



What are the Relative Benefits of Hymn Books, Service Sheets or Projectors?

Short Guide No 16: What are the Relative Benefits of Hymn Books, Service Sheets or Projectors?

Developments in technology have expanded the range of ways in which hymns can be presented during a service. No longer is it automatically assumed that hymn and service books will be handed out at the

		Hymn Books	Service Sheets	Projectors
Repertoire	Provides a ready-made stable core repertoire of song.	✓		
	Allows the building of a core repertoire from multiple sources, perhaps using CCLI and Calamus licences. ¹		✓	✓
	Enables the use of material from outside the congregation's core repertoire – beneficial for special occasions.		✓	✓
	Provides a level of “official” (e.g. denominational) endorsement for material.	✓		
Accessibility of words	Allows singers to see a whole hymn at once rather than just a few lines.	✓	✓	
	Allows singers to review a text before or after use during the service.	✓	✓	
	Allows worshippers access to helpful words for personal use (by either buying the book or taking the service sheet away).	✓	✓	
Service participation	Allows congregational access to music as well as words.	✓ ²	✓ ³	
	Allows ease of congregational use (e.g. a whole service in one place) – benefits visitors unfamiliar with the service format.		✓	✓
	Frees worshippers for other aspects of worship such as clapping, raising hands or the actions with children's songs.			✓
	Frees parents and carers to hold babies and young children during services.			✓
	Helps involve young children (early readers) by allowing them to follow the words on each line, perhaps with a pointing finger.	✓	✓	
Physical	Accommodates the physical constraints of individual worshippers (e.g. height, eyesight range etc.).	✓	✓	
	Reduces the need for holding books which some worshippers may find uncomfortably heavy.		✓	✓
Organisation	Minimises the need for additional preparation for every service.	✓		
	Avoids the need for special copyright considerations such as the use of CCL and Calamus licences.	✓		
	Avoids introducing constraints on the layout of the building (e.g. different seating arrangements).	✓	✓	

door. Even where they are, the time will come to replace these books—and then other options can usefully be explored.

Among other possibilities, two of the commonest are printed service sheets produced week by week, and projectors used with a screen, typically computer-controlled. Both of these options—like the use of printed books—can apply equally whether the material used is hymns in traditional styles, contemporary worship songs, or a mixture of genres. Some of the key benefits of each of these three options are listed in the table.

Various general points still apply. When hymn books are used, musicians and choirs can use music copies of the same publication; with other methods, they will still need suitable music from some printed or electronic source, with possible copyright implications. The use of either service sheets or projection will require the sourcing of suitable material, which may be either helped or hindered by not being restricted to a single core book. However, there will also be a need for careful proof-reading on a regular basis; with printed books, this will already have been done prior to printing. Hymn books will usually show the authors' names and dates; both service sheets and projected words should also include the appropriate author and (where applicable) copyright details. This is not only a legal requirement but also helps to identify the context of a song or hymn in church history.

A decision between the various options will need to weigh these and other relevant factors as they affect the particular congregation at that time. One significant factor which is not addressed here is cost: the relative capital outlay for new books, printers, photocopiers, computers and projection equipment will depend heavily on the size of the congregation and the worship space it uses. There may also be aesthetic constraints (or, in some buildings, planning implications) concerning the introduction of overhead screens. Some solutions will also have other uses: for example, a computer-controlled projector may enable the inclusion of video clips or other pictures in a service.

Each method has its particular weaknesses. Hymn books may appear dated and make it hard to introduce newer songs or material from other sources. Service sheets require a lot of careful preparation. Projected material may be hard to see clearly from some parts of the building and for people such as wheelchair users and those with weaker eyesight; and unless operated with great competence and care, the display can often slip frustratingly out of step with the progress of the service. All these failings can detract from worshippers' awareness of God's presence.

These options are not mutually exclusive. Service sheets may be useful for special occasions even in a congregation which normally uses either projected words or printed hymn books. However, when multiple methods are used together, proof-reading must ensure consistency. It is also worth thinking carefully about the needs of all members of the worshipping community. A caring approach may involve ensuring that adequate printed copies of the words (with large print or braille where necessary) are always available for those who might need them. No-one should be hindered in their desire to participate in the singing of hymns and songs.

Martin Leckebusch – August 2014 – © The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland
Ref HSSG116. For more in this series, see the web site below.

1 <https://uk.ccli.com/> and <http://www.decanimusic.co.uk/calamus-licence/> respectively. There are additional implications for reproducing music as well as words.

2 Subject to the provision of either full music or melody editions of books.

3 Easier for melody lines than full music.

Opinions expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

For anyone who enjoys, sings, plays, chooses, introduces, studies, teaches or writes hymns ...