

Music and Worship

Study Leave Report

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St Moluag's Church, Isle of Lewis, Scotland
Lewis Psalm singing was the catalyst for the journey

Opoho Presbyterian Church, 2017

Contents

Introduction	p. 3
Music and Worship in the time of Jesus	p. 4
The Development of a Theology of Music in the Church	p. 5
Church Music Today	p. 8
Study Leave Conversations in NZ, the United Kingdom & Ireland	p. 12
Gathering the Threads Together	p. 22
Bibliography	p. 28
Appendix 1: Questions for Reflection and Discussion	p. 29
Appendix 2: A Brief Overview of the Churches and Services	p. 30
Appendix 3: Sermon, Burns and Old Kilsyth Church, Scotland	p. 36

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The conversations are as I understood them and were held with the
intention they would inform this study leave report.

Introduction

In September and October of 2016, in company with my husband Mike, I travelled to the UK and Ireland for my study leave to explore the three inter-related issues of:

- the relationship of music to worship,
- how it is that music connects us with God, and
- what are the barriers that might hold us back from experiencing God through music.

I chose to visit the United Kingdom and Ireland as I was particularly interested in the musical connections we as a Presbyterian faith community have with our roots in Scotland, and how that connects with our context in New Zealand. A couple of years ago I came across a Youtube clip of Gaelic psalm singing at the Free Church at Back, on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland and was drawn to the unusual melody as well as the sense of timelessness - I wanted to experience this so going to Scotland was an obvious choice. Music in all its forms: instrumental, congregational singing, and choral, is an integral part of Opoho worship and life so this study would also be relevant to the life of our church and further afield.

It is generally understood among church leaders that music in worship is often the source of division and dissension, and yet it can also offer moments of oneness and community with God and each other that are beyond explanation. This report seeks to encourage our awareness of the importance of the different forms of music in our worship and our faith as we seek to encounter God.

There are few definitive answers in this report. However a number of questions do arise from the study and I would encourage all who participate in or have responsibility for music in worship to engage with them. In other words, all of us who join in worship!

In the report I will first briefly explore how music was viewed in Biblical times and in the early church and then look at how a theology of music developed over the centuries through to the present day. My conversations with people and observations of music in worship form the next part of the report and I conclude with some thoughts and observations. Questions arising from the report are in appendix 1.

Details of the churches I attended are attached in appendix 2. At five of those churches I had substantial conversations with music leaders and ministers which were helpful and stimulating, but at the same time reminded me that all churches share in the same kinds of issues and challenges around music in worship. I also had conversations before I went on the study leave with members of Opoho Church who helped me develop the topic, a group of Presbyterian ministers within the Southern Presbytery and two members of the Presbyterian Church in Dunedin.

Music and Worship in the time of Jesus

The Scriptures give pictures of a rich variety of music in worship and offer insights into the early understanding of music in worship. *Chronicles* contains detailed instruction for the music of the temple, the *Psalms* abound in hymns of praise (in sadness and in joy). David plays the harp for King Saul, dances and sings the Ark to Jerusalem, and, along with all the people of faith, uses the music of the psalms to memorise God's truth and build up truth and understanding. Jesus and the disciples were singing hymns in the garden as the hour of crisis loomed. It is worth noting, however, that music was not harmonious to God if offered by a people who live in the dark, were unjust and sinful. It became, rather a noise! (*Amos 5:23*)



'Angel playing bagpipes',
Thistle Chapel, St Giles
Cathedral, Edinburgh

Music is seen as an attribute of God in the wonderful passage from *Zephaniah 3* "*The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, will rejoice over you with singing*".¹

Edward Foley,² a contemporary Catholic theologian³ tells us that in the *Old Testament* worship context "*the performance of synagogal, word-centred worship continuously migrated back and forth between what we might call speech and song...always lyrical.*" Today's equivalent style, where the reading is fundamentally lyrical, Foley names as 'rap'!

Paul speaks in *Ephesians 5* of the value of hymn singing: "*but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"⁴

Congregational hymn singing is one of the greatest 'gathering' forces we have – it creates communion.

When we inhale and sing together, we feel the act of commitment to each other and those gone and those never met.

