

Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*



Volume 51.4
Sing a New Song



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Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music* (1971–2000) and *Reformed Liturgics* (1963–69), *Call to Worship* seeks to further the church's commitment to theological integrity, corporate worship, and excellence in music, preaching, and other liturgical art forms.

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Introduction

Kimberly Bracken Long

This issue of *Call to Worship* is brought to you by the dedicated members of PAM's Executive Board. When I began as editor last year, they suggested an issue in which authors examine the state of church music—where we have been, where we are, and where we might go. It sounded like an excellent idea. And it was!

In these pages are the reflections, affirmations, and exhortations of some of the finest voices in church music today. They share their wisdom from the unique perspective each one holds as a leader in various musical fields. Jack Bethards surprises us with his report about the vibrancy of the organ-building business these days. Tom Trenney blesses us with his thoughts about the spirituality of making music together. Bill McConnell opens up the musical offerings of the new edition of the *Book of Common Worship* as only he can do, since he was part of the editorial team. Eric Wall shares his perspective as a musician called to serve in the context of a seminary, urging us to recognize the importance of musical training for those preparing for ministry in the church. Bill Mathis, Anne McNair, Heather Potter, and Dave VanderMeer share their considerable expertise, reminding us why we hold them in such esteem.

I am grateful for the thoughtful perspectives expressed by each of our four fine columnists, Mary Beth Anton, Peter Ncanywa, David Lower, and Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk. They bring their considerable gifts whenever they comment on the subject at hand, and we are the richer for it.

Mary Logan's artistic rendition of Psalm 137, featured in *The Work of Our Hands*, is from my personal collection. I came across her work when she mounted an exhibit at Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta and was grateful when she made it possible for me to own a piece of her art. The photographs by Melinda Thompson Meyers offer you a look at the piece as a whole as well as some of the intricate details. Mary Logan's own statement about her process of art-making, and how she created this particular piece, gives us a rare look into the mind, heart, and soul of an artist.

Reading the words of these authors instills in me a fresh awareness for the extravagant gifts God pours out upon us all—gifts we use to express our deepest desires, affirm our most profound beliefs, proclaim our greatest hopes, and extol the praises of our God, whose love and mercy are inexhaustible. The essays in this issue also renew my sense of gratitude for so many who have given their lives to hone their skills and perfect their craft—not for their own glory, but for the glory of God.

Kimberly Bracken Long

Feature Articles

Singing a New Song in the Past, Present, and Future

Anne McNair

I am humbled by the invitation to share my perspectives on the state of church music within the PC(USA) for this issue of *Call to Worship: Sing a New Song!* As president of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians, I have had wonderful opportunities to speak with ministers, choir directors, organists, choir members, and church music participants about their experiences, passions, and outcomes as they lead music in their respective congregations. I am fortunate to have also worked directly with many musicians, visual artists, Christian educators, and clergy in planning worship services collaboratively for the PAM Worship and Music Summer Conferences at Montreat and at Mo-Ranch. The planning processes for the worship services at those conferences serve as a model for collaborative planning and intentional inclusion of music in worship. I am fortunate to serve in a church that also values collaborative planning. This intentionality of how we use music in worship enables music to play an integral role in worship as we endeavor to “sing a new song.”

In our quest to praise and glorify God through music and song, where have we been? Where are we now? Where are we headed? I will explore a sampling of the history of music ministry in the United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including prevalent traditions and practices throughout those years that affect our current views of exemplary music ministries. I will examine our current, early-twenty-first-century music ministry practices as evidenced by the conversations and observations referenced in the opening paragraph of this article. Finally, I will reflect on where it seems that we are headed as we use music in liturgy, fellowship, and even in outreach ministries, all to the service of the church

and to the glory of God. It is my hope to offer words of encouragement to all who wish to strengthen their faithful service to the church via a strong and vital music ministry. May we collectively sing praise and glory to God in every time and place!

Where Have We Been?

Presbyterians in the United States have long sought to “sing a new song.” I serve a church, First Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia, that claims Lowell Mason as an 1827 charter member and initial ruling elder.¹ Lowell Mason has been called the Father of Church Music in the United States and the Father of Music Education in the United States due to his many contributions to both fields.² He had a passion for both congregational and choral singing. He was a prolific hymn writer. It is estimated that he wrote between six hundred and a thousand hymn tunes and arranged many more for his tune book collections.³ Mason grew up in an era in which church music was the predominant musical medium and church music was being reshaped by the singing schools of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴ There were two opposing views on music’s role in society at that time. One was that music’s primary value was for praising God. The other view, becoming more predominant at the turn of the nineteenth century, was that music could play a vital role in edification, or self-improvement, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.⁵ Lowell Mason saw the value of music in both of these areas, as evidenced by his desire to improve congregational singing for the purpose of praise⁶ and to teach music as a means of edification, or self-improvement. He did not seem to need to choose one view or the other, as music was valuable for both praise and for edification. In fact, Mason felt

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that moral, spiritual, and intellectual edification via music could take place outside of the confines of the church as well as within it.

Mason's legacy stems from his broad vision and relentless efforts, using both musical and leadership skills, to elevate the quality of music in his community at large. He established choral societies and provided numerous opportunities for community members to perform. He was a music advocate and was successful in establishing, in Boston, the first public school music program in the United States. He developed music curriculums and advanced music pedagogy. He wrote music, wrote about music, and wrote about teaching music. He had a love for the church and inclusion of good music in the church, as well as for training church members for musical service. Lowell Mason's work in the nineteenth century paved the way for a twentieth-century explosion in the number of churches that offered graded choir programs for their children and youth, as well as large adult church choirs that performed oratorios and cantatas with orchestras several times per year.

During the twentieth century, and particularly during the baby boom following World War II from 1945 to 1970, churches often served as hubs for social gatherings. Participation in a choir was often another opportunity for church members to gather. Many wanted to be included in a group such as the church choir that emphasized musical excellence in choral performance. No doubt many individuals valued musical excellence for its contributions to worship, bringing their best musical gifts to glorify God. But I wonder if, during the era of very large church choirs, the members of the congregation to some degree abdicated their own responsibility to sing to members of the choir, who they deemed more capable.

Graded choir programs were quite prevalent during the 1950s to 1980s, and many graded choir programs still exist today. These programs generally served well the purpose of teaching music to children so that their music skills could enhance congregational and choral singing. Wonderful composers such as Natalie Sleeth, Austin Lovelace, Helen Kemp, Allen Pote, and many others wrote anthems specifically for children's choirs in the mid- to late-twentieth centuries. Helen Kemp not only taught and directed children's choirs but taught thousands of choral directors, music educators, and volunteers through her work at Westminster Choir

College and through her work as a clinician at many music conferences. She gave the following example of how a children's choir's participation in worship can contribute meaningfully:

Being a visitor, I was pleased that the worship service included the children. Their anthem was part of the acclamation of praise segment, so the children offered their song in the early part of the service. Seven children strong they were as they came to the marble chancel stairs of the very large and beautiful sanctuary. Each child sang from memory with confidence, and with an admirable light, clear tone. They watched the director for tempo and phrasing. They communicated the text with conviction. "Yes," I thought, "that choir sang me into the spirit of worship." I was touched and I gave thanks.⁷

Kemp continued by describing later examples in the service in which the children were not prepared for worship. In those instances, they distracted from rather than contributed to worship. When children view their singing as an integral part of worship and are educated to contribute meaningfully, it can be a wonderful experience for both the children and for the congregation.

As with many programs, the primary purpose can sometimes give way to other auxiliary purposes. The graded choir programs also provided opportunities for parents to proudly hear their children "perform," and to boast in that performance, drawing attention to the children instead of to God. In the latter part of the twentieth century, many churches, in the course of a year, put on several church musicals, in which performing by children and youth seemed paramount to using music in worship to glorify God. I wonder if we committed a disservice to many children and youth by emphasizing the performance aspects of singing over the worship contributions that excellent and heartfelt congregational singing can provide.

During the twentieth century there seems to have been a shift in some worshiping communities from participatory congregational singing and worshipful choral singing towards viewing music as primarily a performing venue for only the very talented. Perhaps this stemmed from concurrent cultural changes regarding secular music. As audio and video recordings, movies, and stage performances

proliferated in our society during the twentieth century, a marked change occurred in how we experienced music. Instead of sitting around the piano singing for entertainment, as occurred frequently in the “Tin Pan Alley” days of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁸ families began sitting around the television or stereo, listening to recorded music. People became avid music consumers rather than avid music makers. And as recording technology advanced, with state-of-the-art performances available at our fingertips, there was no way that the ordinary person could match the quality of music heard on recordings. For many, it became more satisfying to listen to performances rather than to engage in singing.

People became avid music consumers
rather than avid music makers.

This mindset also carried over into church music. Many individuals preferred to sit in the pews and listen to outstanding music, whatever their preferred style, rather than to personally engage in singing themselves. The end of the twentieth century gave way to “worship wars,” described aptly by Thomas G. Long in his 2001 book *Beyond the Worship Wars*⁹ and by Ronald P. Byars in his 2002 book *The Future of Protestant Worship*.¹⁰ Facing declining memberships, churches began replacing organs and hymnals with contemporary instruments and technologies, and replacing congregational singing and choral leadership with professional performers, in an attempt to attract new members. Music was used for church growth rather than to glorify God. Performance, in many churches, was valued above congregational singing.

Yet, concurrently, as Paul Westermeyer notes, a “hymn explosion” occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, across multiple denominations:

This explosion encompassed both congregation and choral song—hymnody and psalmody in the mold of Watts; responsorial psalms; psalms sung throughout to psalm tones; hymns written in response to and formed around the three-year Revised Common Lectionary; texts and music from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and around the world; texts and music from Taizé and the Iona Community; settings of the liturgy in

many styles; anthems; concertatos; hymn festivals; large works; new hymnals; an array of choirs singing music from the whole history of the church along with congregational hymns and organ music also mined from across the church’s history; new translations; new music for choirs and congregations; and new music for organs and other instruments.¹¹

Where Are We Now?

In these first eighteen years of the twenty-first century, where do we find ourselves in regard to church music? As Tom Long pointed out in his turn-of-the-twenty-first-century book, “vital and faithful congregations emphasize congregational music that is both excellent and eclectic in style and genre.”¹² He emphasized three important musical characteristics of churches with vital worship: a return to more congregational singing, use of excellent music that is accessible while challenging and inspiring for the congregation, and the use of a broad range of musical styles and genres. Despite some churches that cling to the more performance-oriented practices of the late twentieth century, I have observed that most churches in our denomination now seem to value excellent, eclectic, congregational music.

As Ronald Byars predicted in 2002, I believe that we have now moved beyond the so-called worship wars of the late twentieth century. Byars wrote:

It will be possible to hear the sound of the organ, but not impossible to hear the sounds of percussion instruments as well. Some of the music will sound like the nineteenth century, or the sixteenth, or the second, and some will sound like the late twentieth century or the early twenty-first. Some will make the most sophisticated musicians proud, and other music will gladden the hearts of the same musicians because they understand that the music of worship is first and foremost not for performance, but for enabling the people’s song.¹³

In our current time, we have the largest range of musical styles available to use in worship. We are able to sing congregational hymns from the Renaissance period to hymns that were composed

last week. Our new Presbyterian hymnal, *Glory to God*, is a good example of the broad styles available for hymn singing. We sing music from cultures other than our own, connecting us with the broader church in the world. We sing hymns from the rich traditions of African American spirituals and black gospel music, providing opportunities for those who did not suffer slavery with opportunities to empathize with those who struggled. We sing many musical styles, including traditional hymnody and also more contemporary praise songs. We now have available hymns that address current social justice issues, as well as hymns that speak to timeless human interactions with God and hymns that speak to God's mystery. We are not even limited to hymns that are printed in a given book. Due to easy dissemination offered by the Internet, we have easy and free access to hymns from a wide range of sources and written in a wide range of time periods.

As with hymns and songs intended for congregational singing, we also have a wide range of anthems and choral music from which to select for our choirs. In churches that I have visited, those in which I have served, and those of whom I have heard from other church musicians, choirs seem to be inhabited to a large extent by individuals who want to assist in leading worship rather than those who seek to perform. They are generally open to singing a wide range of excellent choral music of many styles but are equally interested in leading congregational singing. They join the choir because they enjoy the community of faith that they find, allowing their voices to blend with that community in a common praise to God.

Just as congregational sizes have shrunk since the mid-twentieth century, so have some church choirs diminished in size. Increasing work, social, sports, and family demands have impacted the number of people who choose to attend weekly choir rehearsals. But those who are committed to being members of their church choirs seem to take their participation seriously and find joy in doing so. Some may lament that their music ministries are not the same as they were forty to fifty years ago; they miss the large music programs that included a large graded choir program for children and youth. They look back nostalgically at a prior era when music making seemed to be a more important part of society. They struggle with the current demands of our society and the busy schedules of members of their congregations that result in fewer hours

available in which to schedule music activities. They lament diminished congregation sizes that result also in diminished choir sizes.

Others seem energized to find new ways to sing new songs. They offer creative scheduling that suits the needs of their individual congregations. They allow choir members to come and go from inclusion on the choir roll, as other life factors influence their ability to participate. They find ways for children and youth to contribute meaningfully to worship, involving some in regular weekly rehearsals, while involving others by including them in just a few rehearsals for a one-time event. We are definitely in an era of change and need to find ways to give our church members meaningful ways to participate and interact with the music ministry of the church no matter what their hours of availability to participate.

Music will become an even more integral part of the life of the church because the music ministry will be more fully integrated into all facets of each individual congregation's programs and missions.

Where Are We Headed?

I have great hope for the future role that music plays in the life of the church. I believe that we will continue to sing a new song even as the shape of the church changes. Music will become an even more integral part of the life of the church because the music ministry will be more fully integrated into all facets of each individual congregation's programs and missions. Instead of a self-contained music ministry, with graded choir programs and a strong adult choir that "performs" each week, we will embrace the idea of intergenerational, congregational, and community opportunities for singing a new song. To accomplish this, we must be intentional about providing new ways to involve individuals while also allowing for the Holy Spirit's direction. I will attempt to outline a few ways that this may happen:

Collaborative worship planning is vital! With the explosion of new hymns in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, it is increasingly difficult for clergy to be the sole selectors of congregational hymns. Musicians may

effectively collaborate with clergy to achieve a good balance of the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the traditional and the more contemporary. In her book *Rivals or a Team?* Eileen Guenther outlines the various roles of clergy and musicians and suggests many ways to approach collaborative worship planning. She notes:

This means *co-labor*, work together, on a level playing field. Each individual, whether part-time, full-time, or volunteer, is encouraged to contribute to the discussion and all ideas are warmly welcomed. An idea may not be the right one for a particular situation, but it is accepted respectfully for what it is—a *possibility*. As one clergy colleague remarked, the era of “the silo” is over—it is no longer an effective strategy, if it ever really was.¹⁴

Collaboration is more, though, than simply selecting hymns together and coordinating the anthems with the Common Lectionary and/or the scriptural passages to be used in worship. Fully integrating music into the life of the church also means using music intentionally whenever the church gathers. It may mean singing hymns at an intergenerational church lunch or dinner. It may mean singing more with children during the Sunday school and vacation Bible school programming. These opportunities for singing deserve excellent music just as much as Sunday worship does. Any time we gather, we have the opportunity for greater emotional and spiritual bonding with one another and with God by lifting our voices together in praise.

Churches have, throughout history, been deeply committed to mission work around the world, and increasingly in their own communities. Music can fill a role in the mission of the church outside of Sunday morning worship. It is vital that we integrate music and mission/outreach ministries of a congregation. My congregation has a concert series called “Music with a Mission.” Members of the congregation contribute financially to the series so that we can offer all concerts free of charge to the community. Many elderly individuals on fixed incomes are not able to attend other concerts in our city due to expensive ticket prices. Students, under-employed or unemployed individuals, as well as those who simply do not have disposable income are able to attend these free concerts, celebrating the musical

talents of the community. Many musicians from the community and individuals from all socioeconomic classes attend the concerts. At each concert we collect an offering for a local nonprofit organization, raising funding and awareness for four nonprofits per year. I love this concept of offering music free of charge to the community while also raising funding for those in need. I have heard of several instances in which individuals were inspired to volunteer in the nonprofits as a result of attending one of these concerts.

Additionally, our church participates in Family Promise, a program to house temporarily homeless families on a rotating basis with other churches. Whenever possible, I invite the children staying in our church to attend our Wednesday evening children’s choir program. This has been a great way for the children of our congregation to offer their hospitality to our guests while enjoying each other’s company in choir. The children who are visitors in our church also seem to find great pleasure in attending choir rehearsal with us. These are just a few examples of how outreach and music can be merged. It is my hope that each congregation in our denomination will find individualized approaches to integrate music into the outreach initiatives of their respective congregations.

In addition to local outreach ministries, many churches in our denomination are engaging in interfaith dialogues. Our community has two weekends per year in which members of various denominations and faiths come together for worship and community outreach. We have Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Unitarians, Baha’i, and others who come together for a short prayer service on a Saturday morning and then select one of about eight mission projects in which to participate. We always have people from each faith represented in each mission project, with opportunities to work together for the good of the community. In our opening prayer service, a representative from each community of faith offers a prayer from their tradition, we sing a song together, and then we head out into the community to work together. I believe that the bond of music aids us in the community bonding that takes place among individuals of varying faiths as we work together.

By finding ways to integrate music into the full life of the church, rather than having music as a self-contained ministry, we will involve more of our congregation’s members and we will have more

opportunities to praise God by lifting our communal voices in song. Intentional inclusion of music in many settings expands our opportunities to raise our collective voices in praise and worship. We will be led by the Holy Spirit to a mysterious union that is possible through music, uniting minds and hearts to pursue God's purposes on this earth.

We will sing because we love God and because we love each other. We will sing as an expression of our faith that is more than mere words can convey. In our singing, we will renew our individual faith and will also renew our collective faith as a church so that we may hear God's word, so that we may pray more fervently, so that we may act with conviction, so that we may bind our hearts with others, and so that we may express our praise and gratitude to God, that we may be the church that God intends. Our very singing will bring about a renewed spirit of faithfulness and, in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, will enable us to engage in our chief end: "to glorify God and enjoy God forever."

