



Ordination and Commissioning Hymns

Short Guide No 25: Ordination and Commissioning Hymns

Ordinations and commissioning services happen in a variety of contexts, and are a cause of great celebration and spiritual power. Liturgies and traditions notwithstanding, the singing of hymns on these occasions plays a crucial role, and their selection is, therefore, not to be undertaken lightly.

Contexts

Approaches taken towards the discernment, vocation and formal commencement of a person's authorised ministry vary across traditions and denominations. In any event, such occasions (called 'ordinations' for the purposes of this Guide) are wonderful opportunities for celebration, affirmation and evangelisation through preaching, liturgy and hymnody. It should never be assumed that everyone present at an ordination is a practising Christian, and it is clear that at large-scale cathedral occasions, many are not. Within the context of Anglican churches there are two kinds of ordination and two orders involved (though what is said may well relate to the consecration of bishops, too). A person is ordained deacon and then, often, priest, but on separate occasions with, typically, a year in between. A newly ordained priest does not cease to be a deacon, any more than a bishop to be also a priest and a deacon. The discernment of these vocations is considered separately, even if the outcome appears cumulative. Furthermore, the manner of these accumulated ordinations varies: in many Anglican dioceses there is a large-scale event at which several deacons are ordained by the bishop in the diocesan cathedral, before being sent to the parishes or communities which they serve. Typically this happens at Pentecost. After a year or so, either individually or in small groups they are ordained priest by the bishop, with other presbyters laying on hands, in a parish church. Ontologically, missionally and theologically there is no difference, but the practical considerations are different between parish and cathedral ordinations. Each option should be considered and treated slightly differently.

The cathedral ordination

Widespread as this approach is, it is rare for anyone other than the Bishop, Cathedral Clergy and Staff to have any input into what for a Cathedral is an annual 'special' service, requiring large musical and staff resources. Candidates for ordination do not get to pick the hymns, and the constraints of a large building, professional musicians and a sizeable congregation have to be taken into account. Such services can take over two hours too! The hymns chosen must work in a large acoustic, be well-known or easily picked up, and must cover long processions, distribution of communion, and other necessities for a festival service. Nevertheless, what follows may also be useful to those overseeing a cathedral ordination.

The parish or large church ordination

While this may be usefully seen as a smaller version of the large scale cathedral event, it is more intimate and presents more opportunities for the host ministers and ordinand(s) to have input into the content (but not often the structure or liturgy) of the service. Following the great tradition of ordinations, the *Veni Creator* ('Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire') should not be omitted, it being officially part of the liturgy in some denominations, which means that one hymn is already on the service sheet. It is sung, often begun by the bishop or a soloist, after the Litany and before the ordination itself and serves as an invocation of the Holy Spirit, whose action is essential to the ordination. This ancient hymn (with its ancient tune) is still a *sine qua non* of Anglican ordinations.

Ordinations often have readings which are suited to the occasion, and sometimes an ordination falls on the feast day of a saint (for example St. Peter), in which case the readings allocated from the lectionary may well be used. Sometimes a candidate or preacher might choose something else. In any case, the hymns should not be picked without due reference to the readings. So often an ordination involves the candidates' favourite hymns (sometimes they pick one each) and this is a thoroughly deplorable approach, yielding as it often does a mixed bag of unrelated hymns and songs, ungrounded in the liturgy, theme or lectionary of the day. Add to this the

combined preferred styles of worship that candidates and their home churches may have, and there is a complex maze to navigate to produce a satisfying, coherent set of hymns and songs for the occasion. But given that the hymns sung should enhance, reflect upon and help progress through the worship experience, this is nevertheless an important issue to get right, demanding therefore time, energy, thought and prayer.

