

# A GUIDE FOR SONG LEADERS AND ORGANISTS



*Sing praises to God, sing praises!*

– PSALM 47:6

## **MUSIC IN THE WORSHIP SERVICE**

Songs of Zion are precious to believers. They instruct and encourage us in faith and unite the congregation. In sacred music and song texts, we can feel God's presence, be comforted and uplifted and find words for emotions we may not be able to otherwise express. God serves musicians and listeners alike through music with healing and guidance. For these and all gifts, we can thank and praise God in song.

## **YOU ARE A MUSIC LEADER OF THE CONGREGATION**

Leading congregational singing is an important and necessary duty. It is the role of the song leader and organist to serve the congregation and God by preserving a devotional atmosphere. God, in turn, also serves the congregation and all participants through the worship service.

*Music and notes which are wonderful gifts and creation of God, do help us to gain a better understanding of the text, especially when sung by a congregation and when sung earnestly. – Martin Luther*

The primary function of a song leader and organist is to lead the congregational singing. Playing and singing music correctly creates harmony and unifies the singing congregation. Music is like a language. It has its own "grammar" which musicians should observe in order to provide musical clarity and leadership to the congregation. Every music leader in the congregation should consider it important to be familiar with the parts and functions of this musical language. The congregation can easily sing along when musicians know the melody, keep the tempo, sing and play well and from the heart and can be heard above the congregation.

Song leaders and organists should act as one and not take their own artistic liberty. Phrases should start and end together, except for the final chord of the hymn which the organist plays a little longer to indicate the end. Simply stated, if the song leader and organist know exactly what they are going to do and when they are going to do it, the congregation will follow without hesitation.

Maintain free and open communication between the song leader and organist. Share thoughts about song selections early enough so that both have enough time to practice and become familiar with the songs. Offer encouragement to each other whenever possible. When needed, allow time for gentle critique about tempo choices, breaths, incorrect notes or rhythms, poor organ registration choices, song choices, etc. It is healthy and important that we continually refine our gifts.

If there is no instrument or organist available, song leaders should lead the song by selecting an appropriate tempo and carefully choosing a starting pitch that keeps the hymn within a moderate vocal range.

Songs and hymns prepare our hearts to receive God's Word, and music and singing encourage and support ministers in their duty. We want to do our best to reflect the beauty and harmony that God created at the beginning of this world, and that which we await to see and hear in heaven.

## **CHOOSING SONGS FOR THE SERVICE**

Choose relevant songs for the occasion. Consider the themes and texts related to the Church Calendar, holidays and song suggestions from the minister. A Church Calendar Songs brochure is available and can be obtained from your congregation's music committee head or via the LLC website. Visit [www.lchurch.org](http://www.lchurch.org) > faith > resources > song leaders & organists. When preparing for your music turn, it is helpful to read the Bible passages appointed for that Sunday and find songs that are related to, or support, that theme. Also notice special occasions when choosing songs (Mother's Day, Independence Day, etc.). Consider songs familiar to children and youth as well in order to encourage young ones to sing.

-----  
*To ensure a rich use of our songbook, record the songs used during each church event in a hymnal logbook. We suggest writing the song number(s) onto a calendar page, and also tracking the date the song was used in a log of all songs in the SHZ hymnal.*  
-----

## **HOW TO PREPARE**

### *Personal Faith*

We should accept responsibility for the gifts that God gives and approach our duties with humility and a willingness to serve. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17).

Taking care of our undying soul is even more important. It is easier to serve God and His kingdom when matters are cared for and sin is not burdening the conscience.

### *Practical Considerations*

- Dress appropriately.
- Be punctual: show up early and be ready to sing or play. Start the service on time.
- Communicate with the service director about the service schedule, song announcements and song selections.
- Learn how to project songs on the wall if this technique is used in the congregation.
- Announce songs clearly, with enough volume.
- Ask the congregation to stand, when appropriate.
- Song Leaders:
  - Sing into the microphone (don't be afraid of it!).
  - Adjust the volume if needed by stepping closer to or away from it.
  - A song leader's voice should be heard slightly above the congregation's singing.
- Organists:
  - Try to spend some time with the instrument before you play to familiarize yourself with its layout, acoustical qualities in the room, and the tonal qualities available across its registers.
  - Maintain steady, relaxed tempos throughout each song.
  - Do your utmost to maintain the rhythmic integrity of the song over breath marks and verse breaks.
  - Lead the congregation. Do not follow it.

-----  
*For more information and technical help in leading the congregation in song, visit [www.lchurch.org](http://www.lchurch.org)  
faith > resources > song leaders & organists*  
-----

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

### *A Sacred and Solemn Sacrament*

- Maintain solemnity during the service by choosing appropriate songs.
- Two teams of song leaders and organists are scheduled for the communion service. The first pair serves for the beginning of the service and continues until their replacements have gone to communion (try to go to communion when the first table is served). The switch can then be made, and the second pair can lead until the end of the service. Avoid switching musicians mid-song.
- Avoid announcing songs when communion guests are being released.
- Be considerate to the occasion. Announce the song numbers clearly and peacefully.
- It's not necessary to rush from song to song. A period of silence during communion can be beautiful.
- Estimate and attempt to end the song at the same time the communion line finishes. Substitute a shorter song near the end, if needed. Optionally, the organist could play a verse or two after a song ends, rather than starting a new song. Avoid stopping mid-song.

## ANNOUNCEMENT SUGGESTIONS

**Pre-service song announcement:**

“We will sing pre-service song number XXX.”

**Service opening song announcement:**

“We will begin our service this morning with song number XXX.”

**Memorial song announcement:**

“We will sing song number XXX in memory of (name). Please stand.”

## SUMMARY

It is important to take the duty of music leading seriously and attempt to accomplish it to the best of your abilities. Embrace and make the most of the musical gifts God has given you. Be faithful over the gifts you have been given by developing, using and increasing them. Practice singing and playing often, and study the technical aspects of your role by receiving lessons and pointers from others. Attending music workshops and encouraging and mentoring new or beginning song leaders and organists are also part of the duties of congregation song leaders and organists. As a result, you will not only help the congregation sing, but also increase your own interest and enjoyment in your work. We want to take good care of our talents and gifts and not belittle them by burying or neglecting them (Matt. 25). God has given us the gift of music and our individual gifts in His measure. Let us remember as we do each duty to give all honor, praise and glory to Him.

-----

*Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in this world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts and spirits. This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself of the fact that God has created man for the express purpose of extolling and praising God.*

– Martin Luther

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

– James 1:17