We will be rehearsing for the time when we will surround God's throne and sing God's praises eternally. Individuals from all places and times, past, present, and future will sing a new song to the creator, redeemer, and sustainer God. Our hearts and minds will forever be joined by the threads of music that connect us. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Notes

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I Can't Believe I'm Part of Something So Beautiful

Tom Trenney

It was my first day of school as the new teacher, and it was also the first day of school for all twenty-four college freshmen in our Doane University Women's Chorale. Just before class, Summer came up to me and mentioned that she had never sung in a choir before. I was so sad to hear her tell that some of her family and friends had made fun of her voice and that one of her elementary music teachers had told her that she could not and should not sing. In spite of that, now that she was away from home, she was eager and excited to explore her desire to sing. As the choir gathered and began to sing together, I could start to understand some of her family's criticism, and I'll be honest: at first, I worried, "How is this new singer going to affect the choir?" But, after some thought and prayer, I realized what a gift I was being given—to have the opportunity to help someone truly find her voice and to open up the song that had been kept coiled inside her. I invited Summer to come to class each day a few minutes early to do some vocalizing and exploration with me, and we made some progress along the way.

A few months later, the women sang their first performance. The next day, in class, I played a recording for the choir and invited the students to respond to what they heard. Summer, who was well aware that she had not yet conquered her personal musical challenges, was eager to respond and was the first to comment. I will never forget what she said: "I can't believe I am part of something so beautiful." Her humble, thoughtful, selfless response inspired and uplifted us all. Summer may well have been the least experienced musician among us, but she experienced the spiritual power of the choir

more profoundly than any of us. More importantly, her sincerity helped us all to experience the depth of our music and its ministry in a more meaningful way.

When it comes time to sing a hymn together, our individual voices become part of a most beautiful communal offering of prayer and praise.

When we come to worship, we all become members of the church's most important choir, the congregation. There are no prerequisites or auditions, yet this choir sings the richest, deepest repertoire we've got. There are no rehearsals or practices, yet this choir sings for the holiest of all audiences. When it comes time to sing a hymn together, our individual voices become part of a most beautiful communal offering of prayer and praise. We offer back whatever voice God has given us, joining with our neighbors. We individually and collectively return our very breath—we return the very gift of life itself—through our song. As each person is a unique and perfect composition, everyone's voice possesses the spiritual power to make music that has never been heard before and that can never be heard again. When we come to sing in worship, I pray that we will all sing so freely and openly, honestly and passionately that whether we get a single note right or not, we will praise God with all we've got! And then, when our music is over, we can turn to one another, and be overwhelmed with gratitude, humbly saying, "I can't believe I'm part of something so beautiful."

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In a world of *American Idol* and *The Voice*, is it any wonder that “Summers” grow up thinking that music making is only for superstars who have some kind of celebrated talent? In a world where young children have to audition to sing at their elementary school, is it any wonder that music has become, to many “Summers,” a spectator sport? In a world where technology makes

our preferences immediately available to us, is it any wonder that families like Summer’s abandon singing together for fun on a road trip in favor of plugging their ears individually into their favorite music on their headphones? In a world where more and more churches have fewer and fewer choirs and feature more and more stylish “worship leaders” on the big screen, is it any wonder that so many “Summers” cannot even imagine hearing their voice within the beautiful soundtrack of worship?

Summer entered our choir having been taught that her voice might not be good enough for music, but Summer helped us remember that music is not about us individually; it is about our becoming more aware of the beauty we have been born into as part of the body of Christ. Among the extraordinary, ridiculously extravagant gifts of creation is that each of us are created to be an instrument—to love, serve, and give in a way that no one else ever has and no one else ever will. And for those of us who are called to the ministry of music, we must remember that each person (even that aging soprano with a mile-wide vibrato, even that eighth-grade boy who has a three-note range, even that man in the congregation who sings everything an octave lower than everyone else, even that young girl who can’t match the pitches) is created to be a unique and beautiful musical instrument as well. When we make music in worship, we are offering back to God the very breath of life, breathed out in song. Singing is literally a gift of the Spirit that we may return as a spiritual gift. Music, as a spiritual gift, is not about us individually at all.

Carol Burnett tells a story about sneaking backstage of *The Pajama Game* as a young, precocious, aspiring actress. She found her way to the director and begged for an audition for the show. The director asked her, “Are you a good dancer?” She replied, “No, not really.” He said, “So you’re a great

Among the extraordinary, ridiculously extravagant gifts of creation is that each of us are created to be an instrument—to love, serve, and give in a way that no one else ever has and no one else ever will.

singer?” She responded, “Well, no. I’m not really much of a singer.” The director then asked, “How do you expect to get a part in the chorus if you can’t sing or dance?” Carol admitted, “I’m not really good enough to be in the chorus. I would need a feature role.” As we look at the trajectory of Carol’s career, we can see how playing the starring role in the *Carol Burnett*

Show makes perfect sense, and aren’t we grateful she followed that path! Carol was smart enough to realize that to become a part of the chorus—to play a supporting role within the community—requires a different kind of humility and discipline and mindfulness than “fit” for her. These kinds of “superstars” will occasionally come upon us in music ministry, and their presence can challenge us as we strive to create a beloved community.

When I was fresh out of graduate school, I headed to my first full-time church job and met the long-tenured soprano section leader. She (and many of the other choir members) had been in the choir for more years than I was old! She asked to have a meeting with me even as I was unpacking boxes in my office, and I’ll never forget her exact words: “I hope you are planning to choose music for the choir that will feature my voice.” This offered me a challenging opportunity to discern the vocation of our music ministry even before it got started. It was not our calling to feature anyone—not even me! The vocation was for us all to become servants of the music we make and the message it carries that we may experience and honor God. When our music ministries become a vehicle to feature our voices or our talents, we lose the opportunity to serve as an instrument of the Spirit.

We have all heard singers who sound the same when they sing every song they come across. They seem unaware and unaffected by the uniqueness of the music’s melody, rhythm, style, or spirit. They use any music they sing to focus on the sound of their voice, rather than to use their voice to focus on the unique and beautiful sound of the music itself. When we hear them sing, we hear them more than we hear the music they are making. We have all also heard singers who sing deeply and thoughtfully into the music they are singing. They almost disappear as they tender us to the heart and

soul of the music they are making. When we focus on serving the music to which we are offering our voice to glorify God rather than making the music a vehicle for our voice (to bring ourselves glory), everything changes! We become servant musicians. We become vulnerable to the spiritual power of the music to shape and heal and cleanse and transform us. We experience the power of music by becoming an instrument and a servant of the body. Sadly, and too often, we fail to welcome “Summers” to the table, and sadly, and too often, “Carols” will not sit to eat beside and among us. How could our music ministry change if we thought less about the talents and challenges of our voices and more about serving the music we are sounding?

We experience the power of music
by becoming an instrument and a
servant of the body.

But there are deeper layers than this. We who sing the faith are graced with conveying the beauty and meaning of a text, and these words and expressions must inspire how we give voice to the music that carries them. No matter how musically we may sing, unless our musicianship illumines and transmits the message and meaning of the text, we will fail to plumb the depth of our purpose in singing. Those of us who plan and choose music for worship must think deeply about how the music we choose carries its text and how it makes us feel about it. Sometimes this can be a challenge because not all music is composed or arranged in a way that seems to truly carry the message of its text. For example, I remember one Christmas Eve playing my fifth or sixth rendition of “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” I have always loved this carol, and it would clearly not feel like Christmas without it! However, in hearing us bombastically and triumphantly bellowing, “Come and behold him, born the king of angels. O come, let us adore him,” I found myself wondering what we were planning to do when we saw that poor baby. Would we keep on shouting? I then remembered when I was a little boy and first met my newborn baby cousin. I brought a ball and a car with me to share and to play with him because I didn’t realize how precious and fragile he would be. However, as I ran excitedly into Grandma’s house, I could see everyone standing quietly around his crib,

and I remember slowing down and setting down my toys, and first beholding the baby; my whole demeanor changed. My spirit was transformed. Wouldn’t our response to beholding the king of angels be as tendering and affecting as this? I had played this Christmas carol religiously year after year, and I had never stopped to understand its text before. How often may we be taking for granted the texts we play and sing?

To that end, how often do we in music ministry choose a hymn or anthem because it has a cool piano part or it has a neat descant or it has fun rhythms? We like the style of the music a lot, and we think others will like it, too. But then, one of the children in the choir asks us what the text means, and we realize it doesn’t mean much at all! We were attracted to the music and thought others might like it, but we weren’t really deeply engaged in considering the text it carried and transmitted. When we are blessed to discern what words we put on the lips of our singers and congregations, we must look deeper than the surface of the music. When we have the privilege to decide what words a child will memorize and learn to know by heart, it matters what message we plant there! We have access to the most beautiful poetry, Scripture, and prayer of all times and places set to music of all eras and across all cultures. We have access to unlimited resources, essentially at our fingertips. How would our music ministry be transformed if we spent more time pondering the texts of the music we invite our choirs and congregations to sing?

But there are more layers than even this. Each text we sing and each musical composition that carries it comes from a specific context—a particular time and place. When we understand the context of a song, it can help us to be more mindful of the spiritual power of the message it might carry. In thinking about a hymn like “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” so often we hear deliberate, stout interpretations of the music. When we think about the music of its time, though, and remember the graceful minuets which are its contemporaries, *LOB DEN HERRN* can really dance, and what a celebration of praise we can experience. On the other hand, when we know that it was the African American slave who first gave voice to the music and message of “Soon ah will be done with the troubles of the world,” we might struggle to sing it at a brisk, rapid tempo with bright eyes and jazz hands. If we understand the context of the song, we might become more deeply

affected and transformed by the spiritual power of the music. If we sing an African chant without remembering its roots in drums and dance or a Bach chorale without considering the unique accent of its unique language, we fail to reveal the ultimate potential of the music to transform and transport us.

When we thoughtfully and mindfully sing music from other cultures and eras, we can grow in empathy; we can become more aware of our paradoxically simultaneous diversity and unity; we can become more loving to our neighbors of all persuasions. I found myself last summer hearing over and over again how “the Russians” were meddling with our elections and how “the Russians” were trying to destroy our country. Though I know better, I found myself thinking that every person in Russia woke up in the morning thinking about how they could cause harm to every person over here. But then I heard our choir sing “Heavenly Light” by Russian composer Alexander Kopylow, and I was reminded that many more of “the Russians” were praying to the same God that I was for the same peace that I was. Music can break down the walls that divide us and tender us to remember that the neighbors we are called to love are both near and far away.

Music is created in a particular context, and when we recreate music we can be transported through and to that context. However, new contexts are created in real time when we sing together. I remember, for example, a beautiful grace when

we once sang “This Little Light of Mine” following a baby’s baptism. I got a note a few days later from the mother who said that she had sung “This Little Light of Mine” to her son each day he was in intensive care when he was prematurely born. Her context with that song made her recontextualized experience with it in worship even more meaningful. Each experience we have with a song can transform our sense of its context. For instance, think how differently we might feel singing “Jesus Loves Me” at our grandson’s baptism compared to our grandmother’s funeral, or on the Sunday after a school shooting compared to the Sunday of Confirmation. How can the context of a song help us to hear its message more deeply to and unleash its spiritual power?

As we find the courage, as Summer did, to lift up our voice, we can enter the spiritual realm of music through which God strives to connect us to one another. We tend to believe that we have musicians and choirs and congregational singing to make beautiful music for worship. But, maybe God believes that we have musicians and choirs and congregational singing in worship to make us more compassionate, loving neighbors and more devoted, inspired disciples. May we all have the faith to sing our part until we all admire the body of Christ and say, “I can’t believe I’m part of something so beautiful.”

As we find the courage, as Summer did, to lift up our voice, we can enter the spiritual realm of music through which God strives to connect us to one another.

Do They Still Make Those?

Jack M. Bethards

I'm seated in the luxurious, full-legroom comfort of my economy airline seat and my neighbor asks, "Are you traveling on business?" I explain that I'm meeting with a church about building a pipe organ. A wide-eyed expression accompanies "Do they still make those?" Then follows a fascinating conversation revealing what all organ builders know—people love pipe organs! Everyone seems to have a story about the "world's largest" pipe organ they saw in Europe or the lady organist on television, or inspirational "songs" they heard in church. But the centuries-old history of the instrument and its "antique" casework give the impression that pipe organs are surviving relics of the past—not products of a contemporary, thriving niche industry.

The Golden Age Is Now

In my opinion this is the golden age of pipe organ building. There is no doubt the overall market for pipe organs has diminished, but I see it as a blessing. The last big boom for pipe organs happened with the post-World War II explosion of church building. There were previous boom times also related to church growth and also followed by slower periods that offered breathing space. Without the pressure of mass production, builders can perfect each instrument. We organ builders often see the results of high volume organ production when we are called to rebuild instruments that may have been rushed to completion in order to move on to the next job. In a way, today's pace is a return to the preindustrial style of organ building, but with the luxury of techniques and materials born of the industrial revolution. The organ, being a large mechanical device, has become more practical to build when we can use modern

technology to complement tradition. Technology has also benefited organists by making the organ more "user friendly" and flexible.

The slower pace of organ building has also opened opportunities for the practical application of concepts and techniques of past master builders. Since World War II there has been an explosion of research into historical organ building practices. The freedom and ease of European travel has opened our eyes and ears to the great instruments of the past. Now it is possible to commission replica instruments of nearly any past era or to build eclectic (that is, multipurpose) instruments that include historically accurate elements. There are also builders who want to enhance the organ's expressive qualities. Thus, for the first time the whole world of organ design, past and present, is available to satisfy any musical need.

Perhaps most important, the pipe organ has become an instrument of choice rather than necessity. In other words, we builders have the luxury of building for patrons who deeply appreciate and understand what we are bringing to them. The organ is not being bought as a piece of equipment, but rather a commissioned work of art. Pipe organs are for people with discriminating taste who want something special for their church, home, university, or concert hall. We have gone through several periods where only one type of pipe organ was considered "politically correct" by the upper echelons of the musical world, but now there is interest in all styles of organ building past and present and a market for each. Specialist builders can thrive.

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Is There Such a Thing as a Church Organ?

One such specialty is the church organ. Since the church is by far the greatest patron of the pipe organ builder, one might think this is a superfluous question, but it is not. During a good part of the second half of the twentieth century, the church organ was nearly lost. Up through the early 1950s “a dignified and churchly ensemble,” indicating an organ of accompanimental character, was the typical description of a good church organ. Solo repertoire, although regularly played on church organs, was considered of minor importance in the full scheme of the church music program. The organ was an instrument supporting the music program—not dominating it.

Not too many years later, church organists were being advised by the academic music community that they were being short-changed with instruments that were caricatures—not much better than theater organs. The great organ solo repertoire, they said, was being either ignored or butchered in churches. After all, no one makes special pianos for churches, nor violins, flutes, and other instruments; shouldn't the organ be made properly to accommodate its own music? Certainly any organ capable of playing the great masters should be able to accompany. Accompaniment became a secondary concern, and sometimes was not considered at all. By the 1970s, the pressure to install “proper” organs in churches was great, and most churches went full steam ahead with repertoire-specific organs such as neo-Baroque instruments geared to Bach and other early masters. We can't credit this move to academics entirely. Many of the mass-produced church organs were indeed dull and uninspiring, somewhat monotonous and colorless. They were work-horse instruments that could get the job done but not win the race.

Over the years, organs geared to the solo repertoire frustrated music directors and choral conductors, and either irritated or bored congregations. Some were rebuilt and others replaced. In most cases the replacement was a church organ. Yes, there is such a thing as a church organ—an instrument specialized for church use where accompaniment takes precedence. For a small instrument this means tough choices, for example, leaving out a mixture in favor of a mezzo forte 8' voice such as a string celeste. In a larger instrument it means adding things over and above what is required for basic

repertoire, such as specialty color reeds, one or even two “extra” celestes, and a commanding solo reed such as a Tuba. It means having more of the organ, in fact as much as possible, under expression (loudness control). Since all these additions are unnecessary for the repertoire-specific organ, it could be said that the church organ is a much more complex instrument, since it must produce a wide dynamic range, an exceptional variety of tonal color, and also great power when needed to support the singing of a large congregation. In addition to musical accompaniment, much of which is transcribed, a church organ is sometimes called upon for improvised accompaniment of the “dramatic action” of the service. The church organ must be a nimble vehicle for the creative organist.

The church organ is perhaps the only instrument that is heard by and played by the same people week after week, year after year, and sometimes generation after generation.

Most important of all, a church organ must have the ability to capture and hold the interest of listeners and musicians over a long period of time. The church organ is perhaps the only instrument that is heard by and played by the same people week after week, year after year, and sometimes generation after generation. If it does not have enough variety and the ability to make a strong emotional connection, to celebrate joy, to comfort in grief, it is a failure. The church organ has a heavy musical job to accomplish, and its most important characteristics are its versatility and beauty.

If an organ has these qualities, shouldn't it be able to render the solo repertoire as well? There is no hope of such an organ playing any branch of the repertoire with absolute authenticity—that is, with the sounds that were envisioned by the composer—but it is certainly possible for it to render the scores musically if it has the proper tonal architecture. By “architecture” I mean the traditional distribution of tonal families in each division at the appropriate pitches—the organ's “instrumentation.” I make the comparison with the symphony orchestra. Certainly a large orchestra in a large hall with modern instruments cannot play Mozart or Beethoven

with the authenticity that can be captured by a specialized early music ensemble, but it can render a musically satisfying performance because its instrumentation fits that of the score. The same certainly can be true in the world of the organ. In the church setting, authentic performance practice is not a requirement—the ability to accompany the services, render solos musically, and project “dignified and churchly” tone are.

Yes, this is the golden age of the pipe organ. We organ builders are proud that the church in its many variations is our primary audience. What an opportunity it gives us. Church music, supported by the organ, is by far the most popular live music performed in America. In any given week, all of the audience for all live music—classical and popular—doesn’t come near the size of the “audience” for church music. That fact brings with it a serious responsibility for all of us involved in church music: we must strive to provide music that elevates and inspires our listeners.

Can You See It? Opening the Eyes of Our Hearts and Imagination to the Potential of the Church Children's Choir

Heather Potter

On the file cabinet in my office I keep in plain sight a quotation by Richard Leider clipped from a magazine many years ago: "Purpose is fundamental. It is not a luxury." The Bible says it this way, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV). Why is long-range sight so important for us as people of God? How does the clear vision of our spiritual eyes affect our children's choir ministry?

Remember the story of Abram. God called him out of his home country "to go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1, NIV). Along with this radical call for obedience, God revealed the vision for Abram and his descendants: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. . . . To your offspring I will give this land" (Gen. 12:2, 7, NIV). At this point in the story, the land God indicated was currently occupied by the Canaanites, a people hostile to God and likely not interested in ceding their home place. Perhaps even more challenging was the reality that Abram and his wife Sarai were advanced in years and had no children. Yet in the New Testament, recorded years later, we read that Abram (now Abraham) "considered him faithful who had made the promise" (Heb. 11:11, NIV) and "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3, NIV). Abraham caught God's vision. He trusted God's faithfulness and determined to follow in obedience. It was not a perfect journey of faith, there were lapses along the way, but the end result was that God used a (mostly) willing servant to bring the vision to life.