Leonard Enns

¹ *Zephaniah 3:17* (New King James version)

² *The Singing of Jesus* by Michael O'Connor in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*

³ Duns Scotus Professor of Spirituality and Professor of Liturgy and Music, Catholic Theological Union in Chicago

⁴ *Ephesians 5:18b-20* NRSV

Steven Guthrie,⁵ in his paper *The Wisdom of Song*⁶ argues that, for Paul, there is a rich connection between the singing of hymns and our growing in understanding and wisdom of the purpose and presence of God. Paul seeks, Guthrie suggests, to impress on us that we are the holy temple of the Lord “*built together into the dwelling of God’s Holy Spirit.....singing and being filled with the Holy Spirit are bound together grammatically.*”⁷ Guthrie in fact connects all the commands of *Ephesians* 4 & 5 to music in this way:

“*Put away ignorance.*

Let no-one deceive you.

Know the truth.

Be wise.

Sing!”⁸

Christ is the new song in person – the resurrection and the life. Clement of Alexandria

The Development of a Theology of Music in the Church

That the theology and practice of church music is the cause of much debate, division, and passionate opinion is without question. That it has been so over time is proven by the centuries of recorded opinion.

In the first few hundred years after Christ, the Christian church and its theologians emphasised the value of the harmony of music. Guthrie quotes Calvin Stapert– “*a sounding image of rightly ordered relationships*”⁹ and that the importance of singing with ‘one voice’ was a constant refrain, expression of, metaphor for, means towards unity.¹⁰

Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the first century AD, teaches: “*In your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. And do ye, man by man, become a choir, that being harmonious in love, and taking up the song of God in unison, ye may with one voice sign to the Father through Jesus Christ, so that he may both hear you, and perceive by your works that ye are indeed the members of his Song. It is profitable, therefore, that you should live in an unblameable unity, that thus ye may always enjoy communion with God.*”¹¹

Augustine, some three centuries later, had a somewhat ambivalent approach to music as worship – he valued it as a means of moving the soul, warming devotion and gathering us as one, yet was suspicious of its ability to overwhelm him by its sheer beauty, thus taking precedence over God who we are to be worshipping. But he could not step away from the

⁵ Belmont College of Theology and Christian Ministry.

http://www.belmont.edu/theology/who_we_are/guthrie_steve.html

⁶ *The Wisdom of Song* by Steven Guthrie in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*

⁷ *The Wisdom of Song* by Steven R. Guthrie in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*

⁸ Ditto

⁹ Ditto

¹⁰ Calvin Stapert *A New Song* in *The Wisdom of Song.....*

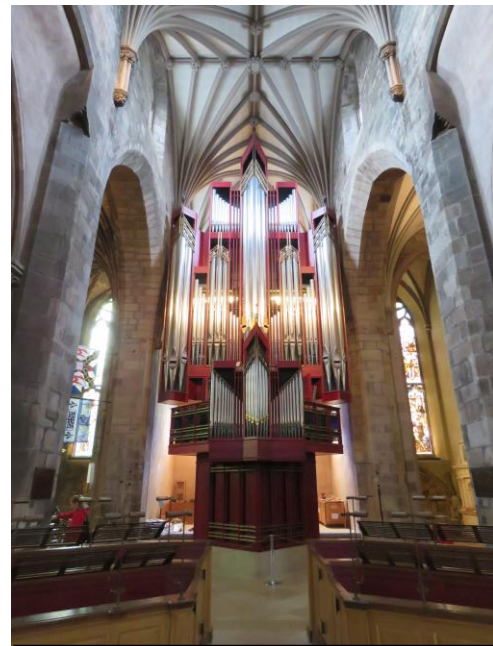
¹¹ Ignatius of Antioch (35-108 AD), *Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Ante-Nicene Library*, vol.1: *The Apostolic Fathers* pp. 149-50

profound effect music had on his soul and therefore on his relationship with God – he concluded: “*that the custom of singing in church is to be approved, so that through the delights of the ear the weaker mind may rise up toward the devotion of worship. Yet when it happens to me that the music moves me more than the subject of the song, I confess myself to commit a sin deserving punishment, and then I would prefer not to have heard the singer.*”¹²

‘Who sings, prays twice’ (*Tui cantat bis orat*)

