



# Music in Worship

## Fact Sheet 6, The Elements of Worship Series



COMMISSION  
ON WORSHIP  
Lutheran Church of Australia

**Now that we understand the main stages of a worship service, understanding the role of music in worship is much easier. As with every element of worship, the music used needs to glorify God and express our response to his actions.**

Music helps us express our faith. If you look through the various service orders, you will see that there are many opportunities for congregations to use music.

- **Sung liturgy** is a part of our Lutheran heritage. It can bring the liturgy alive and help people remember the words, which are God's words. There are several arrangements of almost every piece of sung liturgy. If your congregation likes to sing or has a strong cantor (person who is able to chant and lead singing), you might choose to sing some or all of the liturgy.
- **The Psalms** are the songs of the Bible and can have a powerful impact when sung or chanted in worship. There are a range of Psalm settings to choose from, as well as a number of hymns which use the words of the Psalms. Contemporary Christian musicians are writing beautiful songs using the words of the Psalms as well.
- **Instrumental music** can also enhance the worship experience, especially at the beginning and end of worship (sometimes called preludes and postludes), and during communion or other reflective points of the service.

Of course, the main things which come to mind when we think of music in worship are hymns and songs. There are several things to consider when choosing music for worship:

- **Readings for the week** - the whole service revolves around the Word of God. Your song choices should first and foremost reflect and enhance what God is saying in the service. There are hymn suggestions for each week based on the lectionary readings in the Music section of the Worship Planning Page.
- **Location in the service order** is also important. Generally speaking:
  - The first hymn/song is a hymn of thanksgiving. It is part of the Gathering, so it is intended to bring the congregation together in praise to God, especially for his grace and mercy to us (as often we will have had Confession and Absolution). Some congregations begin with one or two songs before the Invocation. These songs act as a call to worship.
  - The second hymn/song often comes after the readings in the Word part of the service. This song should reflect the main messages of the Bible texts or the main thrust of the sermon, to help people remember what they have heard through the coming week. It may also be the offering hymn, sung after the sermon.
  - A third hymn/song could be sung during the offering if the hymn of the week has already been sung after the readings. This should also reflect the message just heard in the sermon.
  - At least one hymn/song may be included during the distribution of Holy Communion. These songs should reflect the nature of communion and be more reflective in nature. Be aware though of the timing of these. If possible, they should be completed just before the dismissal.

- At the close of the service, a final song of encouragement and praise may be sung which brings together the themes of the service and equips the congregation to go back out into the world.

There are a number of practical matters to consider in selecting music for worship:

- **Your context** – when choosing music for use in worship, always consider the context you are in. What do the people in your congregation respond to? This is a tricky thing to do because you have to be careful of stereotypes. Not every older person likes traditional hymns with organ, while not every young person likes contemporary rock songs. Most congregations contain a mix of people. It might be worth considering offering a variety of styles of music.
- **The voices of your people.** Will they struggle with the high notes? Do they need the pitch lowered to make a song manageable, especially for a morning service? Some hymns and songs are more appropriate for a soloist, choir or small band of strong singers, and less suitable for congregational singing. It is alright to have some music which is intended for the congregation to listen to and reflect on rather than for community singing.
- **Copyright** - Do you have copyright licences in place for the music you wish to use? Your choice of songs may be limited if you do not have the appropriate licences.
- **Your musicians** - Who is playing your music? Do you have an organist, a keyboardist, or a band? Or are you fortunate to have a choice of musicians? Your selection of music will in part depend on the proficiency of your musicians. Be careful to choose music appropriate to their skill level. If you don't have musicians, can you use backing tracks? Or recordings?
- **Variety** - Within the music selection for a service, it is wise to vary the rhythm and pitch of the song selection. Some hymns use the same tune or very similar, and singing two versions of the same tune might be uninteresting or distract from worship. Why not change the pace of the song selections to match the focus of each part of the service.  
Think about varying the style of songs as well. Marva Dawn, a Lutheran theologian who has written various books on worship, suggests we ought to have a range of styles in worship. This helps to cater for all, as well as introducing songs from all over the world. All should be Gospel-based and point to what Christ has done for us.
- **Familiarity** - A new song may take the congregation a while to get used to, so consider limiting completely new music to a maximum of one or two per service. You could introduce it by playing it first as a listening song, or using a strong leader or choir to model the first verses, or play it through a few times in the weeks before it is used

**Choosing music for worship is a complex and important task. The key thing to remember is that whatever style of music you choose and however it is played, its role is to support and enhance the worship of our Lord and Saviour.**