Casting a vision is a step of faith. It requires us to look past roadblocks, negativity, setbacks, and limitations and allows us a glimpse at what is possible when God's presence goes before us. Vision gives us grateful eyes to see the resources around us, the faithful servants to help us, and the

value of the work we pursue. We can be sure of our success, to God's standard, if our vision is inspired by God's direction.

Consider these definitions of *vision*: "a thought, concept, or object formed by the imagination"; "a picture that you see in your mind"; "a supernatural appearance that conveys a revelation."¹ By definition, *vision* is something seen. Whether the picture is concrete or imagined is inconsequential to the reality of the scene in the viewer's eye. Forming in our imaginations a vision that is rooted in God's Word requires us to look carefully with the eyes of our hearts (Eph. 1:18, NIV) to see the prospects for constructive kingdom work within our reach. Without a clear goal for the future, people perish for lack of purpose. The same may be said for our ministries: without vision, the children's choir withers. Sustained success of the church children's choir through the next decade and into the future will largely be determined by the sharpness of the picture in the director's mind's eye.

Do you have a vision for your children's choir ministry? Have you given ample thought, through the lens of Scripture, to the possibilities before you? Is it time to increase the scope of the vision and think more creatively about the ministry you lead?

- Where do you see potential for growth?
- How would you like to expand your work? What areas might need to shrink in preparation for this change?
- Are there ways to love your children more deliberately?
- Can you engage your parents more fully?
- How could your choir enrich and enliven your congregation's worship or minister more directly to your community?
- Could you be sharing the gospel more effectively?

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Our vision must be clear to see how the children's music ministry might grow and adapt appropriately without losing its core purpose in service to God's worship. Doing this effectively requires clear sight in several areas.

Know your culture. Look candidly at the church you are actually serving instead of imagining the congregation you *wish* to have. Be who you are, not a watered-down version of someone—or somewhere—else. Identify the strengths of your collective body and learn to work within the blessings God has given you. How many people are currently involved in the music ministry versus the number who are potentially available for participation? Could you increase the percentage? Consider the needs, preferences, and resources of your people. Think about how to meet those needs as well as how you might stretch them a bit. Look for places in the church where ministry is vital and radiating the energy that comes from the presence of God's Spirit. Could you partner with this ministry?

Our vision becomes blurry when we put in place programs, events, services, or ideas that are for our personal benefit and edification.

Our vision becomes blurry when we put in place programs, events, services, or ideas that are for our personal benefit and edification. God's name and fame must be central to every idea, and our plans should be in the best interest of our church families. Sometimes it is wise to wait patiently until the atmosphere is right for an idea or initiative you have in mind, and other times you must forge ahead. Learn to choose your battles; everything is not worth rigorous discussion, and sometimes you must concede the point to achieve consensus. Familiarity with the personality of your congregation, staff, and leadership will help you discern the path to take.

Knowing well the realities of your culture will inform your choice to fit your vision to your current reality or mold your situation toward the vision. One area for molding might be the rehearsal schedule. Look realistically at when you gather your singers. Is it the best day and time to gather the majority of prospective members? If you see another solution, respectfully petition your ministers, deacons, or elders to consider a change. Another area where

you might mold a new reality is in the area of partnerships. Volunteer to coordinate with your children's minister a summer camp with a musical theme. Approach the minister of music or adult choir director about creating opportunities for the children's choir to join the adult choir on an anthem or sing a descant over a congregational hymn. Engaging children in active leadership strengthens their bonds to their church family.

Acknowledge the challenges. It is crucial to our success that we see clearly the difficulties facing children's music ministry. A focused, honest look reveals the real and significant challenges to a traditional graded choir program. As many churches move away from choral music within corporate worship, they feel less urgently the need to train future generations of singers. In an attempt to encourage families to participate, churches with large commuter populations often configure schedules to allow maximum programming within a minimal time frame. Sometimes this makes it impossible for a child to participate in a variety of activities. Families are pulled in many directions, and they no longer support every church activity simply because of the sponsoring organization. The rapid rise of technology creates an environment where knowledge is consumed quickly in small bites—often in isolation—and conceivably without commitment. This approach encourages learners to drop in on a topic of interest and absorb what they can in a limited-time window before moving on to another subject matter. None of these trends encourages committed participation in a yearlong choir program.

This hard look at reality is sometimes daunting, but it is not a death knell. We may be, as Paul said to the Corinthians, "hard pressed on every side" (2 Cor. 4:8a, NIV) but we are not crushed. The fact remains that God's worship will continue despite scheduling difficulties and misplaced priorities, and the church needs music leaders, whatever the prevailing musical style of the day. Children need to feel accepted and involved in something greater than themselves. There are church members and parents who will pray with and for you as you work to create a children's music ministry that will glorify God and equip children to enjoy God forever.² When God gives a vision for a productive children's choir program, God will provide the means for that ministry to occur. We must hold the vision in mind and be willing to work hard.

Expand your horizons. Tuck away the challenges for a moment and turn your attention to the array of opportunities available within the children's music ministry. What do we offer to children that they will not find in any other activity or noble endeavor? Consider these words of Lynda Fray: "A choir ministry, because of its Kingdom building commitment, is set apart from dance, sports, art and gymnastics. It is not just another activity option in the long list available to children. Children who learn to use their singing voice at an early age grow up equipped to participate in worship through music."³ Singing and leading in worship give children an opportunity to respond faithfully to the truths they are learning in other areas of Christian discipleship and education. We teach real music, expect musical singing, and introduce music reading skills. We act as musicians and expect musical results, but our purpose is higher than simply having a stellar choir. We are aiming for more than choral excellence for the sake of perfection. We are giving children the opportunities and information they need to sing a joyful song with skill and artistry at the highest level available to them for the glory of God and to edify God's people in worship.

Although the core purpose of your choir program should remain firmly grounded in God's worship and edification as set forth in the Bible, there is great room around that core to diversify your vision. Stretch yourself to learn new repertoire and push the self-imposed limits of your musical development. Challenge yourself to make contact with an in-reach ministry that could use the assistance of your choir. Look for outreach ministries where you might engage the children more fully in sharing the gospel through music. Consider partnering with an assisted living home, foster care home, orphanage or shelter to adopt a choir, and plan rehearsals, performances, and social events together. Go Christmas caroling at the hospital or a long-term rehabilitation center.

Author and speaker Daniel Henderson reminds us that God is a creative God who does not duplicate or repeat unnecessarily in the creative process.⁴ This means we are indwelt by a creative Spirit and empowered to worship God creatively. How might this freedom for creative worship refresh your children's choir work? Consider these ideas:

- Write a new hymn text or tune with your singers.
- Combine the singers' contributions into a prayer

of praise, thanksgiving, or confession for use in corporate worship.

- Develop a choral reading from the day's Scripture passage. Prepare the children to lead it well.
- Encourage your talented visual artists to illustrate a hymn or anthem text.
- Give thought to when in the worship service your children offer leadership. Is it always the same place in the liturgy? Could it be different? Instead of a Call to Worship, could they lead a Call to Prayer? Could they teach your congregation a new hymn or sing an anthem to celebrate a baby's baptism? Be bold to begin the conversation for change.

Be intentional about connecting children to the global church through world music experiences. Hearing and singing the music of believers from around the world immediately connects us to them. Children greet these experiences with enthusiasm; they have fewer years of collected bias to shed. If you would like to see your congregation experiencing more world music, allow the children to teach it to them. The presence of children sometimes makes unfamiliar things more palatable.

Connect people. As you reflect on the potential impact of children's choir participation, consider the fact that choir is not a zero-sum game; there are no losers. Everyone may participate at his or her own level of ability and each will contribute something important. Some will excel in musical attributes, others in their spirit of unity and joy, still others will contribute primarily their love for singing or a constant smile. Accept these differences with gratitude and celebrate the diverse gifts God has given to your children.

Contemplate these stories of varied gifts and the bonds of Christ's love strengthened through singing:

Melissa's mother emailed the director after her first year in choir to say "thank you." "Thank you for including Melissa as a full participant in every choir activity, giving her a bell to ring, albeit a split second after the beat, for encouraging her to stand and sit with the group, to lead the children to and from the chancel steps. Thank you for giving her a place to belong. Because of cerebral palsy, Melissa doesn't play team sports or dance, and choir was her first group experience to which she could contribute fully."

José is a serious little boy who doesn't speak a lot of English, and his family has only recently begun attending church. For many weeks, José just listened as the teacher and his classmates sang, but little by little, José began to echo sing when it was his turn. He has begun to participate more frequently with the group and has begun to smile. He belongs here; God's house has a place for him.

Daniel has significant mental and physical limitations due to autism. He doesn't speak or sing, but he responds positively to music. At the teacher's urging, his reluctant mother agreed to bring him to choir where he often sat on the floor and drove his cars in a circle. As the young choir prepared to share a song in worship, the teacher bought a wind chime and taught Daniel how to play by guiding his hand across the bars. When the children sang in worship, Daniel's mother assisted him in playing at the appropriate times. It was a precious moment for her, and Daniel smiled as he contributed to God's worship.

What have these children learned about God through their experiences in choir? Have they experienced exclusion because they are different or do they sense unconditional love? Is this one more place they are set aside, or do they know they belong in God's house? Conversely, what have other children in the choir learned? Have they been faced with opportunities to show patience, love, acceptance, and nurture? Did they receive the opportunity to interface with someone who looks, speaks, walks, and acts different from themselves? Is it possible that their image of God expands as they share life with a child facing challenges?

Our vision should be to draw the circle wider around our ensembles and include more people, not fewer. If your church struggles to staff a children's choir with only your member families, consider partnering with other churches to create a choir collective that serves each participating church regularly. Consider opening your program to the community with intentional advertisement to children and youth through area schools or libraries.

Keep in the front of your mind's eye a commitment to quality. Use the best repertoire you can find, rehearse it well, and perform it musically. Teach children to sing beautifully. Encourage your

singers to give God their very best efforts. Children want to be a part of something good, and they will not come to choir unless they sense that the product is good and the learning is worth their time. Of course, an inclusive approach will change the placement for the bar of excellence, but there is still a bar. When we urge our children to give their best in God's worship, we are setting their individual bar as high as possible *for that child*. This means we must be master jugglers, spurring some on to greater achievement, encouraging others who are frustrated because they're falling behind, approaching each child with love and respect.

As you expand the reach of your program, remember to include parents and members of the congregation. Share frequently the music learning and opportunities for spiritual formation that occur in choir. Invite parents, staff, and church members to attend a rehearsal. Consider planning an opportunity for children and parents (grandparents, guardians) to sing together. Share rehearsal clips via video monitors throughout your church buildings, include snapshots in notes home, or plan a sharing service to highlight learning experiences.

Connect your children to their faith community by teaching the traditions and rhythms of corporate worship employed in your church. As you prepare the singers to lead confidently in worship, explain unfamiliar terms, practice reciting common creeds and prayers, learn hymns and songs planned for the day, and rehearse movement within the worship space. Information and practice reduces anxiety and allows children to be mentally and emotionally present with their church family in the moment of worship. Consider also the ways you might join your children with various subgroups of the church population. Can you host a multigenerational hymn sing? Is there interest in a family caroling party? Could the summer choir have a wide age range? Would a mother-child choir on Mother's Day or father-child choir on Father's Day be well received? Could the youth and children combine to host a fellowship, service day, or talent show? Children are great bridge builders; look for ways they can help bring together people within your congregation who might not otherwise interact.

The door to the casting agency at Walt Disney World bears these words by Walt Disney: "It takes people to make the dream a reality." As your children begin to share more and more with your church family, congregants will become aware of the

possibilities in the seed of a thriving children's choir program. Invite others to share your joy! Include volunteers in the children's choir staff; allow parents to plan social events and outreach opportunities for you. When you're preparing to expand your vision, meet with your stakeholders to get their input and give feedback on your ideas. When a director can spread the vision to other eyes, the possibilities increase dramatically.

The vision is in place; what now? How do we go about giving form to the thoughts or concepts in our imaginations and our spiritual mind's eye? Through prayer, Scripture study, and your knowledge of your church culture, confirm the vision that God has for your ministry in your current setting. Dream big and brainstorm the possibilities. Divide the dream into manageable pieces and identify the people ready to help you put the pieces in place. Periodically take a moment to step back and get a sense of the big picture. Analyze what works and what should be modified. Take spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional breaks from your work to allow for rest and rejuvenation. The conscious act of stepping away from our work acknowledges our dependence on God's provision and faithfulness over our own fortitude and determination.

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See the eye doctor regularly. The book of Proverbs states the warning plainly, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Prov. 19:21). We must constantly be aware of our own goals and ambitions creeping into the ministry vision God gives to us. Regular checkups in prayer are necessary to uncover motives driven by pride or selfish ambition. Commit your ministry to prayer. Pray for your children and the increase of their knowledge and love of the Lord. Pray for their parents. Pray that your congregation will worship with and through the choir's musical offering and leadership. Love Jesus more than a style, more than a stance, more than being right or being praised for your creativity and talent development. Work diligently as though Jesus were

a singer in your choir, or a parent, or a colleague, or a congregant (Col. 3:23–24, paraphrase). Hone your vision with the "eyes of your heart" mentioned in Ephesians 1:18 so that you may know the *hope* of God's faithful provision and God's *power* available to believers. Ask God regularly to renew your zeal for your work; enthusiasm from the Holy Spirit will inspire your vision and energize your body toward the goal.

The God who promised is faithful. If God gives you a vision for a kingdom-building children's choir ministry, God can be trusted to bring that imagined concept into full reality. God is faithful to the promises present in Scripture. A few words that seem particularly applicable to the work of the children's choir may challenge, inspire, and encourage you in your ministry:

- God's Word does not return void (cf. Isa. 55:11).
- The gates of hell will not overcome the church (cf. Matt. 16:18).
- Do not give up meeting together but encourage one another (cf. Heb. 10:25).
- "From the lips of infants and children you have ordained praise" (Ps. 8:2, New Heart English Bible).
- "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth" (Ps. 96:1).

God's people are commanded to praise and invited to sing, shout, and play instruments in God's worship. As those who teach and minister through music, our purpose and mission are secure, our calling to prepare God's people for worship is clear, and with humble hearts following God's lead, our success is sure. To God be all the glory.

Notes

1. *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "vision," accessed February 13, 2018, merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vision.
2. Westminster Shorter Catechism, question and answer 1, Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, accessed February 13, 2018, reformed.org/documents/wsc.
3. Lynda Fray, "Musical Anchors," *The Chorister* 58:6 (2007): 7.
4. This author heard Daniel Henderson speak many years ago, and the concept of a creative God deserving creative worship was transformational. This recollection is drawn from notes tucked in the author's Bible.

Handbells in the Church

William Mathis

Where We Came From

When handbells first came to the American church, they were mostly used for preludes, or perhaps an occasional hymn introduction. But consider what they came from! Since the sixteenth century in Britain, handbells were generally known as a practice instrument for change ringers. Sometimes they even substituted for tower bells indoors, putting them closer to becoming a legitimate instrument on their own. As that practice became more widespread, tunes were played, with very simple chordal accompaniments; most handbells sets were only one to two octaves (given their British roots), so musical options were pretty limited. As sets expanded, so did possibilities.

Interestingly, there really wasn't much of a "handbell community" on either side of "the pond" and only rudimentary publishing for the instrument, so people composed their own settings for their groups!

In 1902, when Mrs. Shurcliff brought home to Boston the set of ten bells given her by Arthur Hughes of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London, she put her bells to use with her friends and founded the Beacon Hill Ringers, ringing changes and tunes as she'd heard in England. This sort of handbell music soon began to spread across New England.

The American Guild of English Handbell Ringers was founded in 1952, growing out of the earlier New England Guild of English Handbell Ringers, and accompanied tune ringing was the main music played. Handbell ensembles were found in churches, to be sure, but homes, schools, and communities were also frequent owners and players. The Guild (today called Handbell Musicians of America) quickly became a publisher in order to

share the music people were composing. For at least another decade, the vast majority of groups were still two- to three-octave ensembles, and the music they played consisted of hymns, folk melodies, and transcriptions of classical music.

Through the 1960s and 1970s bells were found primarily in churches, with a few notable exceptions in colleges and community groups. Compositions largely served those needs, but with an ever-increasing complexity and difficulty. Several composers ventured further into the world of classical transcriptions with great success, with Betty Garee and Martha Lynn Thompson leading the way. The number of publishers began to grow, initially specializing in styles and content, then broadening the variety in their catalogues.

Interestingly, most church graded handbell programs climaxed at the high school level, with adults taking a back seat to even the middle school groups! National and regional events comprised about 90 percent youth ensembles; adult groups hadn't yet discovered their possibilities.

The handbell music heard in churches was commonly hymn or religious theme related.

The handbell music heard in churches was commonly hymn or religious theme related. Handbell concerts by groups of all sorts were becoming the venue for nonreligious and particularly classical works, both at home and on tour. We began to hear bells playing in worship at times other than preludes and postludes, and anthems and offertories became more common.

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As the lives of teens became as ridiculously busy as they are today, and as those teens of the 1970s grew up, adult ensembles came into their own. There are only a few examples today of the spectacular youth ensembles of thirty to forty years ago, and some of those we hear in churches, schools, and communities really knock you out with their skill and the commitment it takes to get there!

Where We Find Ourselves Today

The financial hard times of the last decade have had some negative impact on most organizations and companies, including churches and handbell-related companies. Many churches have done away with “luxuries” like professional musical leadership, appropriate music budgets, and maintenance of equipment. And as people’s lives continue to get busier, recruitment and retention become additional stumbling blocks. Handbell ensembles have the great feature of requiring only a relatively small group of people, but those people have to be committed to a schedule, and that is become increasingly difficult.

In spite of these factors, handbell ministries in many churches are thriving. Congregations large and small have programs which include ensembles for various ages and ability levels, smaller chamber groups, and soloists. This is a form of music making and group interaction that works in a wide variety of situations and can make a difference in both the lives of the participants and the life of the congregation. We hear from many quarters that skill levels are increasing in spite of the above-mentioned handicaps, and that hard times can call forth creativity in program design and utilization in worship (more on that later). Handbell manufacturers report that they are selling more add-on octaves than beginning sets; this means that the handbell movement is not so much expanding as it is deepening. We know anecdotally that as established programs continue to expand the range of their bells, they are often growing in both musicality and in the varied ways they use bells in their worship services.

