

# PONDER ANEW

CONVERSATIONS IN  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHURCH MUSIC

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**EDITED BY JESSICA NELSON**

Foreword by William Bradley Roberts

Contributors include: Jennifer Melnyk Deaton, Deon Johnson,  
C. Ellis Reyes Montes, Rita Teschner Powell, David Sinden, Michael Smith, Keith Tan

 **CHURCH  
PUBLISHING  
INCORPORATED**

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Church Publishing  
19 East 34th Street  
New York, NY 10016

Cover design by Dylan Marcus McConnell, Tiny Little Hammers  
Typeset by Denise Hoff

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Nelson, Jessica, editor. | Roberts, William Bradley, writer of  
foreword.

Title: Ponder anew : conversations in 21st century church music / edited by  
Jessica Nelson ; foreword by William Bradley Roberts.

Description: New York : Church Publishing, 2022.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022004773 (print) | LCCN 2022004774 (ebook) | ISBN  
9781640654440 (paperback) | ISBN 9781640654457 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Church music--21st century. | Music in churches. | Public  
worship.

Classification: LCC ML3000 .P67 2022 (print) | LCC ML3000 (ebook) | DDC  
781.71--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022004773>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022004774>

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# Foreword

The title of this collection of essays celebrates both the wisdom of legacy and the fresh insights of new thinking. *Ponder Anew* is accessible and richly layered. *Ponder* suggests looking deeply at an idea, turning it like a prism to see multiple facets. *Anew* implies that the readers have thought about the matters at hand and are now ready to think about them again in a new way. *Ponder Anew* is not only an invitation, but also an imperative.

To be invited to ponder anew is a profound honor, because the authors thus imply that the reader not only knows something of our worship's legacy—in this case the practice of liturgical music—but also has the capacity to rethink issues with a storied past so that they sparkle with contemporary energy. What an exciting journey on which to embark, especially in the company of the present authors, companions who will shine their searchlights on the subject matter.

The authors—priests, bishops, church musicians, composers, professors—are variously practitioners of not only traditional church music, but also of popular religious song<sup>1</sup> and proponents of diverse worship practices from low church to high. They are just the kind of people whose company you want to share while marveling over a collection of rare jewels.

Church music, like the rest of our culture, is changing and developing at a dizzying pace. Even the most observant practitioners find themselves inundated with a flood of new information and repertoire. To be sure, some will react to this challenge with a stern digging in of heels. For them, earlier visions of church music are adequate and must be defended at all costs. In doing so, they inadvertently imply that the Anglican musical legacy is fragile and must be protected. This book is probably not for them (unless they are courageous enough to read with a perspective other than their own, a daring act for any of us). This is not to suggest that anything new must be good, any more than everything old must be good. It is to suggest instead that both old and new deserve a fresh look.

Who will delight in *Ponder Anew*? Both professional church musicians and amateur (in its best and original meaning) aficionados of the art, who vigorously support the rich heritage of the composition, preparation, and performance of

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1. *Popular religious song* is a term created by Carol Doran to denote music that appeals to a broad spectrum of people, informal music, what musicologist Wiley Hitchcock refers to as “music of the vernacular tradition.” For a fuller discussion, see *Music and Vital Congregations* by William Bradley Roberts (New York: Church Publishing), 45ff.

great sacred music and who also are interested in new directions, fresh thoughts, and new composition. These are the advocates of church music who wonder about the culture around us and how our worship and music might engage with it. They concern themselves with demographic shifts inside and outside the church, knowing that welcoming the stranger is not a mere nicety, but a life-giving mandate from our Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Music is a profound cultural marker. Learn the songs of a culture, and you will quickly learn insights that otherwise might have required a much longer time. A friend of mine says that if she has a date with a person who doesn't like the music of J. S. Bach, that date is the last one. "That tells me all I need to know," she says. Music speaks to our identity.

Sometimes our own cultural markers are so integral to our identity that we don't recognize those that are just as engrained in others. When English-speaking missionaries first traveled to Africa, they took with them a large dose of their own culture, which in many instances was entwined with the gospel they preached. If natives of the mission field were to become Christianized, it was thought, they must learn the hymns and songs the missionaries knew. Gospel hymns of the late nineteenth century became the worship music of the new Christians. Contemporary missionaries, on the other hand, are more likely to affirm the culture of the people they serve. That includes music for worship, which nowadays is likely to be fashioned from local folk tunes (or else composed in that style).

