

## MODULE ONE - The Role of Music in Worship 6/2014

This is a core module that examines and questions how music takes its place as part of worship or liturgy.

*(In this and other modules, the words 'worship' and 'liturgy' are interchangeable.)*

**This module will deal with three basic questions:**

- *Why do we use music in worship?*
- *When should music be used in worship?*
- *What kind of music is there to use in worship?*

**Why do we use music in worship?**

Four reasons why we use music:

1. to 'shine a spotlight' on significant liturgical moments
2. to enable large groups of people to unite as one voice
3. to respond to God using the unique language of music
4. to inspire and support members of the church

The following statements should be unpacked and thought about in the context of your own experience. Make a note of any additional reasons you can think of and share these online with other students.

1. to 'shine a spotlight' on significant liturgical moments

- when speech is used alone, it is sometimes difficult to 'lift' important parts of worship above the rest
- everything can sound and feel all the same when spoken
- singing is an elevated form of speech
- moments in worship that are more 'important' than others are elevated by music
- singing distinguishes and clarifies the 'shape' of worship

2. to enable large groups of people to unite as one voice

- using rhythm, measuring time
- leading through melody and harmony
- unity of song - one voice
- unanimity of co-celebrants
- greater audibility
- extra physical effort, 'All my bones shall cry out: Lord who is like thee?'

### 3. to respond to God using the unique language of music

- a need to give something back to God, to respond by singing
- music expresses our response in ways words cannot
- we need to express emotions of praise, thanksgiving, joy, sorrow
- music is a language that can help us to express our response to God
- to use the elements of song and sound as part of creation

### 4. to inspire and support members of the church

- one function of worship is to sustain, inspire and nourish those taking part
- music can unite and strengthen the group in its beliefs
- singing together as a group brings individuals together
- people are able to dip into this resource when support is needed
- music can uplift and support those who go out from the church building so they will want to speak of the good things they found inside!

## When should music be used in worship?

You have looked at why music is used in worship but when should we make use of it?

It will be useful if you know what elements go together to form our worship.

Joseph Gelineau says that the fundamental elements of Christian worship are:  
the *reading* of sacred scripture  
the *singing* of psalms and hymns  
the *praying* of the celebrant and people  
(from Gelineau's *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship*)

The Eucharist or Communion Service is at the centre of the church's worship and so you will now take a look at how music may be used in this liturgy. A more in-depth treatment will be found in Module 5, Eucharistic Shape and Music.

Within the Eucharist we find the two main sections, The Liturgy of the Word and The Liturgy of the Sacrament. Both contain dynamics which music helps to distinguish.

## The Liturgy of the Word

Here you have the components and shape of this section. Parts that may be sung are in bold.

Reading

**Psalm or Canticle**

(Reading)

**(Hymns/Songs)**

**Gospel acclamation**

**Gospel greeting**

Gospel reading

**Gospel response**

Sermon

Every liturgy has its own structural rhythm created by moments of reflection, preparation and intensity. One function of music's use in worship is to help to signify and place in relief the more intense moments, making a definition and therefore punctuating the rhythm within the shape of liturgical form. This helps those taking part to be more aware of the hierarchical shape and meaning of the liturgy they are part of.

It is the Gospel acclamation and reading of the Gospel that form the focal points for those present to express both the preparation and thanksgiving for the Word. By using music to acclaim the Gospel, we are alerted that something important is about to happen, like a fanfare. This acclamation can also contain a sentence that may be seasonal or appropriate to the reading as well as Alleluias.

## Liturgy of the Sacrament

Singing the Liturgy of the Sacrament or Eucharistic Prayer involves three fundamental interactive parts. These are added to in many cases but form the outline of this prayer.

*Sursum corda*

*Sanctus*

*Amen*

These three elements of the eucharistic prayer are colourfully described by the liturgist and musician Joseph Gelineau as;

*Sursum corda*

'In order that *the celebrant's* thanks may ascend to God in the name of the Church visibly present, the celebrants make sure that all are with them in a union of hearts, and they ask them to testify to this by song. Encouraged by their reply and building up on the lyrical *élan* of the opening dialogue, they launch into song and send up to God the Church's thanksgiving for the benefits of creation and redemption.'

*Sanctus* (Is.6.3/Ps.117/Matt.21.9)

Finally the praise from the mouth of the celebrant bursts forth also from the entire assembly in the seraphic hymn.'

*Amen*

...'so that the people may ratify by their solemn *Amen*.'

'The climaxes of liturgical action are underlined by acclamations of the people, who thereby express their active faith in the mystery being celebrated. The people prolong the Preface by their unanimous *Sanctus*; they... conclude the Canon and the prayers by their *Amen*.

'We should observe that the prayer of the celebrant is always preceded by a call to the congregation so that they may unite themselves with it, and the prayer is terminated by a formal conclusion that they may ratify it: *Amen*.'

So it is the *Sanctus* that the text leads to and is normally seen as a 'bursting forth'. A definite moment for using music!