We often hear that churches that are mostly neighborhood-based have an easier time getting people to commit to attendance and extra events, while those whose members are widely scattered find regular rehearsals are most effective when they can be related to other activities in the building. However, for an established and rewarding experience, people *will* make the necessary commitment of time and travel.

Publishers of music for handbells are turning out a deluge of new music in a wide variety of styles, ranges, and levels of difficulty. It’s hard to keep up with the mailings, many of which include demo recordings; and the more new pieces we peruse, the more difficult it is to remember the fabulous compositions that got us to the present. A few publishers are making an effort to remind us of some of them from time to time, and some planners of handbell events try to include them in their programming. In these days of tightened budgets, directors of ensembles (and festival organizers) do well to go back through their music library on at least an annual basis to utilize music they already own which can fill current programming needs.

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As we hear regularly, handbell programs in some churches are just getting by, both programmatically and musically. And unfortunately, when one sometimes hears, in otherwise musically prominent ministries, handbell groups that are struggling with dynamics, melody/accompaniment functions, missing notes due to faulty technique, or just wrong reading of the music, the obvious concern is that those of us in organizational leadership should be doing more to help! A ringer need not have a degree in music to fully participate in playing a beautiful phrase, and a director’s responsibility, wide-ranging as it is, certainly includes enabling ringers to play with precision and musical nuance. As mentioned above, a musical group that makes good music is more engaging to join, to hear, and to support.

Of course, we’ve never heard a completely correct playing of anything by a pianist, organist, chorus, orchestra, or handbell ensemble. Recordings don’t count, because we all know the technological sonic air-brushing that is available today! What seems to me to be really unfortunate is the number of bell directors who, for all their sincere intentions, lack the expertise to tell there is a problem or to lead the way out of it. That is where mentoring and teaching can come into play. If you are in need of such support, reach out to local leaders or organizations; they are easy to find either online or

with a couple of phone calls to other bell directors in the area.

Many churches today have at least one service which features contemporary Christian music. In most of those, handbells aren't involved, either intentionally or because nobody has figured out a way to utilize them. Below, I will address some ways in which this might be resolved to the benefit of everybody in the mix.

New thinking in general doesn't seem to be prominent these days in church handbell ministries, in either program design or liturgical participation. We can all learn a great deal by attending concerts and rehearsals (call ahead for permission) by school and community groups. In both of these fields, growth, creativity, and musicality are critical to survival. As with many areas in church life, mediocrity and inertia are sometimes accepted as stability, tradition, or "it's just church." This is theologically unacceptable. We aren't all called to be the New York Philharmonic of handbells, but we are called to bring the best offering we can muster. What is necessary to make that effort more the norm?

Ideas for the Present

In most churches, the handbell director isn't the director of music but a volunteer or very part-time employee; they aren't part of the team that does planning for worship, or even for special events. This makes it hard to do much more than plug a piece into a service as prelude or anthem. And as the pastor or music director is unlikely to *ask* for anything out of the ordinary, it is up to the person leading the bell program to *offer* a new thought, even to sell it. Change is both sought and feared, and finding new ways for handbells to serve often sounds like a great idea until one tries to bring up that first new idea. For that reason, one might present several possibilities at once and invite worship planners to use just one idea in an upcoming service. Below are several ideas to help you take the initiative to move beyond prelude and anthem to other elements of the community's worship.

Involve bells or chimes services. Many quality arrangements of appropriate music in contemporary worship styles are now available from various publishers. Unfortunately, the lag time between a new song rising in popularity and the cycle of publishing-advertising-purchasing-learning a particular piece can be significant, but at least it will

be familiar to worshipers. Finding ways to use bells or chimes as an auxiliary instrument is a quicker, if rather labor- and creativity-intensive exercise. Many praise bands regularly include other instruments than the typical keyboard/guitar/bass/drums ensemble, including strings, brass and more. In some creative churches, bells are regularly employed for doubling a melody or even taking a solo verse, or adding bell sound to the musical texture, or otherwise accompanying a singer or instrumentalist. It does take someone with some theory skill and creativity to make that work, but "the simpler, the better" is generally a good motto for this sort of work. In your situation, who might take on such a fun and creative project? If it happens successfully once, it will get better each time.

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Continuing education. Handbell Musicians of America (nationally, regionally, and locally) and other local and denominational organizations are offering terrific training opportunities for beginning and experienced leaders and ringers alike. Such training has become all the more important these days because of two factors. First, as many church budgets have deprioritized musical leadership, training for volunteer or otherwise recruited handbell directors becomes more critical. Training in handbell techniques, score study, rehearsal planning and execution, conducting, and many other subjects is important to the director who wants to lift their own and their ringers' abilities. Second, the ever-increasing possibilities for musicality and programming in the handbell world mean that even experienced leaders require continued training and support in order to do more than "just get by" for this week's rehearsal or offer predictable fare for Sunday's worship.

Membership in denominational or subject-specific organizations (i.e., American Choral Directors Association, Choristers Guild, Handbell Musicians of America) is rarely questioned for full-time church musicians. But when a congregation is benefitting from the hours and dedication of a volunteer or barely-paid handbell director, such

One of the quickest ways to get a group of ringers excited is by introducing a new technique or performance opportunity or piece of music that is *nearly* within their capability.

organizational support can be a great boon for both a director and a church—a tiny cost with a huge payoff. Churches like to support ministries that are visible and/or youth-oriented, so get visible in worship, in the church newsletter, in the local paper. Church leaders appreciate that!

Looking toward the Future

I see four ways we can move toward a new phase of growth and energy: deepening, enlivening, engaging, and broadening.

Deepening. Handbells have a bad rep in the wider music world, and, I'm sorry to say, it is often deserved. A high school percussion ensemble would not be satisfied playing with the rhythmic messiness and the lack of coherent phrases or dynamic range we sometimes hear from handbell ensembles. We can surely raise our level of both rhythmic precision and engaging musicality. Workshops abound in nearly every corner of the country, provided by Handbell Musicians of America, local handbell ensembles or organizations, and church-related associations. One can find instruction on everything from ringing technique to program building. Other handbell leaders in your area will also be happy to help with specific issues or a general conversation. Have a broken spring and need to get it fixed? Ask somebody down the street to teach you how to make the repair in just a few minutes. Need just the perfect prelude for Pentecost? There are discussions going on online where handbell pros will be only too happy to help. Want to find out about an event to which you can take your group for learning and inspiration? Look at handbellmusicians.org for a listing of such opportunities nearby. Just feeling like another pair of eyes and ears might be helpful? Invite a local director to come watch your rehearsal, or maybe take over while you watch. There are particular practices that can make ensembles more effective and rewarding pretty quickly, and while none of us knows everything, most of us are happy to share what we do know.

Enlivening. One of the quickest ways to get a group of ringers excited is by introducing a new technique or performance opportunity or piece of

music that is *nearly* within their capability. New techniques might include standard, notated elements like singing bells or *martellato*, or exercises for fast bell changes or expanding dynamic range. Almost nothing makes ringers feel more successful than discovering how playing a terrific crescendo/diminuendo or incorporating various methods of making bell sounds enhance the expressiveness of their playing.

A piece of music with some carefully chosen challenges can be enlivening or defeating. A good lesson plan makes all the difference. Teaching specific required skills *before* ringers open the score is nearly always the way to go. First, be sure you've learned the technique correctly yourself, then figure out a sequential path to creating success for the ringers. When they can all execute it, show them how and where it fits into the musical context of the piece. The emotional result is nearly always exciting. And it generally leads to their trusting your leadership the next time.

Performance opportunities outside the walls of the church bring fellowship, a sense of outreach, and the reward of a different (frequently uninitiated) audience. Whether it's doing a flash mob at the mall or attending a one-day festival with 100 other ringers, putting one's experience in the context of the larger community is a terrific happening!

Engaging. Congregations have come to know what to expect from us, haven't they? They know our approximate ability level, the stylistic and musical range we offer, and even who to watch (or try not to watch) as a piece is being played. Sometimes that means that not much worship is occurring.

How about doing something unexpected, something that brings worshipers out of themselves into an experience of God's presence? In my workshops on bells in worship we go through a generic liturgy and create ways to use bells/chimes to underline or enhance every liturgical element from prelude to postlude. Of course, only one or two would happen in a single service:

- A processional to begin the service—there are lots of them in print, and they are not difficult to create.
- Adding bells to the accompanying/leading of a hymn—again, resources abound, and a couple of appetizers are offered below.
- A short fanfare as call to worship or benediction response—this could be as simple as the first few bars from a celebratory piece in your repertoire.
- Participation in a Scripture reading—a chord played twelve times during a reading of Jesus’ calling of the disciples or “Wondrous Love” during a reading about God’s grace. Think emotionally.
- Does your service frequently use sung psalm refrains? Let the bell choir lead it instead of the organ. They might be able to play right from the hymnal, or you can put it in handbell notation for them.
- Hand out some bells to people in the congregation to add random ringing to a hymn or other liturgical moment. Generally, scale notes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 work nicely.
- Anything that helps the worshipers into a sense of the present moment and draws them from content to context is what we’re looking for.

Broadening. As mentioned above, fewer congregations have begun handbell ministries, and others have dropped them, or at least dropped wider involvements in organizations like HMA, PAM, and ACDA. We all benefit when these groups are strong and vibrant, and they can be more so when their rolls are increased and their finances are stable. Be sure you’re engaged and involved with the larger handbell community. What can *you*

do to encourage your neighboring director to take that Saturday morning to attend a local event, to invite them to serve in some way, to be sure their membership is current? Of course, organization membership costs have gone up—what hasn’t? Can you sell the idea that \$95 for HMA membership pays off for the church, for the ringers, for the directors’ sense of forward movement? Many local and regional handbell events are free or at a reduced cost to members. There are terrific online resources on the HMA website and lots of ways to connect with others for conversation or assistance.

Have you heard about a local congregation that gave up on handbells sometime in the past, and now has four octaves sitting in a closet? Offer to take your group to play in a morning service and hold an open exploratory session for the congregation right afterward. If a prospective leader can be discovered from their community, attending your rehearsals for a few weeks would be a pretty good jump start; then they might attend that beginning workshop in August.

Does a local orchestra or band or choir have a concert for which bells might play an overture or be an intermission feature? Make the offer. Anything that gets us out into the community raises the profile of both the church and handbells.

The future for handbells in the church can be bright, especially if we get inspired to take the initiative to make a difference in our ensembles, our congregations, and our communities. This is not one of those times when we can count on someone else to make our corner of the world better. It’s up to each of us to make it as deep, as lively, as engaging, and as broad as possible.

We all benefit when these groups are strong and vibrant, and they can be more so when their rolls are increased and their finances are stable.

Appendix

For adding a few bells for ornamentation to a hymn, try using one of these as an ostinato on the first and last stanzas. Adjust it to whatever key you need. Or make up your own! We call this technique Happy Bell Noise.

Something like this might be useful in various ways. Rather than the Singing Bells, a sustained organ or cello open fifth would serve as well.

The image displays three musical staves, each labeled on the left as HBN 1, HBN 2, and HBN 3. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are written as quarter notes with stems pointing upwards. HBN 1 starts on G4 and follows the sequence G-A-B-A-G-A-B-A. HBN 2 starts on A4 and follows the sequence A-B-C-B-A-B-C-B. HBN 3 starts on B4 and follows the sequence B-C-B-A-B-C-B-A. Each staff has a thick black bar underneath the notes, indicating a sustained or ostinato pattern.

What Wondrous Love Is This?

arr. William Mathis

American folk hymn

1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8 9

10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Music Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary

David A. VanderMeer

Virtually everyone agrees that music is vitally important in worship. They may debate the kind of music that is offered, the way it is created, who plays what instruments, and so forth, but very rarely does someone suggest that we don't need music in our sanctuaries every Sunday morning. After all, the book of Psalms was the songbook of the ancient Hebrew worshipers.

I have found, however, that the church needs music outside of the sanctuary, too. Music needs to be a part of the work of the people and the work of the church on Sunday morning, but also needs to be a part of the work of the people and of the church throughout the week and throughout the city. Whether as a part of our outreach, our mission, our pastoral care, or even our educational programming, music enhances all that we do and communicates much about who we are. And again, some of the psalms were surely sung in the temple, but some were outdoor processions leading people through the streets toward worship.

The church I serve, Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia, is located in the geographical and political center of the city. Within our immediate area are the state capitol building, the federal building, and city hall. There is no residential neighborhood, but the streets around us are the sleeping places for a large homeless population. Our congregation is drawn from the whole metropolitan area—one recent year our youth group had students from nineteen different high schools. Our music groups take worship leadership very seriously and work hard to provide wonderful music each week. But they also take music outside the church.

One of the things our Chancel Choir does is to travel to hospitals, hospice centers, or private homes whenever one of our members is nearing the end

of life. We go, taking our hymnals and often taking communion elements, and do our best to “sing” the person “to heaven.”¹ We sing old favorites; we sing requests if the family is able to offer suggestions; and we sing the classic memorial service literature. It often doesn't matter what we sing, only that we are present and we sing. If it is a hospital or nursing home, sometimes we sing to people we don't even know—the Spirit moves and we try to respond. We know this is an important ministry; we know it in our hearts, and we know it because we are received with such love and we depart with a different kind of peace. This is a ministry that any church choir can offer—it takes no special resources, it costs absolutely nothing, and it truly changes the world.

On a totally different note, in 2008, our sesquicentennial year, some of us were commenting to ourselves that although we had been in our current location for 150 years, it seemed that many workers in the government and office buildings around us were totally unaware of our existence. We have an active Outreach and Advocacy Center; we offer worship services during the week; we rent our fellowship hall for meeting space to many governmental agencies; we even have been a venue for movie and television productions since Atlanta has become a center for that sort of thing. Nonetheless, it seemed that the people walking around downtown during the week were not very much impacted by our presence. We decided to try to partner with Georgia State University, right up the street from us, and contacted the music department—specifically the leaders of their jazz program. We wanted to start a program called “Jazz in the Courtyard.” The idea was to set out tables and chairs in our courtyard area, which happens to be directly across the street from the front steps of

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the state capitol building. Student jazz combos from Georgia State would play from noon to 12:45 every Wednesday during the month of October (typically a lovely time of year in Atlanta!). Our hope was that people who worked in our area would bring their lunch, sit in the courtyard, and listen to some really good jazz. And that is just what happened. Again, there was no cost associated with this other than some plastic tablecloths and balloons that we put on the tables and tied to our fence to attract attention. The jazz students were happy to have an audience, and the faculty sometimes played with them. We definitely did not become the number one destination in downtown Atlanta, but many passersby stopped in for a few minutes, and some people planned ahead and brought their lunches on those Wednesdays. There were, of course, some unexpected peripheral benefits. A man whom we had seen periodically on the street and who we knew was experiencing homelessness came by each Wednesday noon. It turned out he had been a professional percussionist. At first, he played rhythms on the fence or clapped along. Eventually, the drummer for the jazz group would hand him a small rhythm instrument and invite him into the group. I think it was a learning experience for everyone—the homeless man, the student musicians, those of us at the church, and other members of the audience.

Another way we take music to the city's homeless population is at our own night shelter, housed in what used to be a gym that now serves as a warm place to sleep seventy men from November through March. Our handbell choir has taken our handchimes to the shelter and led Christmas carols, helping some of the men to play the chimes themselves.

Our location in downtown Atlanta does not particularly lend itself to Easter sunrise services; we are in fact surrounded by tall buildings and generally can only see the sun at high noon! However, we have done sunrise services in our

memorial garden, another form of taking our music outside the walls of the church. We have occasionally taken our portable keyboard outside but most often have used handbells, sung *a cappella* using familiar Easter hymns, or used guitars or other more portable instruments. Celebrating that Jesus has risen from the tomb is especially meaningful in our memorial garden, where the ashes of many of our congregation have been laid to rest.

Since the Civil War the three remaining downtown churches have had a unique relationship. We back up to the Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and just a block down the street is Trinity United Methodist Church. All three of these congregations have been here since the middle 1800s. In 1864, when Atlanta was being set ablaze, Father Thomas O'Reilly, the priest at the Shrine, successfully pleaded with Sherman not to burn the three churches (actually four, but one of them is no longer downtown). That action formed a bond among the three churches that still exists today. We have many activities on which we collaborate, including a shelter for the homeless. When the sanctuary of the Shrine was heavily damaged by a fire, the members worshiped for months in our sanctuary. We have often joined for Ash Wednesday and Holy Week services, and every Palm Sunday the three congregations gather in our courtyard for a time

We have often joined for Ash Wednesday and Holy Week services, and every Palm Sunday the three congregations gather in our courtyard for a time of fellowship, then have a brief worship service, after which we set out on a five-block procession, singing and waving palm branches, and then drop off the two visiting congregations at their respective locations before arriving back at our own doors.

of fellowship, then have a brief worship service, after which we set out on a five-block procession, singing and waving palm branches, and then drop off the two visiting congregations at their respective locations before arriving back at our own doors. At times a brass band marched with us, but more recently we have asked the handbell choir to carry their bells and provide the musical accompaniment as we process around the blocks singing "Hosanna in the Highest."

We have taken music farther afield than our courtyard, too. All of our handbell choirs play in worship regularly, but we have also managed to

take our handbells outside the sanctuary walls. Several years ago, one of the members of our advanced handbell choir was the media specialist at an elementary school that served a low-income area of the city. She had discovered several cases of handbells stored in a closet, obviously unused for many years. They were so tarnished they were almost green! We brought the bells in, cleaned them up, discovered they were in perfect condition, and decided to approach the school principal with an idea. We proposed starting a school handbell choir for third, fourth, and fifth graders. It had to be offered after school as an extracurricular activity, and that in itself posed some problems. The parents of these students could not pick them up. Those who walked home were okay—they just walked home an hour later—but some had younger siblings for whom they were responsible. Those who rode the school bus home had a bigger problem. Happily, it turned out there were not too many of those, and we managed to figure out transportation for those students. The school principal was very supportive, and among all of us we worked out the logistical issues. Teachers volunteered to stay with us in the media center so that the kids were supervised by school employees, though in actuality, we had very few behavior problems.