Traveling around Africa and listening to the music of worship, one can easily determine when and by whom native people were missionized. In some areas, the worship music repertoire still consists of nineteenth-century gospel hymns from the United States and the British Isles. In other areas one hears music in church that has a distinctively local feel to it. In both Davies, South Africa, and Guayaquil, Ecuador, I was delighted to hear passionate singing by parishioners whose repertoire was totally Indigenous music.

As our cultural comprehension broadens, we hear the same gospel in a new light. For example, the last few decades have seen a rise in the public role of women in the church. (Some recognize that women have always guided the church but weren't acknowledged for it.) Racial reconciliation has become a front-burner issue, and many churches have committed themselves to making huge changes in church and culture to correct the demeaning injustices endured by People of Color.

LGBTQIA+ parishioners and citizens have moved "beyond inclusion" (to borrow the name of an effective conference on the subject<sup>3</sup>) to full, robust participation at every level. Tolerance is no longer enough. Those who have felt the

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2. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb 13:2, KJV).

3. This influential conference was first offered in April 1998 by All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena, California.

sting of exclusion are now unsatisfied by tolerance and rightly expect instead to be fully embraced for who they are. God has no stepchildren. Every member of the human race is a child of God.

These relatively rapid changes (though they feel distressingly slow to those who have suffered and endured) have enormous implications for the practice of church music. Much of sacred music is sung and, therefore, has texts. Any linguist, amateur or professional, will attest to the nature of language to change, to incorporate new words, even to embrace intentionally created words. One cannot notice the shifts in culture and pretend they have no ramifications for worship. When and how is worship language changed to relate to contemporary people? In my experience, language changes are best made (1) using the aid of experts—poets, theologians, liturgists, musicians; (2) altering words deliberately, not spontaneously; (3) avoiding trendy words that might seem dated in five years; and (4) listening for the beauty of language as well as its accuracy.

Sometimes new movements arise to fill a gap or respond to a need. Worship with the Book of Common Prayer is the enduring treasure of Anglicanism. Many of us were attracted to liturgical worship by the beauty of its language and the rich understanding of prayer it offers. From the original Book of Common Prayer, created largely by Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), to subsequent editions in many countries, Christianity has greatly benefited from “common prayer,” the prayers of all the people.

As wonderful as the Book of Common Prayer is, some have sensed the need for silence as a balance for continual wordiness. This silence is manifest in the surge of interest in contemplative prayer, in worship derived from the monastic life. This way of praying involves large amounts of silence, a rare commodity in much liturgical worship. Some worshippers sense the need to retreat from the noisy clamor of the culture to a dark, quiet, meditative place where God’s voice is easily heard. When human chatter ceases, practitioners of contemplative worship discover that God’s “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12, KJV) is heard in stark contrast. To be sure, there are opportunities for silence in liturgical worship (even mandated by the Prayer Book after the breaking of the bread), but often we tramp right through those silences to get out of church earlier. Nor is expediency the only rationalization for eschewing silence in church. There is an even more substantive reason: because silence is intimate, it causes fear to arise in many people, and intimacy can be frightening, at least at first. When one leans into that discomfort until finding quiet and stillness, that intimacy turns to resting on the bosom of Jesus as did the beloved disciple (John 13:25).

The service of Compline (pronounced “COM-plin”) is called the “good-night prayer of the church,” because it is the last service of the day in a monastery or convent. It is a quiet service, and, in strict monastic practice, there is no speaking allowed during the Great Silence after Compline until the first office of the next morning. The quiet simplicity of that service appeals to many contemporary

worshippers. Silence is, in a sense, fasting from the noise, chaos, confusion, and distractions of daily life.

Of course, silence is not antithetical to liturgical worship. Indeed, silence can amplify a note of mystery in worship that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. The Holy Spirit is always present. What is needed is for us to slow down and quiet down so that we can notice her presence. To invoke the Holy Spirit, then, is really a matter of invoking our own attention to her ubiquitous existence.

This practice should not be confined to monastic communities. A glorious example of incorporating silence into worship can be experienced at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, a large parish in Richmond, Virginia. The parish began a Sunday evening service of Celtic evensong with Eucharist. I confess that, though I had heard of this service for many years, I assumed Celtic referred to its music, and I was not particularly drawn to attend. (I'm all for Celtic music; I just never felt in the mood to hear it in worship—my oversight and a cautionary tale for those resisting “new” music.) In fact, “Celtic” refers to the spirituality of the liturgy, not its music.

