

Hymnals' value for your worship planning

January 19, 2021

Many churches recognize the importance of utilizing traditional hymns in corporate worship, and hymnals remain valuable sources of such historic Christian songs. However, in an internet age, some worship planners are unsure how to use a hymnal effectively. Here are some ways to use hymnals as you plan a service:

1. Use hymnals as a one-stop service planning resource. The arrangement of most hymnals reflects the shape of the gospel or another thematic organization, allowing service planners to locate songs easily that will fit a particular Bible passage, service function or topic. Most hymnals contain topical and Scripture indices that can help you find a suitable song, or you simply can browse in a specific section to find ideas of songs that respond well to the week's sermon or emphasize the service theme.

2. Utilize hymnals as a testimony of how Christians historically have responded to God's truth. You'll find songs from as far back as fourth-century North Africa, through the Reformation, English Separatism and early America, reflecting unified worship through diverse circumstances. Use hymnals to draw from the worship expressions of Christians through the ages, which will help broaden your worship vocabulary beyond your limited experiences and help your church join its voices with those of Christians before us.

3. Recognize hymnals have been carefully curated to include only songs that have endured through wide use by many churches. Especially in a day when anyone can write a song and publish it online, hymnals provide the wisdom of others to help you discern the best

scripturally sound and musically singable songs. Further, by using the indicated hymn meters, you can find a text that fits your service well and match it to a tune your congregation already knows.

4. Utilize hymnals' balanced diversity of song types and themes.

Hymnal editors intentionally include a wide variety of songs that express praise, repentance, trust, dedication and thanksgiving in different styles from chorales to carols. Use a hymnal to protect you from theological or musical tunnel vision and to help you ensure a variety of focus in what your church sings.

5. Use hymnals as a portable collection of the best devotional literature.

Consider providing hymnals for your church families to use at home. Let them know new songs you will introduce at a later date, and ask them to begin singing them at home. You can also publish the songs for next week ahead of time and encourage them to prepare during the week.

As you choose songs for your church to sing, don't forget the hymnal. Used knowledgably, a good hymnal can be a valuable resource to help you find biblically rich songs, rooted in church history and edifying for your congregation.

Scott Aniol is associate professor of church music and worship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. A version of this article originally appeared in the fall 2020 [issue](#) of Southwestern News. The views expressed are those solely of the author.