We had no idea how many kids would be interested, but on the first day we had three times more potential ringers than we expected. Out of the whole group there was only one child who read music at the beginning, though that certainly changed as the year went on. Initially, though, we learned some music by rote, and then when we switched to music on paper, all of the music was marked and color-coded for right-hand and left-hand bells. There was lots of individual teaching and careful pointing at music. Each Tuesday afternoon I had four to six volunteers from my advanced handbell choir to support our efforts. We had to bring some of our own handbells to the school each week because we had so many children in the program. Some of the children just blossomed. In most cases, these were not children who had experienced much success or positive recognition in their lives. As Christmas approached, we decided to try to offer a Christmas concert. A generous donor from church bought the children little polo shirts with the school name and logo and the words “Handbell Choir” emblazoned across the front. For the children, the thought of wearing these

shirts was almost as exciting as ringing the bells. We prepared a Christmas program with a ringing processional, the whole school came, and it was just absolutely wonderful. Of course, the program continued after Christmas, and we had to decide how to end the year. Someone suggested that we bring the handbell choir to church and have them play on Sunday morning. Once again we were faced with some pretty complex logistical problems. We weren’t sure if we could get the kids to ride a bus downtown to church on a Sunday morning. Again, our supportive principal thought he could make it work, and on a sunny Sunday morning in May a school bus brought about twenty-five kids to downtown Atlanta. Many of their parents also came in cars and on city buses. We found that most of these children had never been downtown before, had never seen the capitol building, and probably had never been in front of quite so many attentive faces! They performed beautifully, they enjoyed lunch in the church fellowship hall, and again it was absolutely wonderful.

The Frazer Center is a school for disabled adults and also offers a mainstream program for preschool children that includes students at all levels of ability and disability.

In another school setting we had the opportunity to offer a chime and handbell program at a remarkable school in Atlanta. The Frazer Center is a school for disabled adults and also offers a mainstream program for preschool children that includes students at all levels of ability and disability. We met both groups twice a week for two years. The children played chimes, learned simple rhythms, developed listening skills, and experienced the joy of playing music in an ensemble. The adults had even more widely varying abilities—the most advanced could read music a little bit and memorize a pattern, but most of our ringers could not. Some could not even hold a bell in their hands and participated by hitting the handbell on the table with a mallet. However, they were able to participate, everyone loved the handbell time, and again all were able to be a part of a group producing something of great value!

In recent years our congregation has been very interested in small-group home worship services. The groups might vary in size from five or six to as many as thirty-five or forty depending on the focus of the group or the particular topic. Sometimes we have used invited leaders, but often the worship is led by congregation members. Always on Maundy Thursday we worship and celebrate communion in homes. All of these services involve music, most often the singing of hymns or repetitive songs from the Taizé community. If there is a piano in the home, the singing might be accompanied, but often it is not. Almost always there are enough choir members or other strong singers present so that the singing is supported, but we are pretty sure that God wants us to sing no matter what!

In preparation for writing this article, I talked to some of my colleagues about their experiences with worship and music outside the sanctuary walls. Eric Wall, faculty member at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, described a Lessons and Carols service he planned at Columbia Theological Seminary a few years ago. The service started in Harrington Chapel, where they read and sang music related to the Lucan birth narrative. They then moved through the hallways of the Harrington Center outside to the quadrangle area for the reading of the portions of Luke 2 about the shepherds and angels. Several students had hung lots of brown paper on the hallway walls with vines drawn on them intertwined with the Matthean genealogy, so that the worshipers “walked through” the generations on the way outside. In the quad there was a continuation of the Lucan text through “Glory to God.” This was followed by singing a “Gloria” that was simple enough to sing unaccompanied outside. While outside, the readings picked up with the shepherds going to Bethlehem. The congregation moved across the quad to the refectory, where the readings concluded with the Matthean stories of the Magi, the slaughter of the innocents, and the final hymn. Eric says, “The service was very well received by the seminarians. The art on the walls was important because it made the hallways part of

a continuing story rather than just having an office building interlude effect.”

Another friend, Haley Ingram, was a Young Adult Volunteer assigned to New Orleans, Louisiana.² She worked in a program at Okra Abbey, a community garden located in Pigeon Town, a depressed area of New Orleans.³ The intent and focus of Okra Abbey is to develop and maintain a community garden. But Okra Abbey is much more than a community garden. It is a sacred space where participants grow in friendship and faith alongside one another as they share both stories and food, pray, play, garden, and find ways to use the food they grow to provide care for the local community, especially those in need. Everything done there, including work, is viewed as worship. Being mindful of this focus enables one to be more open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. The garden has been transformed into a beautiful, welcoming space.

At the beginning of the year they meet for a time of prayer and end with a song. The singing is unaccompanied, consisting only of the wonderful voices of the community. The initial prayer time has grown into a community meal called Grace and Greens. The success of this program opened their eyes to other possibilities for hosting in the garden. For example, on one Easter Sunday they invited a Mardi Gras Indian. The Mardi Gras Indians are beautifully costumed individuals from different neighborhoods all over New Orleans. On that Easter Sunday the woman invited shared her gift of song and dance with the community.

Haley says that one of her favorite events was called Okra and Opera. This event brought students from a nearby music college to sing and share their gifts in the garden. Having no electricity in the garden was a challenge solved by bringing in a battery-operated piano. The piano and voices filled the garden with beautiful music that attracted the attention of those walking by. A mother and her toddler were drawn in, and after the singers finished, the toddler blessed them with her own musical curiosity on the piano.

The service was very well received by the seminarians. The art on the walls was important because it made the hallways part of a continuing story rather than just having an office building interlude effect.

Okra Abbey is one of the worshipping communities that are a part of the 1,001 New Worshipping Communities initiative established by the 2012 General Assembly of the PC(USA). The goal of this program is to have 1,001 new worshipping communities by 2022, and the hope is that they will be more outward-focused and creative in their worship. As such, the Okra Abbey leaders were intentional about evolving to meet the needs of the community and being open to the Spirit working in many ways.

At Central we have found that taking music beyond the walls of the sanctuary can be accomplished in many different ways and is always worthwhile and meaningful for both those who create the music and for those who either join in or listen. For me one of

the most meaningful examples of music outside the sanctuary happens every Sunday at Central. Each week after the announcements, our service transitions into worship, and the pastor leading this portion of the service says, “And now let the tower bell ring out, proclaiming to the city of Atlanta and to the world that Central Presbyterian Church is at worship!”

Notes

1. See the choral arrangement of Daniel Gawthrop, “Sing Me to Heaven.”
2. The Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program is an ecumenical, faith-based initiative that gives young people aged 19–30 an opportunity to spend a year in service.
3. See <http://okraabbey.com> for more information.

Music in Seminaries

Eric Wall

*Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros:
Abraham et semini ejus in saecula.
As was promised to our forebears:
Abraham and his seed forever. (Luke 1:55)*

Mary, in Luke's Gospel, sings of God's promised justice and abundance—promised, as she recalls, in God's covenant with Abraham. Blessings and descendants would be more numerous than stars, because of God's desire to bless so that God's people might also be blessings.

*As was promised to our forebears:
Abraham et semini ejus.*

“Seminary,” from the Latin *seminarium*: “seedbed.” It might suggest a God-promises-Abraham proliferation: nourishment, growth, an inexorable array of budding, blooming, and blessing. But in the epic of God and Abraham, blessing is also wrestling, as seen in Jacob's overnight grappling with a mysterious figure (human? angel?) at the river's edge. At dawn, Jacob recognizes that it was God all along and limps thereafter—the recognition is hard-won. This, too, is seminary. Students are not just confirming call; they are wrestling with it, questioning it, recognizing it. Like the pounding bi-tonal chords in the “Augurs of Spring” portion of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, seminary is an augury of what God may do through servants in ministry.

I am not a seminary student, but in some ways I have learned something about this wrestling during the brief time in which I have worked and taught at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Seventeen previous years in a beloved church community meant that musical, theological, and ecclesial meanings had

formed in deep ways in a congregation that did not change with anything like the fluidity of a seminary. It also meant knowing how musical choices mattered in that place. The arrival in a new community meant adjustments, learning, questions—questions often directed to God, sometimes with a Stravinskian fist. *What is God up to? What does the call to church music mean now? Who am I in this community? What are the songs?*

Seminary is not just a seedbed—it is a repotting. Students do not arrive as blank canvases. They bring their own experiences, schoolings, prior careers, and faith formations. Like the people in our churches, seminarians increasingly come from multiple traditions—or no traditions. The natural “apprenticing” to a tradition or denomination that comes from being raised in it is not a given. A Presbyterian seminary is made up of more than Presbyterian students. And, of course, that seminary population is fluid, always changing as students arrive and depart. Students' roots grow deeper in seminary soil, but it is a temporary pot. Their replanting continues.

When students matriculate at Austin Seminary, they recite this statement at opening worship their first semester:

*In recognition of the claims of God upon me and
in reliance upon God's grace,
I declare my intention to live responsibly
in this community,
to be persistent in the pursuit of learning,
diligent in prayer and praise,
responsive to the needs of my fellow members,
and open to their efforts
to contribute to my equipment for the
service of Christ.*

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What does that equipping look like? What should students know, learn, experience, read, encounter? These questions are explored in all kinds of ways all over campus. In the case of music, the questions might be tweaked. What does that equipping *sound* like? What should students learn and read but also *sing, hear, and play*?

Matt, a second-year student, is a frequent leader of congregational songs in our chapel, both on vocals and on guitar. We sometimes find rehearsal times a day or two ahead. At other times, our schedules mean that we put it together shortly before worship, but Matt is such a natural musician that we can pull it together quickly. I am not a guitar player, so I rely on his advice and instincts, which are always on point. He plays and leads congregationally, with musical energy and personal calm. That musical energy is not always loud; he's attentive to the service, not just the song. His leadership invites worship. In rehearsals and planning, he shows students and faculty how musicians can be colleagues.

I think there is a more fundamental question that comes first: *How does music matter in this place?* It is a natural question for a church, and while a seminary is not, strictly speaking, a church, it is still church. Its purpose is scholarly; it seeks to equip servants for ministry; but it does those things as a community of worship and service. Asking what students need to *know* or *learn* about music—or about New Testament, homiletics, pastoral care, mission, or theology—is not enough. How and why does music, or any other discipline, matter to a particular place and time? The question is crucial because it will always be the question of any ministry context. Equipping students to live into that question is not only a matter of giving them “tools,” or helping them download apps for ministerial phones. It is about learning *and* integrating disciplines. It is teaching students not just to know but also to think, connect, argue, and imagine. We are constantly trying to figure out what to teach and why, which is really discerned by asking what we hope to be learned. Behind both questions are deeper ones of what matters.

They are important questions because a seminary is a place of near-continuous pedagogy, an absorptive way of life. Almost everything is a model, example, or lesson, and not only in the classroom. Heart-spaces and spiritual centering compete with

grades, finances, jobs, family life, personalities, and the overall intensity that is graduate school. Everything feels important, everyone is busy, and this can easily sideline prayer. Take the question most of us ask at some point: As worship leaders with responsibilities, how do we ourselves worship? Drag and enlarge that question like a text box across the breadth of seminary life and you will hear students (and perhaps teachers) name a conundrum: they are so saturated in theological education that spirituality sometimes feels crowded out. It is true that we sometimes live in seasons of particular focus, and spirituality may be at work in unexpected, even hidden ways during intense theological study, the way musicians discover after the fact that music theory did indeed make them better artists. Nevertheless, students—and teachers—still need heart-spaces: the moments and people and rituals that aren't about achievement and study, that allow for tending to other things. We are better students, and teachers, if we do more than just study and teach.

Andrew, a third-year student, was a voice major as an undergraduate. Pulled by the Spirit back to both music and church in recent years, he landed at APTS as quite literally a God-send, not least to a dean of chapel still learning how all this works. Andrew's vocal gifts have not been hid under a basket on campus, and they weave a welcome for others' voices, through his enthusiasm, passion, friendships, presence, and deep theological probing. In a recent service, he somehow sensed that a presider might forget the Prayer for Illumination; walking past the organ console, he motioned to his phone, said I've got a prayer, and took us forward without missing a beat—then went on to cant the evening psalm with beauty and grace. In a directed individual study, he researched music by J. S. Bach, Samuel Barber, Duke Ellington, and John Adams, crafting a final worship/presentation that revealed sacred masterpieces to a student and faculty congregation to whom they were virtually unknown.

What does this mean for the study and experience of music at a seminary? Graduate theological education does not, by and large, mean a graduate level of music education. Like other congregations, students bring a huge range of musical experience and interest, with definite and differing tastes. Where some will feel confident with music, others

Worship is the community's gathered prayer and its central, formative act of theology.

may trust neither their own judgments nor their own voices. Once in ministry, particularly as pastors, they will face engagement with and decisions about music: shaping worship, choosing songs, working with musicians, leading conversations—and these are all decisions not just of art but of community, colleagues, and prayer. At seminary, students are probably not studying music itself with graduate-school-level intensity or expectation. They do, however, need musical equipping, and in that graduate school pressure cooker they also need nourishment.

So, if music matters—then how?

It matters because it is a gift of God. Martin Luther centered his musical convictions on this. Before it is useful, before it teaches, before it equips, it is gift.

It matters because it is biblical. From creation to completion, the Bible is full of song, and God's command is that we take part.

It matters because it calls voices to life. Music in the church is not a professional ethic but an incarnational ethic. Seminarians are nourished and empowered in claiming their singing voices, alongside their prophetic and pastoral ones, and they will help others do the same.

It matters because words aren't enough. Words are everywhere in theological education, but theology and prayer take other forms. There are sighs too deep for words.

It matters because it changes time. In the demanding world of graduate school, time can feel like a declining balance. Music pauses that clock for an alternative temporal space. Listening takes patience; singing gives us a different rhythm.

It matters because it is not competitive. Music means common breath, common voices, and common space. It is shared realization, not individual achievement.

It matters because it helps us bear others. In these days, we desperately need enlarged empathies and sympathies. Songs give us languages, sounds, and people that we need to hear.

It matters because it makes us more imaginative. The church is a liminal space. It needs artistry, invention, poetry, and fun.

Eula, a recent graduate, gave assurances, at the beginning of the semester, that she wasn't a musician and that this class might be intimidating, though music was important to her. A writing assignment to reflect on a meaning-full experience of music in worship made her raised eyebrows visible across the classroom and possibly across campus. What came back in her completed assignment, though, was in fact musical. It had nothing to do with "ability" or "training"—it was concerned with perception, transcendence, meaning-making, power, sighs deeper than words. The entire semester, Eula's voice was raised, if not necessarily in song, then at least about songs—the songs that are so important to her and that are crucial to the church in these days: lament, protest, gratitude, community.

Music, like the rest of worship, comes to life in its practices. Campus worship is the primary place. Worship is the community's gathered prayer and its central, formative act of theology. It is where the community tends to its repertory of song. It is where students encounter music in action: the songs, the songbooks, and the singing practices that will be part of their work. Students may have been formed in certain music traditions; seminary worship is a chance to explore others. Some students are relatively new to faith and worship, with little in singing or worship music, so what they hear and sing in worship may be genuinely and vibrantly new. Hymnals and song collections are ready for all this. In many ways, hymnals are the church at its most ecumenical; and whether or not we are in communion with each other in liturgy or sacrament, we have long been in communion as singers. Can music in seminary worship reflect an ethos in which all kinds of songs are at home as possibilities for prayer? Worship is where music is held accountable, so that it is true to the community at hand: to its languages, races, gender identities, ages, pieties, as well as its studies, questions, and convictions. Can music in seminary worship cast a wide net, not only because it is a practical contribution to students' readiness for the musical range they may encounter in ministry, but also because it *matters* that music reflects the boundary-breaking love that is the will of God for the world?

Karla, a graduating senior, raised a combination question-affirmation in the same class a few weeks later: "This is a place where we can talk about different songs and about the increasing number of brown people in white churches. We should talk about this, right? We should talk about how songs can make room for people." In response, Eula said, "That question makes my heart happy." Whether in her first language of Spanish or in English, Karla sings with devotional fervor and leadership. When a fire alarm unexpectedly disrupted a candlelit moment at last year's Easter Vigil, it so happened that the next song was to be led by Karla: Psalm 42, "Como el ciervo." In one song, she pulled the community back into worship. Similarly, her singing of Pablo Sosa's "Yo sé que sé" was, in another service, almost hypnotically expressive, inviting the congregation to share that song's prayer: "Sí, Señor! Yes, my God!"

Worship is also, in part, laboratory. This is not a diminishment of worship, just an aspect of it, as it is an aspect of the whole life of faith. We try things because curiosity, imagination, and creativity are God's gifts. It is not so much asking, "What can we do with this idea or this song?" as "What can God do with this?" The delight in exploration—the premise of education—naturally makes its way into worship. Musical exploration can be particularly rich, because a seminary population brings so many gifts. Worship is where those gifts can emerge—where voices and instruments are welcomed and where leadership is cultivated and deepened. A seminary choir or praise team can teach students week after week how ensembles lead worship, how music is composed and rehearsed, and how musicians work together. Such ensembles offer alternative and restorative spaces, with the shared task of creating beauty. As in churches and other schools, they are niches, particular ways for people to be involved and find community.

Closely related is the work of worship planning and preparation. There are different patterns at different schools, but whatever the pattern, the conversations around worship planning are prime opportunities for students to engage with music

and with musicians. A single half-hour meeting can show students something of how pastors and musicians work together. It can also help students realize that choosing songs is not a text-only task but also involves music. It is why such meetings should occur where there is a piano or some kind of instrument, so that planning includes listening and singing. This helps students to think about musical sound and character. It can teach them what happens when music occurs: what is *experientially* different between a four-stanza hymn and a repeated chorus, or what is *experientially* different between a prelude-call to worship-hymn sequence and a contemporary worship song set. It can invite them to imagine how songs will relate to other parts of worship and to attend to the sonic and expressive arc of a service. It helps them go beyond merely choosing hymn texts that "go with the sermon" or routinely filling in the blanks of a worship template.

Jasiel, a graduating senior, has sung solos and in a choir. He has a finely tuned sense of worship—its rhythms, textures, sounds, and energies. When he is cantor, his singing deflects attention from himself and invites the congregation's voice. In a recent planning session, he raised a question not thought about before by others in the room: What is the relationship of music in a service to the expressive character of the preacher? As the worship committee, at another meeting, worked to fill in dates for senior preaching, a particular date was already tentatively booked for a special music program related to Bach. Jasiel asked to preach on that date, eager to engage as a student preacher with that music.

Music in the classroom is more of a variable from school to school. There are often only the most minimal requirements for classes in worship, let alone music. But all seminaries should consider this: the potential for lasting impact that a class in church music can have on students is real. A colleague of mine still recalls, years later, how crucial a class with Martin Tel at Princeton Theological Seminary was for her. Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary, under the leadership of Paul Roberts and Tony

There are different patterns at different schools, but whatever the pattern, the conversations around worship planning are prime opportunities for students to engage with music and with musicians.