When I finally did attend the Celtic evensong, I was completely disarmed by its style and content. The forces are simple compared with festive evensong services: a piano, a cantor, and a solo orchestral instrument—sometimes oboe, other times cello or flute. The service follows the basic form of evensong except that all the language is inclusive and expansive, and there are moments of copious silence. The church has ample candles, scattered around the chancel and altar, with dimmed artificial light. Instead of a sermon by a clergyperson, a layperson offers a reflection, usually focused on the speaker's personal story of spiritual revelation. It is a powerful service.

Following Celtic evensong with Eucharist, there is a community supper, then a service of Compline. The whole evening is sometimes called “the three acts.” Compline consists of a superb choir, sitting behind the congregation and singing plainsong and polyphony with prayers and the gospel. Like the Celtic service, there are numerous candles, only this time there is no artificial light. The service is filled with silence and opportunities for meditation, and the congregation is freed from any verbal participation, allowing worshippers to focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit.

As beautiful as the music is, it is not the primary content. The primary content is the movement of the Holy Spirit and our response to her action among us. To say that this is a powerful service is simply naming the obvious, because the Spirit is palpable. People leave blessed and transformed and, perhaps most significant, as vessels filled with the Holy Spirit, prepared to pour out that blessing on others.

One indicator of the richness of this worship is the attendance. Of the several services offered on Sunday, the Celtic service is by far the largest, surpassing the

usual principal service on Sunday morning. Contemplative worship has become the norm for this congregation.

This is not the only congregation experiencing the quiet, powerful bliss of contemplative worship. Such a phenomenon is starting to appear across the country.

Because our society is impressed by polls and statistics, some of us have come to believe that our church is on an unavoidable downward trend. Some of the rest of us, however, will have none of that. Whatever trends might appear from myriad studies, people of faith will attest that these trends are not inexorable. Responding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, God's people are empowered to march boldly, filled with the promise that God will never leave us. *Ponder Anew* is witness to the Spirit's abundance.

Used thoughtfully, *Ponder Anew* spotlights worship in the Spirit and illuminates the role music plays in preparing us to be "true worshippers . . . in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). Listen attentively as these imaginative essayists invite us into a rich environment of sacred music that sensitizes us to the movement of the Spirit and, therefore, to deep worship. The results will be just what the church needs right now: the life-giving transformation of a direct encounter with God.

To this end, may God be praised.

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Richmond, Virginia  
All Saints Day, 2021

# Introduction

The idea for this volume bubbled up nearly simultaneously in two different places: in an editorial consulting group for Church Publishing and in a group text involving me and a handful of church musician colleagues. This ongoing group text has been a go-to resource for me for all sorts of things—the mundane and unglamorous (repertoire suggestions, troubleshooting an aging and temperamental organ, the care and feeding of choristers) as well as a sounding board and source for productive advice on trickier topics (delicate pastoral care issues, negotiating complicated professional relationships, running music programs in the age of coronavirus, and other esoterica). At least a few of the topics discussed here were inspired by conversations with a small professional cohort convened by Ellen Johnston, a mentor and colleague who has worn many hats over the course of her service to the church—parish musician, conference director, consultant. This cohort has been a wonderful resource. It was formed in response to the coronavirus pandemic and has been meeting about once a month via Zoom. These are all musicians actively working in parish ministry, and though our contexts are a little different, the issues we all grapple with are remarkably similar. I am grateful for all of the above-mentioned friends. Would that all of us were surrounded with a like constellation of knowledge, wit, and faithfulness.

The title for this collection, *Ponder Anew*, is borrowed from a hymn treasured by many. Catherine Winkworth's 19th-century translation of Joachim Neander's 17th-century amalgamation of bits and pieces of psalms is set to *Lobe den herren*, a bright and buoyant tune that, when supported with a sense of forward movement and judicious articulation, is a total jam, an exhilarating waltz that leaves you slightly out of breath. "Ponder anew" comes at the highest point pitch-wise in the tune—the peak of the antecedent clause to which the remainder of the tune responds. Now, I am prone to neurotically overanalyze, and this could just be an inconsequential occurrence not worth the musing, but to me, this is a magical moment in the hymn. The confluence of the shape of the phrase with the text detonates an explosion in every place I've sung this hymn—a burst of energy that could shatter (stained) glass. Perhaps this is the Holy Spirit?