Augustine

John Calvin took a very dim view of instruments in congregational worship – a view held still by the Free Church of Scotland. Before the coming of Jesus they were acceptable as a training tool for a church in its infancy, but after Jesus and in the clear light of the Gospel Calvin believed that we are to serve God in a simpler form – he clearly aligned instruments with Papist excess. He called instruments a ‘*departed dispensation*’ that would only bury the light of the Gospel. He also believed that we should only be singing the words found in the bible, a practice still followed by the Free Church in Lewis. Where the singing is not linked to the mind ie where the melody takes the focus rather than the words, we are in danger of allowing emotion to diminish the word – a view that I cannot agree with. On numerous occasions at Opoho and in other places of worship the sensitive use of musicianship only enhances and at times interprets the words we sing. Equally though Calvin writes that singing “*has the greatest value in kindling our hearts to a true zeal and eagerness to pray.*”¹³ He, like Augustine, knew the connection of singing with prayer.



Organ pipes, St Giles, Edinburgh

Lutheranism took a different approach - there were debates within early German church, comments Joyce Irwin,¹⁴ concerning music’s relation to the Word of God in preaching. It was widely believed that music had its own particular capacities to prepare the heart to receive the Word and instill it in the hearts of the believers, special stress being placed on music’s emotional potency.

¹² Saint Augustine (Bishop of Hippo) 354-430 AD *St Augustine’s Confessions* 10.33.50

¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

¹⁴ Introduction *Resonant Witness*



One of the most influential women to develop the understanding of music and theology was Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) who, says Margot Fasler, was “*able to interweave theology and music with consummate skill and proficiency.*”¹⁵ It was interesting to note that in her seeking to have music suited to female voices, she was censured for putting her musical notes in a higher range and was roundly criticised by John of Salisbury who said he was ‘disgusted’ by this ‘feminisation’ of music. Hildegard’s response: that the men just needed to adapt to the range and new harmonies. There is nothing new.... For all the angst of this newly introduced work, Hildegard very firmly believed that music was the food of transformation and newness – all was focussed on the saving grace of God.

The work of Johann Sebastian Bach is often considered that of a ‘theological musician’ – one who expresses his faith understanding through his music – and whose work overflows with examples of this, as he held to the theology of the cross as expressed by Martin Luther. He incorporated symbology of the cross in his works eg St Matthew Passion including using music to emphasise key ideas in the text, ascending for heaven, drawn out notes for sorrow. Two prominent theologians that Guthrie and Begbie¹⁶ describe as ‘musical theologians’ are Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who used their passion for music as a responsive form of witness to God’s reconciling self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. David Moseley¹⁷ posits that Bonhoeffer felt it was an effective way of connecting with the culture around in a way that not much else of ‘religion’ did and Barth saw music a means “*called forth by Christ...through which he bears witness to himself and his reconciling work.*” Neither theologian however, in Moseley’s opinion, fell into the trap of idolatry of music. We note that Bonhoeffer too distrusted the use of harmonies in sacred music, feeling that it crossed the line of revering the music above the word.

<p>A Theological Musician</p> <p>A Musical Theologian</p>

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) found itself in the midst of a controversial debate on music in worship. The leaders charged that music within the Roman Catholic Church had become too lavish, too hard to sing, and interfered with the liturgy, but the musicians felt the Council was trying to stifle their creativity and control their compositions. They saw their work as a bridge between the people and God, an ongoing debate in churches today!

¹⁵ Margot Fasler, *Music for the Love Feast: Hildegard of Bingen and the Song of Songs in Resonant Witness*

¹⁶ ditto

¹⁷ ditto

In 1977, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger¹⁸ spoke in Stuttgart on the crisis facing the Catholic Church regarding music in worship. He noted two theological millstones affecting the music of the church. The first is where the concept of active participation dominates, the theory where music should only exist and function as congregational singing denies the value of festive or choral music. Interestingly the second millstone has grown out of this: there have emerged new ensembles and contemporary musical offerings which themselves become elitist (the same criticism levelled at the choirs etc which they have replaced). They appear also to consider all older music as of no value.