McNeill, has created the Melva W. Costen Institute of Worship, Preaching, and Sacred Arts, which includes intentional education for worship leaders and musicians. At Austin Seminary, classes like “Music and the Church” and “Pastors and Musicians as Partners” have tried to help students think broadly about music and imagination in worship, the partnership of pastor and musician, the practical skills of using hymnals and song collections, navigating copyright issues, and planning worship intentionally and creatively. Classes on music, or at the very least room for music within worship classes, can give students the chance to explore the range of congregational song, the relationship of church music to church history and theology, and practice with integrating music into worship. The presence of church music in a seminary curriculum helps its importance as a discipline of study that will equip students. Like the work of most church musicians, these are all examples of a kind of translation: teaching music to people who are not primarily musicians but who will have to use music and work with musicians. We would not expect future pastors to learn preaching, polity, or pastoral care by trial and error in the field; we should not expect them to learn music that way either.

Like the work of most church musicians, these are all examples of a kind of translation: teaching music to people who are not primarily musicians but who will have to use music and work with musicians.

Carrie, a second-year student, has sung opera, recital, and music theater. She sight-reads most anything and has a range that sends her among several sections of the choir. She moved a congregation of alumni and visitors recently by singing Handel; with equal ease she sang a contemporary Christian psalm setting on Ash Wednesday. She also fills occasional percussion needs, producing shakers and such on a moment's notice—even sleigh bells at Lessons and Carols.

All of this can help students—and, maybe more crucially, those same students in the future as pastors—remain connected to vocational delight and wonder. On the sacristy wall at Austin Seminary are these framed words: *Out of duty, we do things well. Out of love, we do things beautifully.* One of the things music and musicians can help teach the church is how to hold on to both of those things, because doing music well is so closely tied to doing it beautifully. Beauty is a part of being called: that mysterious alchemy of formation and experience that lands a student at seminary in the first place, in the existential conviction, however dim or bright, that “I am supposed to be here and do *this*, whatever *this* is.”

It is like the study of music. We are equipped, as music students, with technique, literature, history, and theory; we hone performance skills; we practice the methods and conducting that help us teach music to others. But those things are in service to something deeper: the musical life. They equip us not just to work as musicians but to be musicians—to be musical people, to hold on to the claim that music, in some way, makes on our lives. That claim may be part-time or full-time, vocation or sideline, but it is a claim. Leonard Bernstein captured it precisely:

*Life without music is unthinkable.
Music without life is academic.
That is why my contact with music is a total
embrace.*

If this sounds similar to the way pastors describe a sense of call, it's because it is. Pastors and musicians sometimes struggle with life together. Those can be power, ego, and turf issues, or personality conflicts. Sometimes it is more a matter of speaking different languages, of genuinely not understanding each other's work or worlds. But I am still persuaded, more than ever in this recent season of seminary work, that common ground—a shared seedbed—is found here: pastors and musicians both know what it means to be called. We share that unlooked-for and persistent push-pull towards something so compelling that we must do it. Musicians know it; they confirm it in musical colleagues and communities; they deepen it by study and practice. Musicians also wrestle with it: music doesn't always pay, burnout is real, employers may be unfair, and cynicism creeps in. The wrestling may be deeper: imposter syndrome, the relentless voice:

“Am I equipped for this? When will people find out that I’m not that good?” Pastors, like musicians, know the total embrace. Musicians, like pastors, know the summons, the questions, and the fears. Of all the things that seminaries can do for music in the church, this might be the most important: giving students—the future church leaders—witness to this common ground and the partnerships that *are* possible.

Erica, a graduating senior, brings together a love of beauty, an instinct for ritual, and a passion for justice. She loves hymns and songs of all kinds. She is also a born collaborator. In every worship planning meeting, she is reaching for hymnals almost immediately, trading ideas with faculty and students about how songs can take part in the worship fabric. In a recent planning meeting, she helped make the right choices with another student, who asked, “Is this how it always happens in worship planning?”

Austin Seminary’s dean of students, Sarah Kinney Gaventa, preached for our Ash Wednesday service this year. She referenced Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “underground” seminary—a crucial seedbed in its time—and how Bonhoeffer led students into life together. She reminded us that listening to each other is crucial to community in these days. Listening to each other, as to music, may well change time, make space, and call voices to life—and it most certainly will be a gift of God.

The Bach-oriented service finished with what many church musicians know as a “standard,”—“Air on a G String.” What are the standards, in these

days, to the changing mix of people who are seminary students and congregations? What does a Bach chestnut like that mean to these students, in this community? What kind of truth, for them, is this beauty? The question lingers, as does the memory of its sounding in Austin’s Shelton Chapel: the tune sounding on melodica, with Matt’s teasing at the harmonies on guitar, with Carrie’s vocalizing of the lovely inner voice, and with Andrew’s vocal pizzicato on the inexorable bass line.

In different ways, seminarians are apprenticing, and I personally find myself doing a fair amount of apprenticing in this work as well—observing the experience and expertise of others, shaping new skills and reshaping old ones. That apprenticing is both ontological and artisanal: knowing that there is some kind of call, and the weaving, whittling, hammering, stitching, firing, sanding, practicing of being equipped and still more equipped—the apprenticing we all do, the students we all are.

John Bell makes this exhortation: “Believe in the voice God has given you. It is the voice of an apprentice angel.” We are always apprenticing to God the Cantor, singing with God who is our lead guitarist, master drummer, gospel pianist, *organiste titulaire*. All of our voices in the church—trained or not, ordained or not—are apprentice angels, and surely among the better angels of our nature. This world and these days are sorely in need of better angels. Seminarians are some of them, wrestling with God, with the church, and with all of us at the edges of rivers, and bestowing God-sent blessings on the body of Christ that they are called to serve.

Music in the *Book of Common Worship* (2018)

William McConnell

Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
God's praise in the assembly of the faithful.
(Psalm 149:1)

The singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is a vital and ancient form of prayer. Singing engages the whole person, and helps to unite the body of Christ in common worship. The congregation itself is the church's primary choir; the purpose of rehearsed choirs and other musicians is to lead and support the congregation in the singing of prayer. Special songs, anthems, and instrumental music may also serve to interpret the Word and enhance the congregation's prayer. Furthermore, many of the elements of the service of worship may be sung. Music in worship is always to be an offering to God, not merely an artistic display, source of entertainment, or cover for silence. (Directory for Worship, W-2.0202)

Throughout Scripture we are called to respond to God in spoken words, instrumental and vocal music, physical movement, liturgical posture, and even silence. How do we decide when and how to do those things? Our Directory for Worship provides a theological framework within which we do all of these—decently and in order! Yet leaders and participants in worship are craving creative options, eager to find new ways to glorify God in song.

Gone are the days when three congregational hymns, an introit, anthem, and benediction response from the choir, a prelude and postlude from the organ, the Doxology, and the Gloria Patri were all

the music expected (or even tolerated) in Sunday morning worship. And what about fresh ideas for other services of worship—funerals, weddings, special commemorations, celebrations, services in times of tragedy, the offices of Morning, Midday, Evening, and Night Prayer, and other times the people of God gather? Resources are available that set to music virtually every element of worship, including the sermon. How much music is enough? Is there such a thing as too much music in worship? How can a pastor, music leader, or worship planner decide?

These sorts of questions infused conversations about musical selections and suggestions to be included in the 2018 revision of the *Book of Common Worship*. In the 1993 *Book of Common Worship*, Harold Daniels and his associates included instructions and resources for singing psalmody and canticles, as well as chanted suggestions for the Great Vigil of Easter. Rubrics suggesting music in the Service for the Lord's Day and other worship services included only limited references to specific selections. In the years since 1993, numerous resources for congregational song in multiple styles have emerged, not the least of which has been *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (2013). How should the newly revised *Book of Common Worship* recognize this huge depth and breadth of resources without becoming overly complicated, unwieldy, and difficult to manage?

What follows is a brief overview of ways that music has been integrated into the newly revised *Book of Common Worship*. There will always be room for questions of why particular elements of worship should or should not be presented musically. Each worshiping community will decide for itself how best to incorporate music, movement,

William McConnell, former executive director of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians (PAM), served on the editorial team for the revision of the *Book of Common Worship*. He currently serves the Presbyterian Mission Agency as Mission Engagement Advisor for the South Region (Synod of the Sun and Synod of Living Waters).

gesture, stillness, spoken words, and silence into its own worship. There may be disagreement, and there may even be strife about our choices. But through it all, Presbyterians will continue to sing, worship, pray, and receive nourishment together at Christ's table—the place where we simultaneously celebrate the reality of our right now and God's not yet.

Although we readily acknowledge and celebrate many fine resources available from multiple composers, publishers, and worshipping communities, we have confined our specific recommendations to two hymnals and one Psalter released by Westminster John Knox Press: *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), abbreviated as GTG; the *Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), abbreviated as PH; and *The Psalter: Psalms and Canticles for Singing* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), abbreviated as PS.

The Service for the Lord's Day

Utilizing readily available musical resources, it is possible to sing virtually every element of the Service for the Lord's Day. From God's call for us to worship, through our response to the Word and God's sending us into the world, there are many outstanding resources for singing both historic and newly conceived texts. In the revised *Book of Common Worship* (BCW), we chose to include musical suggestions for texts that have become for Presbyterians and our ecumenical partners most conducive to song. In particular, suggestions are included for:

- *Kyrie* (Lord have mercy . . .)
- Glory to God in the highest
- Gospel acclamations
- Gloria Patri (Glory to the Father . . .)
- Doxology (Praise God from whom all blessings flow . . .)
- Eucharistic Responses
 - Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)
 - Memorial Acclamation (Christ has died . . .)
 - Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)
- The Lord's Prayer
- Amen
- Hymns and songs during distribution of the communion elements

This should not be construed to mean that these are the only places where texts often spoken could be sung, or that music should be used at all of these. For example, many congregations find singing creedal statements to be very meaningful. "I Believe in God the Father" (GTG 481, a setting of the Apostle's Creed) and "When We Are Living" (GTG 822/PH 400, a bilingual English/Spanish setting of texts and concepts from the Heidelberg Catechism) provide opportunities to internalize these statements of faith from our *Book of Confessions* in ways that simply speaking them may not. Conversely, some congregations find silence during the distribution of communion elements and at other points of the worship service to be meaningful.

When the instruction "Hymn, Song, or Spiritual Song" is included, we encourage worship planners to include music of whatever style best presents the theme or scriptural text being presented. The conversation about music choices should begin with the question "What are we trying to say?" and not "How are we trying to say it?" We suggest consulting the outstanding indices and cross-references in *Glory to God*, as well as those available in other hymnals used by your congregation. The first issue of each year of *Call to Worship* contains a broad range of outstanding suggestions from both Presbyterian and ecumenical hymnals.

In an effort to streamline suggestions for liturgical refrains, we refer worship planners, as much as possible, to sections of *Glory to God* and the *Presbyterian Hymnal* devoted to musical settings of these texts. Regardless of the worship resources being used, we encourage worship planners to overcome the "tyranny of the topic heading" and allow pastoral sensitivity, creativity, and the Holy Spirit to guide your work. For example: just because "O Little Town of Bethlehem" may not seem appropriate during a liturgical season other than Christmas or Epiphany, the fourth stanza provides a beautifully appropriate response after the Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon:

Oh, holy child of Bethlehem, descend
to us we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in; be born
in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad
tidings tell;
O come to us; abide with us, our Lord
Emanuel! (GTG 121)

It is our hope that the suggestions offered lead you to other musical options appropriate for your worshipping community. If your congregation has not yet learned a particular setting of the text you would like to include, is another, more familiar setting available? Might it be possible to use the Metrical Index in your hymnal to sing the text you would like to use to a more familiar tune in the same meter?

Daily Prayer

Whether they are used in private devotional life or as a corporate form of prayer, the offices of Morning, Midday, Evening, and Night Prayer provide multiple opportunities for incorporation of music into worship. Suggestions for singing the various psalms appointed as well as ancient and modern settings of historic canticles allow for great flexibility within these services. In addition to settings of the Psalms, suggestions in the revised BCW include musical settings of *Phos hilaron* (Hymn to Christ the Light), Magnificat (The Song of Mary), Nunc Dimittis (The Song of Simeon), and Benedictus (The Song of Zechariah).

The Psalter

The Psalms are a treasure trove of prayer often spoken, but most effective when sung. The 2018 BCW includes all 150 psalms with multiple suggestions for their use in both corporate worship and personal prayer. We are deeply grateful to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for graciously giving permission to use in the BCW the complete Psalter from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, an inclusive-language version that includes pointing and psalm prayers.

The Psalms are printed in a way that enables speaking, chanting, and singing. They are formatted for responsive reading alternating and also pointed for chanting. If you are not familiar with chanting the Psalms, the introduction to this section of the BCW provides simple and easily assimilated instructions. This ecumenically shared translation of the Psalter artfully and skillfully utilizes inclusive and evocative language, maintaining the integrity of the ancient text to maximum poetic affect.

References to hymns in the *Presbyterian Hymnal* and *The Psalter: Songs and Canticles for Singing* indicate psalm refrains, and selected psalm tones have been retained from the 1993 BCW. References to metrical and responsorial psalm settings in GTG

are noted for each psalm included in that hymnal. We also added psalm response suggestions, along with PH and GTG hymn references (where possible) to psalms not included in the 1993 BCW.

The eight psalm refrains published in the 1993 BCW, each conveying a particular attitude of the psalmist's prayers, were composed by Hal H. Hopson. Each psalm refrain was paired with two complementary psalm tones. In consultation with Hopson, and with his blessing, we chose to retain one psalm tone with each refrain. We have added alternative notes to psalm response accompaniments, making them more easily played on the piano. We also added accessible guitar chords.

Using the outstanding 1993 *Book of Common Worship* introduction to the Psalter as our guide, we expanded this introductory material, retained instructions for chanting the Psalms, and suggested that worship planners consult such additional exceptional resources as *Psalms for All Seasons* (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship/Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012), *Psalter for Christian Worship* by Michael Morgan (Curriculum Publishing, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2011), *Singing God's Psalms* by Fred R. Anderson (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), and *The People's Psalter* by Hal H. Hopson (MorningStar Music Publishers, 2008).

Uses and presentations of psalmody are limited only by pastoral sensitivity, liturgical creativity, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is our hope that congregations will be led to new expressions of prayer as they explore the profound riches in this first hymnbook of the church.

Congregational Song for Weddings and Funerals

Since we hope to encourage congregational singing at weddings and funerals as well, we drew on and expanded materials developed by the Presbyterian Association of Musicians to provide suggestions for hymns and other forms of congregational song particularly appropriate for these services of worship. Like the suggestions included in other sections of the book, specific references are limited to *Glory to God* and the *Presbyterian Hymnal*. These suggestions represent the opinions of several people and should not be considered a closed canon. Pastoral needs, local traditions and sensitivities, and the leading of the Holy Spirit should always be paramount. As with hymn and song references in other sections of the BCW, we encourage you to

use these suggestions as “jumping-off places” into other musical resources available to you and your congregation.

Other Musical Suggestions

Because music is an integral part of all the church’s worship, we included congregational song suggestions for a variety of occasions, including:

- Advent Service of Lessons and Carols
- The Three Days (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Great Vigil of Easter)
- Ordination and installation to ordered ministries of the church
- Commissioning of people to specific service in the church
- Various occasions in the life of a congregation
- Dedications of churches, homes, and other institutions
- Blessing of the Animals
- Services at times of national crisis or disaster
- Services after violent events
- Interreligious gatherings of celebration, commemoration, and lament

When planning services of worship that include participants of other denominations or other faiths, care should be exercised that musical selections be appropriate for all and that guidelines of respectful presence, referenced in the revised *Book of Common Worship*, be followed. For further guidance on respectful presence, please consult *Respectful Presence: An Understanding of Interfaith Prayer and Celebration from a Reformed Christian Perspective*, a 1997 study paper commended by the 209th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Deciding What Not to Include

In all aspects of this endeavor, some of the most difficult decisions involved questions of what *not* to include. There are nearly innumerable theologically sound, beautifully constructed, and musically intriguing possibilities available. But, there is simply not room for everything. In choosing music to suggest, we decided to include, as often as possible, musical settings of complete texts. There are references to phrases from the Psalms in hundreds, probably thousands, of hymns, and references to phrases from liturgical texts in hundreds more. As

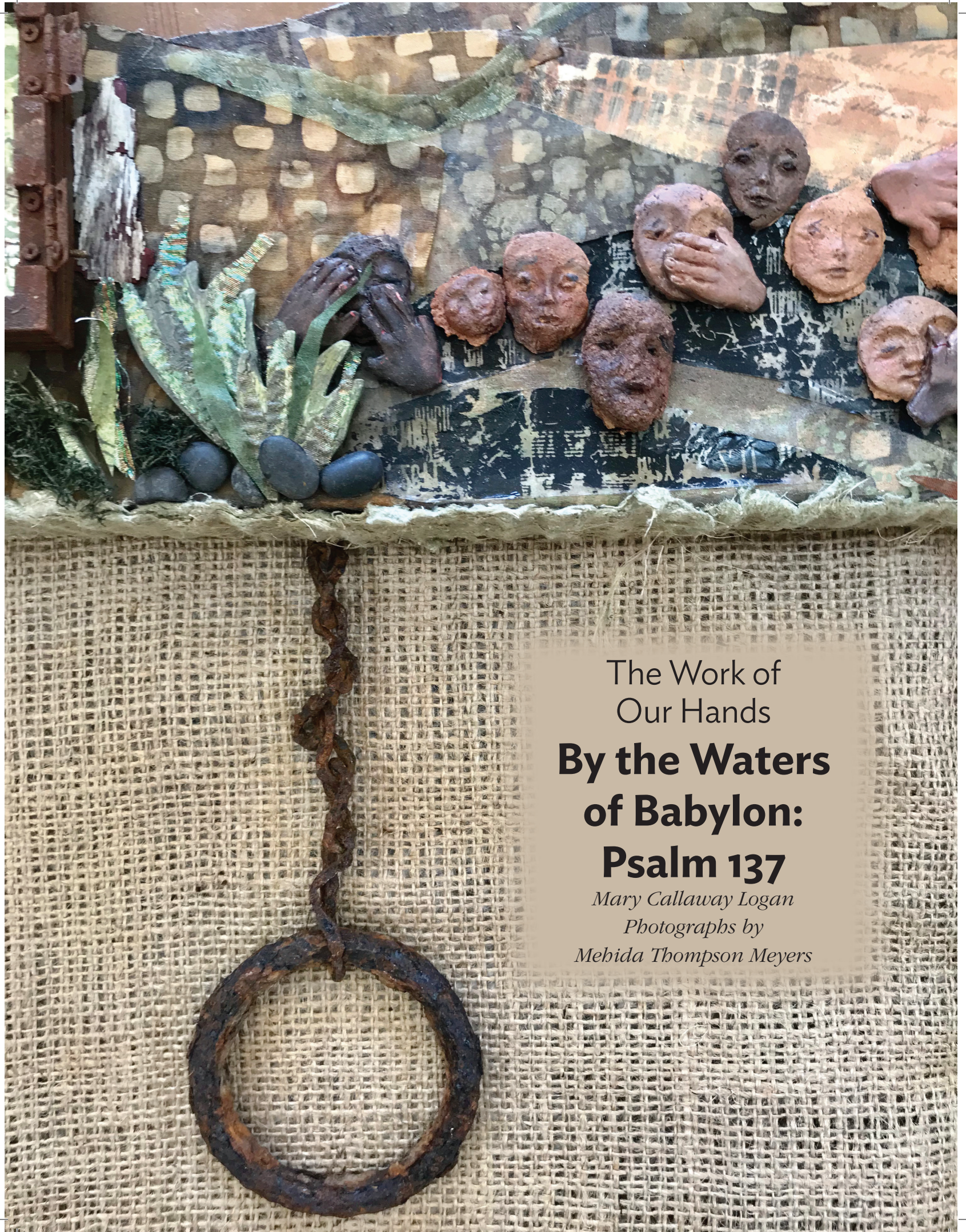
much as possible, we offered musical suggestions that present the complete scope of the texts being sung. Admittedly, this was an exercise in art and not science. As has been mentioned several times, pastoral considerations, local sensitivities, creativity of worship planners, and guidance of the Holy Spirit should always prevail. Hopefully, suggestions we have made will lead your thoughts to other musical options appropriate in your congregation. As the revised *Book of Common Worship* moves into wide usage, we look forward to messages from users excitedly reporting on how suggestions in the *Book of Common Worship* led them to discoveries of other rich musical resources. Reformed and always reforming!