Inspired by the thousand or so sermons I've heard over the years that have deployed the same device, I found the original German text to see what, if anything, had been lost or gained in translation. I learned that Neander's "denke daran" became Winkworth's "ponder anew." Now, it's been nearly twenty years

since my one semester of German in college, but in my limited understanding, this shakes out to something in English along the lines of “think about it.” This is a fairly literal translation, and I’m sure the nuanced understanding of a native German speaker would reveal a shade of meaning that I’m unable to appreciate, but to my ears, this strikes me as amusing. “Think about it” is a casual admonition, something one might say in the course of a conversation about where to have dinner. “Do you want Applebee’s or Red Lobster?” *Shrug*. “Well, think about it.” In my ears, Winkworth’s rendering of “ponder” is weightier. We’re meant to consider, reflect, contemplate. *Marinate* on it, as I sometimes say.

As long as I’m torturing meaning out of words, I might as well address “anew.” I’m sure the same has been true for every generation, but the nonstop feed of news via the breaking news alerts dinging on my phone every few minutes makes me deeply aware of how quickly the world is changing. In my twenty or so years as a church musician, the cultural and professional landscapes have changed immensely and are changing still. Although my perspective is understandably limited to that of a middle-class millennial woman in the Deep South, I can identify a number of issues that have profoundly affected the way I perceive the world and, consequently, the way I approach my work. In the past several years alone, the rise and ubiquity of social media (for better or for worse) has changed the way we live our lives in community and both the quantity and quality of interpersonal communication. Identity politics are at a fever pitch, and movements—Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, climate change reversal—all galvanized by the social media maligned not one sentence ago, have deeply affected both my personal and vocational lives. This was *not* going to be a book about the coronavirus pandemic, because as of this writing, we’re still living through it and don’t yet have the benefit of perspective and clarity that a little distance will eventually bring. I don’t think that we can ignore it, though. It’s changed so much and so quickly. The Rev. Susan Anderson-Smith is a founder of Imago Dei Middle School in Tucson, Arizona, a tuition-free Episcopal school exclusively serving students from low-income families. She is also a skilled musician and liturgist. In a conversation with Susan earlier this year, she opined that church musicians will be on the front lines of helping the church recover from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, *if* we are to recover. Where do we even start?

The church’s self-consciousness is at an all-time high—I’m unaware of another era in Christian history in which the church has been so prone to self-examination on so large a scale. Every month or so, a new article makes the rounds on social media—someone panicking about the imminent demise of the institutional church, in damning hyperbole, statistics, and pie charts in an effort to get page clicks. People wring their hands and share away, piling their own anxiety on top. I’m weary of panicking. I need to use that energy elsewhere. The church is changing and has been since the very beginning. My hypothesis is that the role of the church musician in parish ministry is changing along with it. I

sense that our role is expanding—that the church needs us to wear hats on top of our musician hats. We’ll have to be advocates, collaborators, ministry planters. Maybe this isn’t as daunting as it sounds. Doesn’t gathering people to sing on a regular basis mean we already know something about community organizing?

Advances in technology, especially in communication technology, have changed *how* we do our work. Social media has put our professional communities into more frequent contact than ever before. Friendships are formed, resources and ideas are exchanged, all without ever actually meeting each other in person. Thanks to video meeting platforms, it’s no longer necessary to be in the same building (or even in the same area code) to do ministry together. And with the advent of tools like desktop publishing and especially the little recording/photography/movie studios we carry around in our pockets, we can create nearly nonstop and communicate ideas as quickly as they occur to us. Widely available notation software has turned our offices into engraving desks. We can have an idea at breakfast, commit it to the page by lunch, and have copies printed and bound by the evening choir rehearsal. If you had asked me two years ago what came to mind when I heard the phrase *virtual choir*, I would’ve looked at you blankly. In the earliest weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, when the first virtual choir videos began to circulate on social media, I turned my nose up. “Yeah, I’m not doing that,” I may have said out loud to my boss. But at this point, I estimate I’ve assembled a hundred or so of these remotely recorded pieces to be used in prerecorded and livestreamed liturgies. It wasn’t the thing we so desperately missed, and I’m not sure that I would jump at the opportunity to spend hours hunched over a MacBook again, but it wasn’t nothing. It wasn’t at all an adequate substitute for what we’d temporarily lost, but it wasn’t *nothing*. Are these things good? Well, maybe they are and maybe they aren’t, but at this point, we cannot unknow what we know.