Church Music Today

One of the most helpful definitions I found of the purpose of worship music is the following from the pen of Christopher Hayward – to which I have added points 5 and 6:

1. *Music assists in memorisation of story and truth*
2. *Music ought to reflect the breadth of Scripture*
3. *Music ought to reflect the breadth and depth of human living*
4. *Music is for the building up of the body of Christ*
5. Music is conversation with God and the world
6. Music ought to glorify God

To discuss the importance of music in worship seems similar to discussing the role of breath in our lives.....The relationship between wind and breath and spirit and song is a wonderfully messy one.

Leonard Enns

In reflecting on my study leave, I realised how little music is on the theological radar of church leaders. By this I mean that any debate is more likely to be about who chooses the music, which hymnbooks are used, the musical styles, not upsetting parishioners than why we have music in a service of worship in the first place. The relative dearth of modern theological debate was a concern to me - while music may occupy one or two pages in a theological textbook, it is seldom offered in any depth or breadth. Begbie and Guthrie¹⁹ would concur as, in their introduction to the collection of essays in *Resonant Witness*, they bemoan the lack of writing and debate linking the musical with the theological in modern times. And so a question that arose from the study leave was: 'How do music/worship leaders engage with or understand the theology of music in our services?'

Professor Leonard Enns of Conrad Grebel University College, a Canadian Mennonite, has some wisdom to impart here. He believes that we need something beyond conventional language and debate to fulfil both the longings and the celebrations of the soul as we meet with God. Sacred music is, for him, the vibrant connection with the source of our being. He says:

¹⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger *Crux et Cithara* (1983) <http://musicasacra.com/commentaries/theological-problems/>

¹⁹ Introduction *Resonant Witness*

“Music speaks in a less precise, but also a less limiting way, than words [spoken] – music, when written and placed appropriately, is often the most direct path to the holy”²⁰

Enns also touches on the global and unifying role of music and believes that when we gather in worship to sing we are creating one of the greatest ‘gathering’ forces we have. Congregational hymn singing creates communion, meaningful involvement not just in the immediate community but in conjunction with all those who have sung the same hymn, with those who created the music – *“when we inhale and sing together, we feel the act of commitment to each other and to those gone and those never met....Let music be an avenue to God and a tangible embrace with each other.”²¹*



Gaelic psalm singing,
Back Church, Isle of Lewis, Scotland
Photo Credit: Gaelic Psalm Singers of Back Free Church

Jeremy Begbie, Professor of Theology at Duke University in the United States, who is passionately engaged with the meaning of music in our faith, who believes that *“the world of music holds out considerable promise for theology today, by offering distinctive modes of apprehending, perceiving, and understanding its primary subject-matter (the Gospel of the Triune God).”²²* He tackles the emotional versus rational discussion that engaged the early church, noting that many today seem to have either gone overboard with emotion or stoicism and encouraging us to find the middle ground. How can we be only one or the other – we have need of the emotions to truly encounter God but the mind to guide and direct that emotion always through and with Christ. Worship, he says, is a school of emotions!

What was unique about New Testament Church, then, was not that it was a group of people experiencing community, nor that this community manifested itself in song. What was extraordinary was those among whom the ‘boundaries’ were being crossed and which parties were experiencing ‘fellow feeling’.

Steven Guthrie

Begbie’s co-editor of ‘*Resonant Witness*’, Steven Guthrie, picks up the theme of community in his writing where he declares that *“the activity of singing is both an enactment and an exposition of the church’s unity”²³* and that, through singing, Jesus Christ is made known and we grow in wisdom and understanding. Sharing in the practice makes us one – one body based on the image of God. But it is the Trinitarian

²⁰ Leonard Enns, *Through the Song, the Church goes on* in *Canadian Mennonite Journal* 8.22 (Nov 15, 2004):8-9

²¹ Leonard Enns, *Music as Communion* in *Canadian Mennonite Journal* 13.22 (Nov 16, 2009):4-7

²² Jeremy S. Begbie, *Faithful Feelings: Music and Emotion in Worship* in *Resonant Witness*

²³ Steven R. Guthrie, *The Wisdom of Song* in *Resonant Witness*

God we follow – one in three and three in one. We come together in one voice but it is the voice of many, the voice of relationships lived out in unity. As the New Zealand hymn says:

We are many, we are one, and the work of Christ is done
when we learn to live in true community....