Vocation and ministry hymns

In addition to considering the texts for the service, there are also specifically ‘ordination’, vocational, ministry-focused hymns that serve these occasions well, involving (as they invariably do) direct reference to or reflection upon what is going on in the service. Some of the main hymn books offer sections of selections for these purposes, although it may be acknowledged that providing for ordinations may not have been deemed to have fallen under their remit of their editors. Assumptions that a hymn book would not be used at an ordination, or that such occasions are – or were – rare in local churches, would be valid. It may be for this reason that *Common Praise* has no section at all, nor anything like it. Its successor, *Ancient and Modern*, fares better, with a section entitled ‘The Church’s Ministry and Mission’. In it are 26 hymns, not all of which are specifically suitable for clerical ordinations of course. Those that are include Timothy Dudley-Smith’s ‘Christ is the one who calls’ (LOVE UNKNOWN); James Seddon’s ‘Church of God, elect and glorious’ (LUX EOI); Chris Idle’s ‘Glory to God, the source of all our mission’ (HIGHWOOD); Sylvia Dunstan’s ‘Go to the world’ (ENGELBERG); Ally Barrett’s ‘Hope of our calling’ (SONG 22 or WOODLANDS); Shirley Erena Murray’s ‘In the name of Christ we gather’ (GRAFTON); Hugh Sherlock’s ‘Lord, thy church on earth is seeking’ (LUX EOI); Jeffery Rowthorn’s ‘Lord, you give the great commission’ (RUSTINGTON); John Bell’s ‘One is the body and one is the head’ (ONE IS THE BODY or PEACOCK) and ‘Will you come and follow me’ (also known as ‘The Summons’, to KELVINGROVE) and two old favourites that speak of unity and proclamation: Samuel Stone’s ‘The church’s one foundation’ (AURELIA) and Edward Burns’ ‘We have a gospel to proclaim’ (FULDA).

The New English Hymnal has two hymns (the first of which it also designates as ‘suitable for general use’): J.R. Peacey’s ‘Go forth for God’ (MAGDA) and James Montgomery’s ‘Pour out thy Spirit from on high’ (DUKE STREET). Readers are also directed to 6 other hymns found in other sections of the book. *Church Hymnary 4* also has a section designated ‘Ordination’ containing 7 hymns and 7 further suggestions. Some of these are not elsewhere: Shirley Erena Murray’s ‘In the name of Christ we gather’ (TANTUM ERGO SACRAMENTUM (GRAFTON)) is, but her ‘Here is the place, now is the time’ (SUANTRAI) is less well-known. Ruth Duck’s ‘You are called to tell the story’ (REGENT SQUARE); an adaptation of Henry Fox’s ‘Send out the gospel!’ (OLD CLARENDONIAN); and Mary Louise Bringle’s ‘Go in grace and make disciples’ (ABBOT’S LEIGH) are also included. The Roman Catholic *Laudate* has a section called ‘Ministry, Service, Ordination’, with 4 items: Ruth Duck’s hymn along with Paul Inwood’s ‘O Lord, you are the centre of my life’; Stephen Dean’s ‘Go into the world’; and Sylvia Dunstan’s ‘Go to the world’ (SINE NOMINE).

The Methodist book *Singing the Faith* has a section entitled ‘Calling and Commissioning’, in which there are 16 hymns and references to 9 others. Highlights include Charles Wesley’s two hymns ‘A charge to keep I have’ (CAMBRIDGE) and ‘Give me the faith which can remove / and sink the mountain to a plain’ (MOUNT SION); Dan Schutte’s ‘I, the Lord of sea and sky’; Philip Doddridge’s ‘The Saviour, when to heaven he rose’ (GONFALON ROYAL); and George Herbert’s ‘Teach me, my God and King’ (SANDYS). Kevin Mayhew’s *Anglican Hymns Old and New* has its characteristic extensive index, with 44 suggestions, most of which have wider scope than ordination.

The broad and narrow ways

Many hymns remind us all of our vocation: the universal calling we each have to be disciples and proclaimers of the faith, as well as the specific and individual vocations which we discern as lay or ordained people of God. We have mainly considered the second half of the latter here, notwithstanding the fact that at any act of commissioning or ordination, there are people present of great, little or no faith. That is why, as always, the selection of hymns and songs is itself a vocational act, which may touch the hearts of many and help them hear the voice of Christ calling in their own lives.

Gordon Giles – May 2016 – © The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland

Ref HSSG125. For more in this series, see the web site below.

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 ...

The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Visit www.hymnsocietygbi.org.uk for more details.