This is not a how-to guide or a textbook. If you’re looking for registration suggestions for a Bach trio sonata or perhaps hymn suggestions for the Feast of Saint Ludwig the Least, I do have lots of thoughts about those things, but I’ll offer them on another occasion. Contained within are essays addressing specific issues about which I think church musicians need to be especially mindful. These essays seek to answer the questions that I’ve encountered the most often over the past several years, including, What does it mean to be Anglican? What is the role of music and the musician in pastoral care? How do we negotiate new technologies in our work? There are also a handful of conversations and interviews, that we might learn from the life experiences of others. Although sermons are a medium best delivered live and in person, a small number of sermon transcripts have been included—not just because they’re beautiful pieces of prose, which they certainly are, but mainly in the interest of providing a good and encouraging word to us on our way. These sermons include funeral homilies for two giants in our field: Ray Glover and Gerre Hancock. They’ve been included not as tributes, but because these peoples’ lives have provided us with enduring models of vocation.

At its heart, this is a book about vocation—about who we are and what, exactly, it is that we mean to be doing. I think it’s empirically observable that the *how* is changing, but is the *what* changing as well? What do we need to be equipped to negotiate this roller coaster, other than several giant cups of coffee and a relentlessly positive (if occasionally somewhat grating) attitude? I am not prone to false modesty, so please know that what follows is not that: I know that I am not the smartest person in the room, nor the best organist, composer, or choirmaster. What I do excel at, however, is surrounding myself with very smart and talented people. The content of the following pages represents the collective wisdom of a group of people that spans hundreds—if not a thousand—years of experience, training, and wisdom, and with facets of perspective too numerous to count, high church, low church, and every conceivable gradient thereof. These contributors have been chosen specifically for their thoughtfulness and intentionally skew toward people in the late-early to middle stages of their career. Perhaps one day my friends and colleagues will forgive me for giving them homework assignments and for responding to most any comment with, “Can you say more about that?”

Some of these writings may prove to be more helpful to you than others. It also occurs to me that you may not like or agree with everything each contributor has put forth, because neither do I. In fact, some of the perspectives contained within may contradict others. I’ve always found, though, that tangling up with and butting against a position counter to my own is the quickest and most complete way to clarify my own understanding. After all, we’re capable of holding two ideas in our heads at once. Isn’t holding things in tension the Anglican way? This volume is intentionally designed to be cafeteria style, to be consumed a bit at a time and not necessarily in order. It is, by design, incomplete. I don’t know all the questions that need to be asked, and besides, even if I did, there are limits to what you can put in a book. I hope that somebody comes along after me and puts together a second, third, fourth volume. More than anything, I hope that what we have done here, at the very least, is to begin to raise the questions, challenge the assumptions, and ponder the issues that we need to consider as we live into the next millennium of making music to the glory of God and in the service of the church’s worship.

I

ESSAYS

# 1

## How Can I Keep from Singing?

### On Music as Pastoral Care

*The Rev. Jennifer M. Deaton*

“I would rather preach a gospel sermon to an appreciative, receptive congregation than write a hymn,” insisted Robert Wadsworth Lowry, an American minister in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> But there was more melody and poetry in his proclamation than could be contained in a pulpit. Appreciative, receptive congregations today don’t remember Lowry’s gospel sermons, but they do still sing his gospel hymns, of which there are hundreds, including “Shall we gather at the river?” “All the way my Savior leads me,” and this one:

My life flows on in endless song above earth’s lamentations.  
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I’m clinging.  
Since love is Lord of heav’n and earth, how can I keep from singing?<sup>2</sup>

Lowry considered music an avocation, secondary to his preaching and pastoral ministry. Music, though, has a vocation all its own in the life of a worshipping congregation, providing pastoral care to those who are gathered, echoing the endless and ever-modulating song of creation, a song of life and death and life again, a song of praise and lament. Musicians, then, and all who participate in planning and leading a liturgy that includes music, have the opportunity to render pastoral care to individuals, families, congregations, and entire communities. How, then, can we keep from singing?

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1. Jacob Henry Hall, *Biography of Gospel Song and Hymn Writers* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 76.

2. “How Can I Keep from Singing,” *The Upper Room Worship Book: Music and Liturgies for Spiritual Formation*, ed. Elise S. Eslinger (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2006), hymn 170.

