. Liverpool (trio for 2 manuals and pedal)
5. Alabama (quartet for 2 manuals and double pedal)

Published in 2016 and released under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-SA

http://duncanvinson.wordpress.com