

Outline: **Music in the Church: Both Bane and Blessing**  
 From: The Ven. Canon Terry Leer  
 Date: September 30, 2021 Latest revision: October 4, 2021  
 Date of event: October 23, 2021 Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

1. Session anchors.
  - 1.1. Why: content requested by Warden of Lay Readers.
  - 1.2. Who: those lay readers who attend.
  - 1.3. When: Saturday, October 23, 2021, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
  - 1.4. Where: online, Zoom platform.
  - 1.5. What: PowerPoint in support of session goals.
  - 1.6. How: deliver online content.
2. Session goals.
  - 2.1. Discuss the theology behind Church music and its implications.
  - 2.2. Share a framework for best practices in Church music.
  - 2.3. Host a roundtable on Lay Reader experience with Church music.
3. Session content.
  - 3.1. Theology of music: What is the purpose of music? What are the goals of music?
  - 3.2. The practical application of our theology.
    - 3.2.1. Hymnody.
    - 3.2.2. Liturgical support.
  - 3.3. A Lay Reader Roundtable: What has worked best for you?
4. Follow-up.

### **Music in the Church: Both Bane and Blessing**

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1. Introduction.  
Introduce self.

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There's nothing like the perfect musical selection to push us into the nearer presence of God. We pour our hearts out to God in song. Many of us weep at the poignancy or the memories of a particular piece of music.

There's nothing like a tiresome, repetitive and theologically empty musical selection to shut down our worship experience entirely. One bad piece of music and suddenly we're fuming rather than listening to the sermon.

Of course, one musical selection can have both effects at any given service. The perception of every aspect of worship is a matter of the individual's response and personal history. We all know that we can't please everybody all the time, but there is something of a faith obligation to choose and produce music wisely and to the best of our ability.

2. The Theology of Music in the Church.

If we are to choose and produce music wisely and to the best of our ability, we actually

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have to think about the “why” of music. We have to know our theology of music, which is part of our theology of worship, which is part of our theology of the Church. The theology of the Church is called “ecclesiology”.

Like all theologies, the theology of music has changed over the centuries. Our practices haven’t necessarily caught up to the changes, but our thinking about music and its role in our worship has changed in fact if not exactly in deed.

One chief factor in our shift is one of the most hidden of all—architecture. How does architecture affect our theology and particularly the application of our theology? **[Discuss.]**

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A second factor in our theology is the decline of the Christian Church. We no longer have sufficient numbers to support professional musicians. We no longer have sufficient populations to provide support to worshipping congregations.

A third factor is the decline of musical education in Canada. That is, we have fewer and fewer people with enough education to support music in the Church and we have fewer and fewer people with exposure to producing music. The vast majority of Canadians are huge consumers of music, but produce next to no music themselves. Fewer sing or play instruments than in past generations. **[Questions?]**

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Since most of our congregations have never needed music to cover up the sound of marching big choirs or ranks of clergy through the nave and into the chancel, why do we sing at all? I’ll warn you in advance: saying, “Because we’ve always sung in the Church,” is insufficient. Nostalgia as a theology is spiritually bankrupt and empty. If tradition is the primary reason for music in the Church, I suggest we ban music from our services.

So, why have music in the Church? What is its purpose? **[Discuss.]**

- Support the spiritual experience of worshippers.
- Support the proclamation of the gospel.
- Fill the spaces left when the celebrant isn’t talking.

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There is another way to phrase this. Music supports and gives power to our experience of the following:

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Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’<sup>1</sup>

And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 12:29-31.

obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’<sup>2</sup>

But in this, music works primarily on an emotional level, in what’s called the “affective” domain. Music moves us. I’ve never been known to bring a person to tears through my sermons, but we all know that choked up feeling from singing that particular hymn. So through music we support the love of disciples and work on fulfilling the Great Commission. Music in the Church is primarily evangelistic but is most effective not in a cognitive sense, but as the means to touch our hearts.

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3. The practical application of our theology in hymnody.  
Our theology says that music in the Church supports the Two Great Commandments and the Great Commission. Music is therefore primarily emotional support and proclamation in the service of Christ and his gospel.

This means that those who choose and produce music in the Church must

- a. know Christ as Saviour and Lord,
- b. know the gospel as communicated in the Bible, and
- c. know the congregation, both as disciples and as participants in music.

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What would you like to ask about knowing Christ as Saviour and Lord? **[Wait.]**

What would you like to ask about the gospel as communicated in the Bible? **[Wait.]**

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Now, let’s talk about knowing the congregation.

- a. Know the shared faith experience of the congregation.
- b. Know those with abilities that can be developed and shared: who can play what, who can sing what, who is presiding/preaching.
- c. Know the proclamation needs of the worship, especially for a specific Sunday: theme for the Sunday, preaching focus, liturgy to be used, special holidays or services.

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With that knowledge in the forefront of your mind, you can then begin to select music.

- a. Pray for courage, wisdom and insight.
- b. Read through the lectionary set for the service.
- c. Select the appropriate number of pieces according to your congregation’s traditions.  
No “Processional” or “Recessional” for most—“Opening” and “Closing”.  
Associate the gradual hymn (if any) with the Gospel reading.  
Use the Sunday Eucharistic lectionary.  
Pay attention to the emotional impact of each selection, based on what you know of your congregation.

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4. The practical application of our theology in liturgical support.

A secondary and increasingly minor area for musical support is in the liturgy itself. Fewer and fewer congregations are able to sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* / Glory to God, the *Kyrie Eleison*, the *Trisagion*, the Great Litany, the Canticles from Morning and Evening Prayer, the *Sanctus*, the *Benedictus* or the versicles and responses. However, where there is still a tradition of supporting the liturgy through music, how do you make your choices?

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

- a. Who can play or sing what?
- b. Can you switch from setting to setting?
- c. What are the musical needs of the congregation?

5. Music as an impetus for change.

The danger—and it is a real danger—in Anglican liturgy is to always look to the past. Our form of worship can often become nostalgic, a wistful longing for the good old days.

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This is especially true with music, both in hymnody and in liturgical music. We long for what used to be. The majority of music used in our churches today comes from the 1800s to the first three quarters of the 1900s. That's not a problem for most of us, because we were born before 1955. But such musical choices focus our attention on the past, and this does represent a problem for those who are new to our Church, especially if they were born after 1975.

Remember, our Church must be evangelizing within that demographic. This is a God-given mandate, and the only way we will ensure the survival of the Diocese of Athabasca.

So, Church musicians have to strike a balance between the congregation's nostalgic desires and the divine demand to proclaim the gospel in our context. Musicians must know and appreciate the past while encouraging the hearts of believers to move into the future.

How will you do that? **[Discuss.]**

- a. Keep tempos lively and moving.
- b. Balance the available sources: CCLI, hymn books, DVDs, YouTube...
- c. Keep the theology of music in the Church in the forefront and resist the temptation to only pay attention to the nostalgia.

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6. A Roundtable: what are your issues and what have been your solutions.

Let's share with one another.

- 6.1. What have been the issues in Church music occupying your attention?
- 6.2. How have people addressed these issues?
- 6.3. What more do you need from the community of Church musicians?

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7. Follow up.

I have been tracking these concerns. In those cases that I have noted, I will follow up with practical support.

You may also request support from me, and I will respond.

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