## An Endless Song: Singing in Scripture

The story of our faith is filled with song, glorifying God who made all things and who makes all things new. In the first chapter of Genesis, creation itself comes into being through the sound of God's voice: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Over and over again, God says, "let there be," and there is—light, dark, night, day, land, water, air, animals, and humankind. Reading the story, we learn its several refrains—"let there be," "and there was," "and it was good"—and we say them along with the text. Christian writer and theologian Clive Staples Lewis, in *The Magician's Nephew*, transposed the language of God's creation from speech into song, so that the land of Narnia, a magical copy of our own world, is created through music. "In the darkness," Lewis wrote, "something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing."<sup>3</sup> It is the voice of the great lion, Aslan, the Christ-figure in Narnia. As the melody rises, light appears first as stars and then in a sunrise. The song rumbles low, and valleys form, filled with water and green grass. When the tune grows more animated, "it made you want to run and jump and climb. It made you want to shout. It made you want to rush at people and either hug them or fight them."<sup>4</sup> Animals of every shape and size begin appearing, adding their voices to the song of creation.

In our Holy Scriptures, everything in creation is capable of making music. God invites those exiled in Babylon to repent and return to a life of abundance, promising them, "You shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12). The book of Psalms is filled with human voices and instruments; the sea and its creatures, the land and its beasts, and the sky and its sparrows and stars also make music and participate in praising God. A psalmist writes, "The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy" (Ps. 65:12–13). Borrowing from King David's celebration when the ark of God was brought into the tent (1 Chronicles 16), another psalmist writes, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord" (Ps. 96:11–13). In yet another psalm, we read, "Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord" (98:8–9).

"Let heaven and nature sing,"<sup>5</sup> declares a beloved Christmas hymn, and indeed in scripture we often hear the music of angels and of earth. It is human-kind, though, who makes music most often in scripture—songs of victory, songs of thanksgiving, songs of mourning, songs of consolation, songs of praise, and

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3. Clive Staples Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Collier Books, 1955), 98.

4. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 113.

5. "Joy To the World," *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Hymnal, 1982), hymn 100.

songs of longing, expressing the fullness of human experience and emotion. “The motivation to express the depths of our feelings in song is basic to almost all human beings,”<sup>6</sup> observes Raymond Glover, general editor of *The Hymnal 1982*, and we certainly witness it in the stories of our ancestors in faith. Moses and Miriam rejoice as the waters of the Red Sea rush back on the Egyptians and God’s people are finally free: “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed’ . . . Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing” (Exod. 15:1, 20). In the wilderness, the Hebrew people give thanks for God’s gift of water at “the well of which the Lord said to Moses, ‘Gather the people together, and I will give them water.’ Then Israel sang this song: ‘Spring up, O well!—Sing to it!’” (Num. 21:16–17). In his final lament, Job grieves his misfortunes and says, “My lyre is tuned to mourning, and my pipe to the voice of those who weep” (Job 30:31). When Saul begins to suffer a mental illness, his servants suggest music might help, so they bring young David to console him with song: “Whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him” (1 Sam. 16:23). Solomon brings musicians and instruments to the temple to sound the people’s praise as the ark is brought inside: “It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised . . . ‘for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,’ the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud” (2 Chron. 5:13). The Song of Solomon collects fragments of poetry such as would have been sung of the love between a bridegroom and his bride, often understood as the relationship between God and God’s people.

In Luke’s Gospel, Mary cannot keep from singing as she and her cousin, Elizabeth, rejoice in the favor God has shown them, and the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaps when Mary comes near. “My soul magnifies the Lord,” Mary sings, “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46–47). Her song is filled with wonder that so powerful a God would choose so lowly a servant, and with hope that the new work God is doing through the child in her womb will transform suffering into joy. Zechariah sings a similar song after his son, John, is born (Luke 1:68–79). With the Christ child in his arms, Simeon sings in wonder and relief, “Now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples” (Luke 2:29–31). In a prison cell at midnight, their bodies bruised and beaten, Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God as the other prisoners listen (Acts 16:25). Letters to early Christian communities urge congregations to “sing

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6. Raymond Glover, “What Is Congregational Song,” in *The Hymnal 1982 Companion*, vol. 1, *Essays in Church Music* (New York: Church Hymnal, 1990), 3.



by the Holy Spirit that a transition in one member's life affects the whole Christian community."<sup>7</sup> We bring to our regular Sunday morning celebrations of Holy Eucharist, however, the same anxieties, hopes, and hurts that these liturgies and rites address along with all the joys and sorrows of our daily lives, so that in our primary experience of corporate worship we are a congregation filled with every imaginable emotion from all that has happened to us during the week. All liturgy, then, has the potential to offer us pastoral care.