Where Do We Go from Here?

In preparing this revision of a resource that has served the church for the last twenty-five years and will hopefully serve the church for many years to come, this book is offered as a starting place for conversation. We encourage pastors, church musicians, and worship planners to become familiar with the resources and suggestions presented here, reviewing the introductory materials, discussing the ideas, using suggestions that serve your worshiping community, and skipping portions that do not serve your congregation’s needs. This is not a book just for pastors. All who lead the church’s worship can find resources and inspiration here. When multiple copies of this book find their place on the desks and in the daily usage of church musicians, worship planners, and pastors alike, one of our primary goals will have been realized.

What are the most appropriate moments for music in worship? How much music is too much? How little is not enough? These are questions that cannot be answered outside the context of a particular worshiping community. Music that may provide a transcendent moment in worship for one congregation may be an intrusive interruption to another. We offer the musical suggestions in the 2018 revision of the *Book of Common Worship* as a place to begin exploration, spark creativity, and encourage discussion—a place where those who lead in worship find inspiration to serve the church with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

Soli Deo Gloria



The Work of
Our Hands
**By the Waters
of Babylon:
Psalm 137**

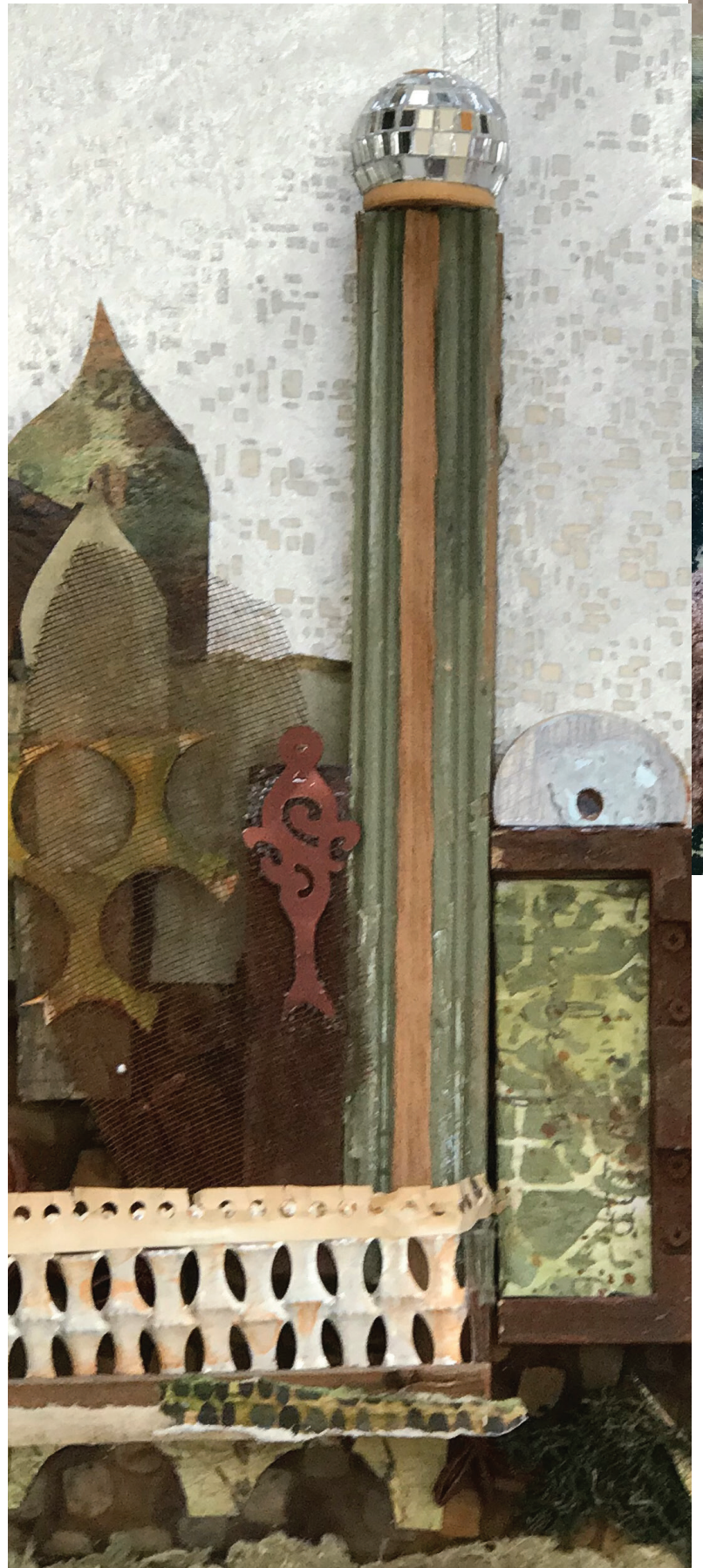
Mary Callaway Logan
Photographs by
Mebida Thompson Meyers

How I Work with Found Objects to Make Art

I have long been a collector of discarded, broken, lost, and patinated materials that live in swelling boxes and bags in my studio. When a psalm or spiritual topic moves me to begin—usually following *lectio divina*, centering prayer, and reflection on world events such as the refugee and migration crisis of this decade—I pull out a used canvas to distribute papers, sticks, metal fragments, pieces of glass, and other objects over the surface. This is the play, when the orphaned objects begin to “talk” to me. I trust these fragments to instruct, to name their preferred color ways, to begin to order a direction. By simply handling objects we can know many things that our minds cannot conceive. The physicality of the “found” object has a self-possessed being, not yet processed through the grasping, thinking place.

These found things also stand in for our own “found” state, our own brokenness, needed healing, re-membering. In their humility and incompleteness, they beg for creative re-assembly, usefulness, paint for enhancement. They also represent us on the faith journey in which we seek spiritual and communal transformation in this world. The mystery of Christ’s incarnation beholds and redeems all things human; all grit and grace is meant to come to beauty.

A summary of the artistic method might read: find, trust, don’t know, slow down, love, play; then something like a relationship with a person might evolve with an animated human voice. This may call up Scripture or liturgy, or may speak “a new thing.” Sometimes it may make art.



Mary Calloaway Logan is an artist in Black Mountain, North Carolina.



This Assemblage and Voices of the Exiles

This assemblage, a collage in 3-D, represents the protest and lament of Psalm 137. The tribes deported and exiled from the land of promise, the place where God continuously has called the people to possess and love, arrive in their captivity. Exhausted, they collapse “by the waters,” which I imagine to be at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates River. They are traumatized, and as further torment their captors—with mocking cynicism—require the exiles to entertain them with the songs of their beloved Zion. Singing of Zion in a land not of God’s covenantal seal and home is unthinkable, a sacrilege. How profoundly connected to the land they are, as the heart is to the body! Do they discern that one’s voice could utter blasphemy in song? The humiliation is profound, the lament is deep, the defeat of the exiles is spiritually devastating. Yet they still possess their devotion and a protesting heart.

Those of us who are privileged twenty-first-century dwellers can understand little of the journeys of refugees and migrants who have left everything. In Psalm 137, the abyss of grief suffered by those exiled reflects the loss of their connection to God, to beautiful Zion. Fear and despair lead to questioning: Why would God let this happen? While we might empathize with the thousands of people on the move in this world who carry only one bag to safety, what do we know of intangibles they hold sacred? These are the true treasures that are their lifeblood, their faith story; these hold the power of place, and the seal of lifelong trust.

By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there
we hung up our harps.

For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

How could we sing the LORD’s song
in a strange land?

(Psalm 137:1–4)





But the captives have brought their harps, communal instruments for music making. When Sweet Honey in the Rock, an ensemble of African American women, sing their version of this psalm, they sway rhythmically with a *cappella* voices while a deaf interpreter signs and sings. In nonwhite bodies and voices, the universal, contemporary breadth of this prayer is reenacted. We are also reminded that often slaves in the American South were not allowed to read or pray, and so they sang their sacred songs in the master's universe, hidden in plain sight.

Sweet Honey's version adds these words from Psalm 19:14 to Psalm 137 for emphasis: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, my rock." That interwoven line emphasizes this psalm's potency: seeking synchronous purity of heart with voice for God's hearing. For any kind of captivity in our contemporary world, don't we struggle to find a voice, to find that heart compass that will restore *home*?

Antique papers from my mother's music from the last century, painted papers, trash and fabrics, along with television memories of the war with Iraq led me





to find a terrain of sand and colors of a metallic sky. Out of the land rose an imagined ancient empire, all in colors drained and drab, but grandly self-conscious, resting above a rusted circle hanging like a leg iron. But for the willow leaves, the tree planted by waters (Ps. 1), I began to add the sunrise color of copper. And there the instruments (not harps) are hung so that they can dominate the bleakness.

Close to the river in reeds on the shore are faces of the anguished captives, made of dirt. They are covering their faces and mouths. Beneath the shallows I suspended the fish (perhaps Jonah's whale), a very serendipitous "find" from the bottom of a box: a long-forgotten sacred object found broken in a Judaica store years before. Such synchronicity awakens and delights me! It is a ritual object used in Sabbath worship, a kind of punctured pot, a besamim box, meant to hold cloves and spices and candle. At

the end of the service, celebrants pass around this vessel to "remember the sweet smell of the Sabbath," a fragrant memory to last until the next lighting of the candle for Shabbat. Angled above is the ladder which connects all realms, all worlds, seen and unseen, echoing Jacob's ladder and confirming God is indeed present. "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16).

The question at the heart of this psalm, "How could we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" is universally compelling. Thousands of generations, over thousands of years, have pondered this in many organic forms. When our compass is spinning madly and we find ourselves in a foreign, strange or alien land, what songs root us? What words, what poetry? And how do we find the voice to muster through our loss and humiliations to know whom we are singing for, and to sing out?



Presbyterian Association of Musicians

2019 Worship & Music Conferences



Week 1: June 16–21, 2019

Week 2: June 23–28, 2019

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June 16–21, 2019

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Conference Director

Joshua Taylor, CCM

at Mo-Ranch Assmblly
Hunt, Texas

On Liturgy: How Do We Sing a New Song?

Mary Beth Anton

Last Christmas Eve my family attended worship together at my husband's church. While there, I was profoundly struck by the faith and courage of the worship leaders. One was newly diagnosed with cancer. Another had lost her beloved mother during the past summer. In the fall, the husband of a third had died suddenly of a heart attack. Despite their private griefs, each of these women took her part in leading the congregation in the celebration of Jesus' birth. Remembering their service that Christmas Eve, I marvel. Under similar circumstances, would I have their courage and faith? *How do we learn to sing a new song when we are grieving?*

Every pastor looks out each week into the faces of the congregants, knowing the pains, the hurts, the grief, and the needs of those gathered. In the fourth pew, an older couple sits with their grandchild whose mother committed suicide. A couple in the west transept battles to save their marriage. A young woman in the third from the last pew has recently suffered a miscarriage. A widower now sits alone in the pew shared with his wife for sixty years. A student in the balcony suffers from depression and anxiety. An usher has recently learned of the recurrence of his son's cancer. *How do we learn to sing a new song?*

Of course, on any Sunday, a worshiping community includes congregants not facing difficult situations. But knowing the painful circumstances of many in the congregation, I am always impressed by their courage and perseverance. I am all too aware how difficult it has been for some to get out of bed that morning, much less attend worship. *How can they sing any song, let alone a new song?*

Before we can sing a new song together, we must deal with the pain in our midst. In his *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, Walter Brueggemann writes,

our life of faith consists in moving with God in terms of:

- (a) being securely oriented;
- (b) being painfully disoriented; and
- (c) being surprisingly reoriented.¹

How might we as a worshiping community acknowledge the painful disorientation in our midst? How might we provide space for the movement from disorientation to reorientation, from death to resurrection? *How might we sing a new song together?*

I always remember the complaints of a former congregant who told me (more than once) that our pastoral prayers were verbose. Having long cared for her late husband, my friend found herself frustrated by her inability to find space within the service to express her own grief and pain. "Please be quiet. Give me space. Give me time to say what I need to say to God." How might we who structure and lead worship help those whose only song is one of bitter lament and disorientation?

In planning worship we took her complaint to heart. It became our practice to frame the prayers of the people with a congregational song or hymn that served to invite honest petition and engender hope. One such song is a setting of the Twenty-third Psalm by Marty Haugen found in *Glory to God*:

Mary Beth Anton is a Presbyterian minister and coordinator of the Women in Ministry Initiative at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,
beyond my fears, from death into life.²

Sometimes we would sing only the refrain. On other occasions a soloist or choir would sing the stanzas. Using the music to bracket our prayers, we also began to add time and space for private petitions. Worshipers were invited to express their petitions for themselves, others, the church, and the world either out loud or in silence. Then we sang together:

Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,
beyond my fears, from death into life.³

Haugen's haunting text and music lingered in mind and heart long after the time for prayer ended.

Another song is a composition of John Bell, "Don't Be Afraid":

Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,
my love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,
and I have promised, promised to be
always near.⁴

Bell clearly understands that fear underlies our disorientation. With this song, we are reminded that God's love is stronger than any fear. God is not far off, rather God is Emmanuel—*with* us. This simple text and tune proclaims an immutable truth: *We are not ever alone*. Reminded of God's promises, we might begin the movement toward reorientation and a new song.

In his hymn setting of Psalm 77, "I Refused to Be Comforted Easily," John Bell provides another possibility for framing the prayers of the people:

I refused to be comforted easily and the tears
of distress made me blind:
I turned faint when my thoughts went too
deep for me
and I groaned when I called God to mind.⁵

In adapting the psalm, Bell boldly declares the supplicant's disorientation. We do not often give worshipers the opportunity to express such honest lament. Then the hymn's final stanza and refrain speak of the movement toward a new song:

Then, at last, I remembered all the things
I'd forgotten,
all the wonders you, Lord, had begun.
And I saw how misfortune had distracted
attention
from your faithfulness in all you've done.
Now I'm sure that your way is a holy way,
for its progress and path I can see;
and I know that your faithfulness in the past
will be real and be present for me.⁶

How do we sing a new song together? By providing space for the expression of our wounds and with honest songs and hymns of pain and hope, we find a way to raise our voices in a new song.

Notes

1. Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 2.
2. Marty Haugen, "Shepherd Me, O God" in *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 473.
3. Ibid.
4. John L. Bell, "Don't Be Afraid," in Joyce Berger and Martin Tel, *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 429.
5. John L. Bell, "I Refused to Be Comforted Easily," in ed. John Witvliet, *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012), 470–471.
6. Ibid.

On Music: How Can I Keep from Singing?

Peter Ncanywa

Hazel-Rimes Presbyterian Church is located on the West Coast, atop a scenic cliff overlooking the ocean. Established in the 1800s, the church is a pillar in its community by leading and participating in feeding and housing programs, among many other notable things. Hazel-Rimes has two pastors who have been serving faithfully in the wealthy town of Hazel-Rimes, and the music program is thriving under its esteemed music director, Dr. Patrick Cooper, who holds a Ph.D. in choral conducting. The children's choir sings in worship every Sunday, produces and performs three musicals each program year, and embarks on a small tour each summer. The volunteer adult choir consists of trained and amateur musicians who all have a profound love for music rooted in their faith. They do a biennial international tour and have performed with prestigious chamber orchestras around the world.

Clement Wall, a long-time member of Hazel-Rimes Presbyterian Church, has loved music from a young age. He is the first to arrive for all three weekly rehearsals held during the week, preservice, and postservice respectively. Even though he hoards multiple copies of each piece and claims not to have received them, his music is diligently marked with notes from Patrick. He is an active member of a local community chorus that regularly performs at HRPC. He practices his parts almost daily, but one would suspect otherwise. In fact, Clement is tone-deaf. He will always gravitate towards the melody and other voice parts that are convenient. During *a cappella* pieces, Clement's voice drones a tritone or so below the bass part at cadential points. During rehearsals and worship services, he misses every entrance; if he does come in on time, it is most often on a random note of his choosing. This was

particularly disconcerting to Patrick at first as he would look up to cue the basses and be greeted by an enthusiastic singer who was always late and slow with page turns.

Over a sixteen-month period, Clement grew progressively worse as he continued his private voice lessons. He sang louder; he listened less. In the summer of 2016, he signed up to sing a solo arrangement of "How Can I Keep from Singing?" The Thursday afternoon prior to his offering, he rehearsed the piece with Patrick—the music upside down in his hand. *Thankfully he signed up for a low Sunday*, Patrick thought to himself. Sunday came. Clement walked into the sanctuary an hour before worship to warm up and run through his offering again. At the end of the run-through, Patrick looked at him and said, "That will be just fine." He turned around and rolled his eyes as he walked away. Clement sang his offering that morning. The congregation was silent at the end of the song, and he stood there anticipating an appreciative "Amen" from someone. None came. He held his head up, said "Amen," and slowly returned to his seat. After that service, he grabbed the wrong jacket from the shelf and could not find his car keys.