We will join creation's song, make a world where all belong,
build as one in peace and loving harmony.....

Words: Colin Gibson²⁴

In song we can create a new sound to God that is more than the individual voices or instruments. Differentiated unity and unified diversity are the words Guthrie uses to express this concept. There is an interesting discussion in his paper on whether we actually submit to the song, that by staying in tune and timing, there is a synchronicity in which we both lose our freedom but find a new freedom in community.

Guthrie also states how important it is to not just engage in the act of singing but to reflect on it as well. He looks to Paul to find directions on practice and variety and find that, with broad brush strokes, Paul's music is vocal and communal, the participants can hear each other and the songs reflect the teaching of the church. He notes but does not explore the thought that other types of church music might not fit this description but it can be argued that they bring other gifts. This has some immediate implications for the way we approach music today. Do we only engage in congregational singing, what is the place of instrumental music particularly in but not exclusive to contemplative music, and what forms of music might be encourage those who are not particularly melodic in singing e.g. rap music? Today we can sing in different languages inviting a trust that the words we sing are pleasing to God.

*That music should be the
source of discord is sadly
ironic....*

Steven Guthrie

The ministers' group I spoke with here in the Southern Presbytery also reflected on the theology of music, suggesting that it is the depth of feeling and engagement that people have when participating in the singing of hymns that is also reason why there is so much angst when it is not exactly as they expected. Some of them saw singing as prayer that takes us beyond ourselves (echoing Augustine's belief), connecting with our emotions and inviting us to participate and engage in a meaningful way. They too were aware of when music may be distracting or inappropriate and felt that the greatest travesty of music in worship is when the music itself becomes the focus, the idol, and when music is used to manipulate us rather than encourage. An example of this would, be slowing down the tune so much that even the most joyous of words become a dirge. Noted too, by one of the group, was the idea of the importance of the music reflecting

²⁴ Colin Gibson in *Faith forever Singing: 67* (Raumati, NZ: The New Zealand Hymnbook Trust; 2000)

the ‘journey’ of a worship service and that, when we have just had a meditative prayer for instance, transitioning into loud invasive music is not helpful. Always we are reminded that it is not music itself that transforms but God’s spirit – and so the need for perfect harmony in music and words before Christ will come is a misnomer and needs to be put aside.

Another point raised by both the people I talked to here in New Zealand and overseas and in the writings of contemporary theologians is the real concern with the trend in church music towards introspective, self-focused singing. As Pete Ward describes it: “*away from an evangelistic concern for the outsider, via a focus on the importance of the church fellowship, to a flight ‘for refuge, escaping [from the world] into the comforting arms of the Father.’*”²⁵ If congregational singing is primarily for coming together in community with each other and God, for learning and looking outward, for learning scripture in all its breadth and depth, then singing only personal salvation, inward facing songs is teaching us to memorise and live a theology of self. For John Longley (St Columba, Edinburgh) this is an immediate red flag in the choosing of hymns.

To conclude this section on church music today, I would like to share a very pragmatic approach to the theology of music in worship from Eric Wyse, Director of Music at St Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church in Nashville. These are excerpts – the full article is available at <http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/eric-wyse-a-theology-of-music-in-worship>

“The vision for music in worship at St. Bartholomew’s is one of worship of the Triune God with all our beings, with all of our emotions, and with all of our intellect—hence we worship joyfully and exuberantly, as well as meditatively and reverently.... As we worship, our primary purpose, starting point, ending point and overall “umbrella” is an acknowledgement of who God is, and our response His call. This is a very God focused, rather than me-focused expression...

At St. Bartholomew’s, our musical offering is a reflection of who we are as believers living in a post-modern world, connected to the ancient historic faith. We draw from various styles and periods of music, including classic hymns, chant, and anthems, as well as fresh new expressions of music from around the world – praise songs, Taizé music from France, music of renewal from the Roman church, and Celtic music. We sing music that is hundreds of years old, because in addition to the truth it contains, it reminds us we are a part of the historic church, and we sing today the same music the saints of old sang, and in that way are joined as one church universal. We sing modern music, because he has put a new song in our hearts. We draw from the wealth of resources from our varied traditions. We sing in other modern languages (Spanish) to remind us that we are part of a global church, and we sing in Latin, which was the language of the

²⁵ <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/music-worship-and-the-church-by-christopher-hayward/>

church for most of church history. When we sing in Spanish, we connect to the believers in our church body who worship with us, singing in their first language. When we sing in Latin we connect with the historic language of the church—a language that is still sung every Sunday around the world. When we sing the service music we join our voices “with angels and archangels and all the host of heaven” (i.e. the cloud of witnesses)....

