



Which Hymns and Songs Should we Use?

Short Guide No 3: Which Hymns and Songs Should we Use?

Have you been asked to put together a worship service, such as a Sunday morning or evening church service? Then here are some questions to use in reflecting on what you have chosen; not all questions will be appropriate for every occasion.

Our various responses to God

1. Do these particular hymns and songs give a sense of the holy presence of God among his people?
2. Does the worship material give adequate opportunity for praise, celebration, gratitude and thanksgiving?
3. Does the worship material give an opportunity for reflective penitence and lament?
4. Is there an opportunity to consider and then to respond to the needs of the world, locally, globally or both?

The theological and pastoral content

5. Is there something with a clear Trinitarian flavour? (This may be in a single hymn, or may be achieved across two or three complementary items.)
6. Is there something which celebrates God's creative activity in its rich diversity and beauty?
7. Is there something which celebrates God's unfolding purposes through history, in particular his coming in Jesus Christ?
8. Is there some reminder of the death of Christ and its significance for the human race?
9. Are the resurrection of Christ and his victory adequately remembered?
10. Is the Christian hope of eternal life brought out by anything which has been chosen for this occasion?
11. Is there something about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and / or the church?
12. Is there something which will bring comfort to those who are struggling with their faith, and challenge to those whose discipleship needs strengthening?
13. Is there any recognition of the church as a family and a community, with our mutual responsibilities?
14. Are the different aspects of the church's worldwide mission – including both evangelism and social action – addressed?

The overall shape of the service

15. Does the material near the start of the service help to focus attention on God? (It is important to encourage people to engage and participate.)
16. Does the material near the end of the service enable the congregation to recommit themselves to discipleship? (Worship needs to lead into the practicalities of daily life.)
17. Are the musical items broadly aligned to the theme of the service – in particular, the Bible readings and the sermon topic? (It may help to work with the preacher and other leaders to ensure a common mind.)
18. Is there adequate preparation for and response to Holy Communion if this forms part of the service?
19. Are the items chosen appropriate for the season of the church year?

Different styles of material

20. Is there something “old” – something well-loved, drawn from the church’s heritage and which has stood the test of time? (This may be appreciated by older worshippers.)
21. Is there anything new – whether brand-new or new to this congregation – which can introduce an element of freshness into worship? (This may help to engage younger worshippers.)
22. Has anything been used from outside the congregation’s normal tradition – for example, from the “world church”? (The occasional use of something less familiar can help to remind us that we belong to a bigger, world-wide community.)
23. Is there a suitable mixture of different styles – hymns, psalms, songs and so on?
24. Has use been made of the Psalms in one form or another? (This can be done in many ways, depending on your tradition and local opportunities: chant, metrical paraphrase, free rendition in song and responsive reading are among the possibilities.)
25. Will the material chosen be within the capability of the musicians available for the occasion?

Look at the items which you have chosen for use in the light of the questions above – how many can be answered “Yes”? It may be that some “Yes” answers can be found beyond the congregational song – for example, prayers of confession and intercession may address some items.

Now ... how does your hymn selection (plus any accompanying prayers, readings etc) score?

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| 0-13 | Is this really an appropriate selection for this occasion? Might it be better prayerfully to re-think what you have in mind? |
| 14-17 | Sounds like a good start, but perhaps one or two items could beneficially be changed. |
| 18-21 | This is looking like a well-balanced selection which should help people to meet with God and to respond to him. |
| 22-25 | Could it be that aiming to include something of everything might make the end result seem too fragmented? |

Martin Leckebusch – April 2012 – © The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland
Ref HSSG103. For more in this series, see the web site below.

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