On Thursday evening at 7:15, as Patrick went over his rehearsal plan, the eager Clement was nowhere to be seen for the 7:30 rehearsal. He was usually there by then. Nor was Clement to be seen during Patrick's prelude and postlude practice session before Sunday morning rehearsal. After two weeks, Patrick decided to pay Clement a visit at his house. He was greeted by a surprised Lydia who welcomed him. He entered the house, noting the view overlooking the valley, the Christmas tree, a shattered angel piece, and other decorations in and around the storage box. No Clement. Patrick

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explained he had growing concern for Clement's absence from church and choir over the last couple of weeks. He couldn't help but feel something was not right.

Lydia closed her eyes for a moment, took a deep breath, and said, "Would you like something to drink?" She stood up and brewed a pot of organic African rooibos tea. With shaky hands, she placed the silver tray and cups on the coffee table in the lounge and settled down. "George was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease a year ago. A couple of weeks ago, he left for choir, and an hour later the police called to tell me he had been lost, completely disoriented at the local library asking why the choir locked him out. They drove him back."

She sipped her tea. "For a while the rehearsals seemed to be helping. Especially this last year. He would return feeling better, in a happier mood, and would tell our grandchildren his childhood stories some times. I was always surprised how he would remember the little things." Patrick was silent and astounded as he realized that he had missed all the signs. But nothing measured to the shame he felt.

"Clem told them an interesting one a couple of weeks ago. Our youngest granddaughter was struggling with a piano passage. She was ready to

give up until he told her about his neurological condition that affected his fingers. He can't move them well independently; he struggles paging through his morning paper every day. So, he could not play any instrument he wanted to. That's how he ended up singing. He knows he doesn't have a good voice, but it was the only way he could share in the making of music which is important to him in worship." She took another sip and dribbled on her chin. She didn't notice.

"Thank you for being patient with him. He is upstairs napping. He couldn't figure out how to open the small ladder to place the angel on the tree. He got angry."

Patrick thanked Lydia for the tea and for disclosing Clement's condition. As he was leaving, he remembered words of his professor of sacred music: "One of the greatest things with choral singing is that, collectively, we are better than our best singers and not as weak as our weakest. We elevate one another. Imagine doing that while praising God and the difference you can make for all who experience it."

On Preaching: Actively Wondering Preaching

David E. Lower

One Sunday several years ago a worshiper approached me during the postlude and said, “Pastor David, I think immediately after every worship service we need to meet and decide what we are going to *do* about what God put on our hearts today.” Harold’s suggestion was so firm and faithful that I found it irresistible. Soon thereafter we started a “bonus hour” time called “What Would Jesus Have Me Do?”¹

Making space for wondering how we should respond together produced some meaningful personal expressions, as well as a new mission initiative in support of families experiencing homelessness. But much to my regret, Harold’s inspired idea of weekly faithful, reflective, and responsive action eventually lost steam and ceased to be. The demands of weekly imagination, consensus, and initiative inspired by the Scriptures was more than the congregation, or any congregation, I suspect, could muster.

While gathering to wonder and commit together after worship has its place and time, that faithful question from the receiving line has sharpened some of my senses about preaching. Of course, the gospel we preach is always calling us to change and new activity, but how does faithful activity get prompted in community living together? And how can sermons support or even prompt such action? All in parish ministry have experiences of God making new things happen. While sermons can explicitly call for prescribed action, I am recently persuaded by Scripture’s call to active wonderment and exploration, through which the Spirit can also work and become visible.

Last year I collaborated with an elder of the church I serve on a sermon through which we were moved to wonder what God might be asking us to do.

In this particular sermon journey, we discerned (from Luke 7:17–35) Jesus’ admonition to followers that they stop debating so much and instead invest themselves in the outward, relational, and healing way of Christ. We heard Jesus make this challenge to us in the midst of rancorous national debate about how many and which refugees of war should be resettled in the United States. And rather than predefine the Lucan text as judge of the national debate, we instead heard Jesus’ call to real interpersonal work and activity in the way of Jesus. In the proclamation of the sermon, we actively wondered what Jesus would have us do in such a time.

It felt like a good first move would be to take an exploratory field trip together to the International Refugee Committee office in Atlanta to help us learn about and get to know people who have fled trauma and resettled nearby in Clarkston, Georgia. In the sermon we actively wondered and invited others to actively wonder with us. A significant group of about twenty responded. After our field trip date and guide were set, though, our plans fell through because the IRC was receiving a large number of new refugees that day. If we had prescribed a specific call to action, we likely would have rescheduled for another day, but because this was a sermon-inspired trip for wondering, we instead sought another guide and venue. That was when this story of wondering and exploring would become extraordinary and inspired.

Looking for new guidance, we were connected and introduced to a generous and wise woman named Jennifer. Her guidance in understanding the life of refugees led members of the group to ask her about the specific work she does. She talked about her work as the founder and director of Refugee Family Literacy Services, responsible for a

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school nicknamed “Mommy and Me,” which offers preschool children and their mothers literacy training and support as they get adjusted to life in America. Our explorers asked Jennifer what her organization needed, and she said, “Well, there are a number of ways to help what we do every day. But . . . I guess I’m just gonna say the big vision too. We also have a waiting list of two hundred people we cannot help, so one day we hope to open another school, maybe renovate and revitalize an old vacant school, so that no one has to wait for these essential services.”

Our field trippers responded, “What exactly are you talking about here? We like to renovate buildings and have done so in lots of places.” And so our Jesus-inspired project was born, led by our church in partnership with others, which produced a new Mommy and Me preschool the following fall. That next school registration day, when a refugee mother who had previously been on the waiting list was told she and her children could enroll for the new year, she was overcome with tears of joy and gratitude. But this project was just as much about some privileged church members who followed Jesus and found themselves invested and related to extraordinary people from all over the world, and blessed by knowing some of the gifted, beloved people behind the impersonal, faceless, categorical word “refugee.” And this sermon-initiated active wondering has also joined us together with other churches in the presbytery who have discovered the good that God does when we make space and time to build relationships with our resettling sisters and brothers.

This experience reminded me that while sermons, like the Scriptures they proclaim, often and rightly include a call to action, sometimes we do not yet understand what particular action is

to be. Sometimes a sermon that actively wonders, in community, and plots faithful exploration, can be guided and powered by the living Spirit at work for the world. And in my recent experience, sometimes actively wondering preaching can yield far more than we could ever ask or imagine. When inspiration strikes a wondering community, not only can good and faithful things be accomplished, but invaluable lessons about God can be taught.

The creative power of God through actively wondering preaching has reminded me about what former *National Geographic* photographer Dewitt Jones describes in his teaching called “Everyday Creativity.” Jones claims that sometimes creativity and purpose are revealed once you get yourself to the “place of best potential,” like a photographer strives to do. Those places of best potential are rarely obvious, and usually discovered through wondering, trying, changing, and, ultimately, revelation.² Sermons can function to help us wonder, actively try, and change perspective in pursuit of that “place of best potential” for God. And thankfully that is sometimes all God needs from any of us, even those of us called to testify.

Notes

1. “What would Jesus have me do?” was borrowed from Dr. Peter Gomes, who suggested the variation on the question “What would Jesus do?” posed by oversimplified Christian ethics. In Dr. Gomes question the onus is put not on Jesus but on us. Peter Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008).
2. Dewitt Jones, “Everyday Creativity,” Star Thrower Distribution, <https://starthrower.com/collections/dewitt-jones/products/everyday-creativity-dewitt-jones>.

On the Arts: You Have to Be There

Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk

“Child of the Covenant, you are marked as Christ’s own forever.”

“This is the bread of life. This is the cup of salvation.”

“As you are anointed with this oil, so may God grant you the anointing of the Holy Spirit.”

“From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return.”

These words spoken aloud from the font or table, whispered in a home or hospital room, or spoken, person by person, represent moments set apart, profound, fleeting, and embodied. In liturgy, time and space become material for making meaning. Matter, like water, bread, wine, oil, and ashes, activates the mystery of an ancient faith.

Each time I have experienced these moments I have marveled at their power. I have felt the oil on my thumb, the rim of the tiny bowl in my hand as I scraped off the excess, and the way my eyes met the person in front of me. My hands remember the exact movements required to make those two small marks, the sign of the cross, with oil or ashes. We pray. We lean on the moment and the material to make sense of human life in divine presence. These are examples of “you had to be there” moments, holy happenings.

I came across another kind of happening a few years ago at Pierogi Gallery in New York. A group of master of fine arts students from the Royal College of Art in London were just beginning a two-night exhibition of some of their recent performance work.¹ The space was a large, empty warehouse. Spectators filled the room, beginning an evening full of wondering what would happen next.

The first artist, William Colley, was dressed in a suit and tie. He walked slowly around the room and then began running on all fours in a circle, panting. He paused every now and then beside a spectator. Breathing heavily, he crouched down and took their hand quietly and gently, still, until his breathing slowed. He began running again and repeated the actions with another spectator. Slowly we moved from being spectators to being participants. I began to hope for the times he would stop to catch his breath and wondered whose hand he would take next. He looked increasingly exhausted, and with each new pause he seemed more relieved. What had seemed like a series of very strange actions worked to bond participants as a new community concerned with the well-being of the artist. It was something you had to be there for. It happened once. It may have been meticulously planned, but it was not scripted.

As another performance began, we heard the sound of a large metal object clanging and creaking. Out came artist Alicia Matthews, carrying an extremely large ladder. We made room for her as the ladder bumped into the door she emerged from. It was clearly heavy, and its sheer size meant that it looked cumbersome to carry. We watched as she lifted the ladder, unfolded it, climbed it, and sat on the very top, probably about 15 feet up. She began to look down and say “sorry” over and over again to those gathered below. She climbed down and carried the ladder outside. We followed. She unfolded it in the middle of the street, and while blocking traffic, she looked at the cars around her and said “sorry” over and over again. You had to be there.

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It was the first time I had ever seen live performance art. I realized then that performance art is something you have to be there for. Documentation and description can help to re-create the scene, but nothing replaces live presence with the work. It is embedded in time and space.

Artist Allan Kaprow first coined the term *happening* to describe this concept. In 1959 he presented *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reuben Gallery in New York.² Invitations to the event said, “You will become part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them.”³ Kaprow sought to blur the lines between life and art. He was influenced by instructors John Cage and Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College, a school in Black Mountain, North Carolina, known for experimental pedagogy that produced some of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. They used movement, time, and space as material for turning viewers into participants and questioning the importance of the permanent art object.

Explorations in live performance are on the rise in the art community. Artists seek new ways to blur lines between life and art, to be more present in their work, and to engage viewers in new ways. These goals are profoundly countercultural in a time filled with coveted commodities, pithy memes, and virtual reality.

Isn't it also the case that liturgical action can be profoundly countercultural? Placing my experiences in worship leadership in conversation with the concept of the happening in performance art has helped me to think about how liturgy functions

in our church communities. When we gather and participate in the words, music, and material of worship, what are we doing, really? When we are at our best, we may have planned the service, but it is not scripted. We are embedded in present space and time, yet somehow we re-member the past and rehearse the future. We become participants in God's new heaven and new earth as we enact God's hopes for inclusion. We engage in civil disobedience by daring to consent to be here, now, in the presence of a gracious and loving God. You have to be there.

The words may have already been written, but in the event of corporate worship something more *happens* in all the rest—the materials, the smells and sounds, the time and place, the persons present. This is the stuff of holy happenings. Might the idea of the happening be a way to think about what it means to keep Sabbath in chaotic times?

Maybe the performance art community can offer an important reminder for us church leaders and members. It may sound new at first, but I believe it's a song we've known all along: you have to be there.

Notes

1. *Beyond (Becoming)*, June 26–27, 2015, organized by London's Royal College of Art, The Boiler, Pierogi Gallery, New York.
2. Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1959, The Reuben Gallery, New York.
3. Kirstie Beaven, “The Happening, Allan Kaprow,” *Performance Art 101*, The Tate Modern, May 30, 2012, <http://kirstiebeaven.com/artwriting/performance-art-101-the-happening-allan-kaprow>.

Ideas: New Hymns

In the Small Hours of the Night

SMALL HOURS

Text and Tune: Paul Hooker, © 2018

Harmony: Eric Wall, © 2018

1. In the small hours of the night ere the dark - ness takes to flight,
2. Bear - ing spi - ces for the dead, come to dress the wound - ed head;
3. Emp - ty tombs can hold no power. 'Tis the myst' - ry of this hour:
4. In the wee small hours of dawn long be - fore the morn - ing comes,

The first system of the musical score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one sharp (F#).

fol - low grief down its wear - y way and find the place where he was laid.
see the grave clothes now laid a - side. The tomb has noth - ing left to hide.
death is strong, yet we do not fear, for he is ris - en, is not here.
still un - sure what we dare to say, we dry our tears and wait for day.

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Hymn to the Trinity

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM

8.7.8.7.8.7.7

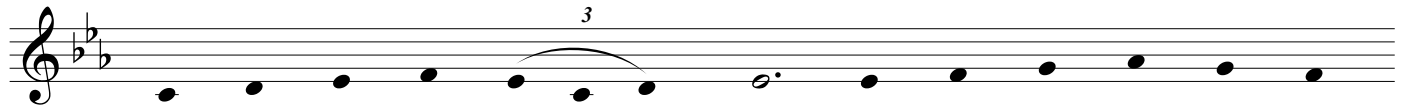
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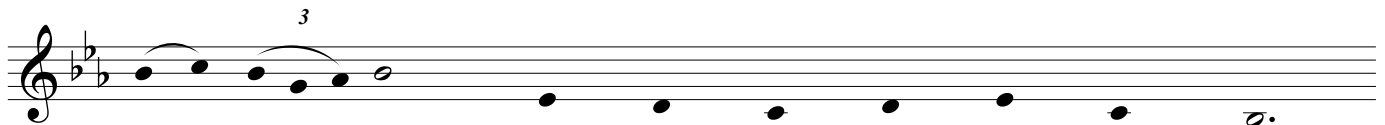
1. Source of all be - fore be - gin - ning. Mo - ther, Fa - ther, Par - ent,
 2. Suf - fring ser - vant conq - 'ring Sov - reign, Sav - ior, Lamb, yet Ma - ry's
 3. Breath of hea - ven, flame, and wa - ter; God now pre - sent here - on
 4. Glo - ry be to God the Fa - ther, and to Je - sus Christ, the



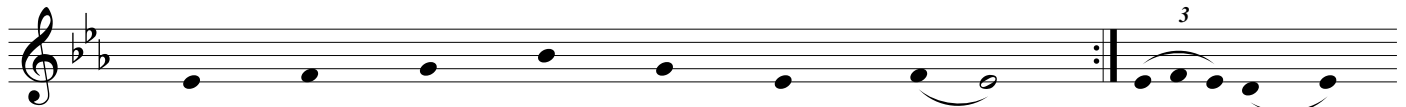
Friend. Ground of be - ing, womb, and shel - ter,
 child. Prince of Peace, though scourged and slaught - tered
 earth. Word of truth be - yond our lang - uage.
 Son, And to God the Ho - ly Spi - rit,



Rock and for - tress, brood - ing hen. Ea - gle soar - ing at cre -
 Hung up - on a cross - to die. Ri - sen, glor - i - fied, and
 Com - for - ter, di - sturb - er, dove. In - ter - ces - sor, close com -
 Ho - ly Three, e - ter - nal One. From cre - a - tion's cha - os



a - tion, Judge, de - liv' - rer Great I AM.
 reign - ing, Robed in light, ex - al - ted One.
 pan - ion, Whis - p'ring thun - der, crash - ing calm.
 pul - sing And be - yond earth's fi - nal breath.



Ev - er - more and ev - er more. —
 Ev - er - more and ev - er - more —
 Ev - er - more and ev - er - more. —
 Ev - er - more and ev - er more — A - men

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 Tune: Public Domain

You Are My Beloved

BELOVED

Text: David Gambrell, © 2015

Tune: John M. Dull, © 2015

Capo 3:

C *Dm* *G7* *C* *Am7* *A7*
E♭ *Fm* *B♭7* *E♭* *Cm7* *C7*

1. Ris - ing from the wa - ter, Je - sus stood to see heav - en break - ing
 2. Call - ing his dis - ci - ples, reach - ing out to heal, danc - ing at a
 3. Pray - ing on a moun - tain, Je - sus beamed with light, law and proph - ets
 4. Chal - leng - ing our com - fort, en - ter - ing our strife, lift - ing up the
 5. In a cloud of glo - ry, Je - sus will re - turn, pour - ing out the

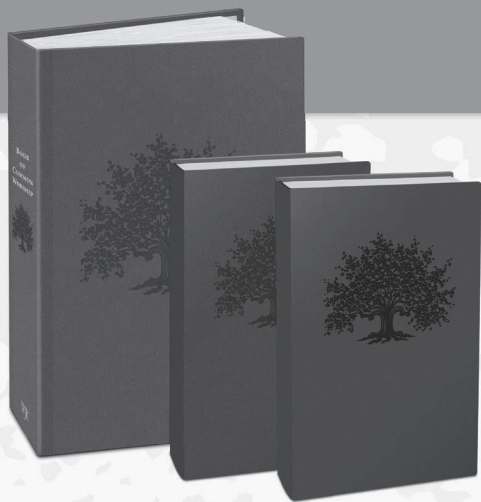
Dm7 *Am7* *Em* *Am* *Am7* *F* *G7* *C* *G/B*
Fm7 *Cm7* *Gm* *Cm* *Cm7* *A♭* *B♭7* *E♭* *B♭/D*

o - pen, Spir - it fall - ing free. Then a voice, so ten - der, made the bless - ing clear:
 wed - ding, of - fer - ing a meal, Je - sus shared the bless - ing he was sent to be:
 with him, bless - ing shi - ning bright. Then a voice, fa - mil - iar, all a - round him heard:
 low - ly, lay - ing down his life, Je - sus speaks with bless - ing to the suf - fering soul:
 bless - ing, life for which we yearn. Then a voice, re - joic - ing, to the saints will call:

Am *Dm7* *C* *G/B* *N.C.* *C*
Cm *Fm7* *E♭* *B♭/D* *N.C.* *E♭*

“You are my be - lov - ed child, I hold you dear.”
 “You are my be - lov - ed, come, and live in me.”
 “You are my be - lov - ed, true and liv - ing Word.”
 “You are my be - lov - ed; I will make you whole.”
 “You are my be - lov - ed; love is all in all.”

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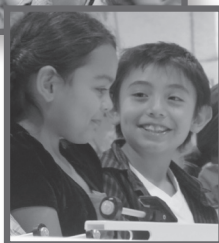
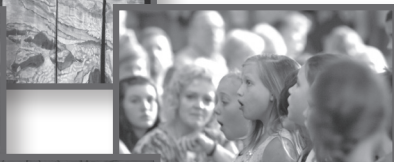


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