*Note.*

*The Sanctus is seen by some liturgical scholars as an interruption and indeed is not to be found in some early eucharistic prayers such as Hyppolytus. Musicians need to take great care in the way they clothe these words with music. Do you stop the momentum of the prayer here while the choir sing a lengthy Latin setting?*

At this stage, you need to be aware that there are places in worship that benefit from the use of music to distinguish them.

A way to tell if music is needed is to ask these questions:

- are the words very important?
- is this a 'spotlight' moment?
- is there a practical reason for using music (collection, procession, setting the mood)?

When not to use music:

when words will do  
when choice separates the congregation  
when things need to move on  
when silence is more appropriate

Liturgy is like a flowing river, sometimes moving deep and slow, sometimes fast and shallow.

Music must join the flow, rather like a leaf on top of the water.  
The water moves the leaf (not the other way round!)

... a bit like the tail wagging the dog!

Read the following passage and relate it to your regular experience of worship:

'The liturgy, the dwelling place of present and remembered encounter with the living God, itself begins to think and speak for the assembly and turns wholly into music, not in the sense of outward, audible sounds, but by virtue of the power and momentum of its inward flow. Then, like the current of a mighty river polishing stones and turning wheels by its very movement, the flow of liturgical worship creates in passing, and by the force of its own laws, cadence in rhythm and countless other forms and formations, still more important and until now undiscovered, unconsidered, and unnamed.'

Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 87

## What kind of music is there to use in worship?

There is a huge amount of music that has been written down for use in worship since the 4th century. There is music written for certain historical types of worship. Music written for the worship style or fashion of the day or to cater for denominational differences. Political and religious reformation has produced new styles of liturgical music yet these always build on what has gone before. The worshipping church has always required music to be written for the liturgy and has lived hand in hand with the development of the art; sponsoring, chastising, encouraging, inspiring and pioneering in partnership with musicians.

Choosing from this enormous resource of available music, we need to take our bearings and take a close look at who will be involved.

- our ideas about worship have changed
- we should take a lead from our present liturgical position
- our choice should be appropriate to the forms of worship we use today
- when choosing music, look at the people who will be using it
- consider your personal taste and choosing for others

Think about the differences of taste we all have in musical styles.

How far do we let these tastes influence our choices of music for worship?

Should we leave these tastes at home or at least in the car CD player?

Should we be able to use the musical styles we like best in our worship?

Where there is no opportunity for choice of worship style, what happens?

Does your church have two separate services to cater for different tastes in music?

Is there a dominant group/person in charge of the choice of music?

### The threefold judgement!

Roman Catholics have been developing music that enables the whole congregation (or 'assembly'), to participate since Vatican II. As far back as 1972, the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy issued the document *Music in Catholic Worship* which established that three judgements should determine the appropriateness of music for liturgy:

*the musical judgement*

*the pastoral judgement*

*the liturgical judgement*

Applying these judgements to music that we consider using really makes us think and covers all aspects of its use. The musical judgement questions the quality of composition and text. The pastoral judgement focuses on the people who will be singing and how they will engage with the music. The liturgical judgement considers the placing of the piece in the flow of the liturgy (remember the leaf on the river). Leave any one of these judgements out of the process and there is likely to be a problem

Some further questions for discussion in the online forum, or for your own thoughts;

- *who decides what music is used in your church?*
- *are there musical talents that are not used?*
- *is music doing what it should do in your church?*
- *what changes would you make?*

### Next Stage

You have now worked through this first module and probably found that you need to discuss this material with others on the course. Please use the online forum for this. You can leave a question or comment on a 'thread' or start a thread which will then be added to by other students and tutors.

As this is a core module, you will now need to produce a piece of written work which considers the opening three questions in relation to your own experience in your church:

*Why do we use music in worship?*  
*When should music be used in worship?*  
*What kind of music is there to use in worship?*

Don't forget, this need not be an academic piece of writing, more a working out in your own way, how these ideas relate to what actually happens where you worship and what might happen if the role of music in worship at your church was thought about.

Take your time to read some or all of the following recommended material. Discuss, explore and satisfy yourself that you have understood and grasped the key issues before moving on to your next chosen module. If you have any questions, please email the course director

### Recommended reading material:

[Re-pitching the Tent](#), Chapter 26 (especially p.201), *Making Music*, Richard Giles, Canterbury Press 1999

[In Tuneful Accord - Making music work in church](#), James Whitbourn, SPCK 1996.

[The Singing Thing, Part 1, A case for congregational song](#), John L. Bell, Wild Goose Publications 2000.

[The Singing Thing, Part 2, Enabling congregations to sing](#), John L. Bell, Wild Goose Publications, 2007.

[Music and Worship: Principles to Practice](#), Peter Moger, Grove Worship Series No. 27, 1994.

[Creative Chords, Studies in Music, Theology and Christian Formation](#), Gracewing 2000.

*When in our music God is glorified* - Timothy Hone  
*Make Music for the Lord* - Emmanuel Gribben

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