Liturgy is the ordering of our expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God. It is rightly directed toward God. Pastoral theologian Elaine Ramshaw explains that liturgy can also comfort the human heart.<sup>8</sup> It provides order and familiarity in the midst of chaos. It reaffirms and re-engages our connection to a larger community and a larger story. Liturgy helps us acknowledge the ambivalence inherent in times of transition, when we might feel both fear and hope, grief and gratitude, pain and joy. The dissonance may not be resolved, but the presence of a praying congregation and the reminder through scripture and sacrament of God's promise to remain steadfast adds a sustaining note that augments the chord. In liturgy we bear witness to God; who is both beyond us and within us; who is mystery, and who is found in such knowable acts as breaking bread, drinking wine, and in the laying on of hands.

The ministry of pastoral care is most often made up of hospital visits, home communion, sympathy cards, chicken spaghetti casseroles, and flower arrangements taken from the altar. There is talking and listening, and sometimes there is silence. There are smiles, tears, and tissues. Many definitions of pastoral care reference tending troubled souls and comforting emotional distress. But the practice of pastoral care is profoundly incarnate and personal, even sacramental. Delivering a plate of cookies, holding a hand in prayer, humming a beloved hymn by a hospice bedside—surely these are “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace,”<sup>9</sup> means by which God's loving and healing presence is made known within individuals, families, and entire congregations in need. We literally feed the bodies of those whose lives are unsettled. We offer to run errands or sit by a bedside so that a primary caregiver can rest. We anoint the forehead of a sick person with oil. We send, in the form of a notecard or a flower or a prayer shawl, a tangible reminder that a faith community is holding them in prayer, loving them as we have all been loved by God in Christ. Like good liturgy, and within good liturgy, good pastoral care provides a moment of order (now we pray, now we eat, now we rest). It reconnects us *to* and *as* a community of shared faith, and it makes space for conflicting thoughts and feelings to exist together in the presence of God. The second verse of Lowry's hymn sings of this kind of care that does not

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7. *Changes: Prayers and Services Honoring Rites of Passage* (New York: Church Publishing, 2007), 4.

8. Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1987), 22–33.

9. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 857.

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necessarily diminish the darkness or still the storm, but that provides a source of strength within it, something to which we can both literally and spiritually cling.

Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing.  
It finds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?  
No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging;  
Since love is Lord of heav'n and earth, how can I keep from singing?

In the midst of all that threatens our peace, liturgy as pastoral care through scripture and sacraments, through prayer and community, and through song, fastens us to that Rock.

Within a worship service, music can reinforce the scripture readings or the liturgical or theological theme of the season or day. It provides an opportunity for choirs and church musicians to celebrate their God-given gifts of creativity and artistry by offering them back to God in the context of worship. Music can assist us in prayer as we sing service music, or chant a litany, or use a brief refrain with our intercessions. Music can be devotional, leading us in meditation following a scripture reading or sermon, and it can be purely functional, engaging the congregation while worship leaders are performing a necessary task. "One of the most important parts of planning and preparation for any service is the choice of hymns," wrote the Rev. Dr. Marion Hatchett, for reasons such as those listed above, but also because we respond to music, in body, mind, and spirit, differently than we do to the spoken word alone: "People's theology is probably influenced more by the hymns they sing than by the lessons and sermons they hear or the prayers they pray."<sup>10</sup>

### Music as Pastoral Care for the Body

Liturgical singing, even more than liturgical speaking, is a bodily, physical act. In addition to holding a book in our hands, reading a page with our eyes, and moving our mouth to form words, we must be more aware of and intentional about our breathing when we sing. We take deeper breaths to make it through a verse, and the extra oxygen benefits our bodies in other ways, improving our lung function, our mood, and our heart and brain health.

Our bodies are naturally rhythmic and resonant, consisting of a beating heart, coursing blood, expanding and contracting lungs, and vocal cords and ear drums that vibrate. Even if we cannot manipulate the sounds we make to sing on key, our bodies hear and feel the music we make and the sounds we produce. There is evidence that singing reduces cortisol levels (a stress hormone made by

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10. Marion J. Hatchett, *A Liturgical Index to The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing, 1986), 1.