Our music will be primarily congregational, as we hear from God and are best transformed into his likeness, within the context of community. Because we view the human voice as the primary instrument through which we offer praise, we sing some music unaccompanied (a cappella) each week. As we lift our voices alone, we are certain to hear the voices around us, (not just the instruments offering accompaniment), and are reminded that we live and worship in a community of joined voices and lives. On occasion, a soloist, or choir will offer music as an offering. During this time, we will engage in active listening as God speaks to us. At times, we will be silent and hear the Spirit speaking to the church.

The music in our worship will be Christo-centric — in every service we will use music to help retell the story of God’s saving acts throughout history — from creation, the exodus, and other events in Hebrew history, to the incarnation, death, resurrection and reign of Christ and the coming of His Kingdom. ²⁶

Study Leave Conversations in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Ireland

By the time I was ready to go on the study leave, I had ideas of what I might find but was content with knowing that a good conversation about music and God would be sure to offer insights and unexpected directions. My study supervisor encouraged me to be open to the experience and to not put too many boundaries on my questions. This was sage advice. Some conversations were planned, others were of the moment, some short and some long, others very fruitful and one or two a little disappointing in the lack of depth. What follows are observations and thoughts that emerged from those conversations.

When speaking to John Longley, musical director of **St Columba by the Castle Episcopal Church** in Edinburgh he had a number of ideas that resonated. He believed the choice of music for worship required thought and understanding. The vicar chose the hymns with input from John, the musical director. John was aware of the readings beforehand, and looked to offer both well known and new, traditional and contemporary, and had difficulty with hymns where the theology, language and style are exclusive or troubling. At the same time he believed that many hymns also have words of hope and that in the end, the good sanctifies the moment. John made the comment that he was most concerned with many contemporary songs that appear to

²⁶ Eric Wyse, *A Theology of Music in Worship*. <http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/eric-wyse-a-theology-of-music-in-worship>

be written on a theme of self-gratification alone and he was pleased that the vicar of St Columba had been given a copy of *Alleluia Aotearoa* from New Zealand, which he considered a scripturally balanced modern hymnbook. He acknowledges that you cannot please all of the people all of the time and so looks to engage everyone some of the time. For him a service should not be a musical desert for anyone! His theory is that there should be at least two pieces that everyone knows well.



St Columba by the Castle, Edinburgh, back garden

The language and theology of hymns are important for both he and the vicar but they recognise it is not so for most of the people who are more concerned with familiarity and good tunes. In light of the way in which hymns help us memorise and understand our faith is there a need to challenge that thinking whilst accepting the power of belonging that well known words evoke? There are a few times, John believes, when the words and/or theology actually prevent people from engaging ‘body and soul’ with the music and so are to be avoided.

The St Columba congregation regularly sang songs from other cultures, whether or not they have people of that nationality attending believing it important to see ourselves as part of the world of faith and in the same way to sing songs of different centuries aligning us with the saints throughout the church in time and across boundaries.

John raised an intriguing thought around the pursuit of novelty in our music and wondered if we are almost dependent on it – that if we exclusively value modern music then we are in danger of worshipping novelty, not God. We certainly need to bring in new music but that it needs to sit in the robustness of the known. And finally John talked about ‘globalisation’ of the Spirit – allowing the Spirit to connect us with what is right for us so that we can know God in old and new ways that are culturally, denominationally and theologically diverse. Music speaks to the Spirit in so many ways – always different.

I had a very different conversation with a 96 year old gentleman called Alan, a member of the congregation at **Crathie Church in central Scotland**. He was introduced to me as someone who had a huge knowledge of hymns and had been part of this congregation his whole life. The service itself was very sedate with no surprise hymns – this may have had to do with the fact the royal family were in attendance – and most of a particular cadence and style. The one Mike and I did know and had some swing was sung by a choir to us. Alan was keen to know how we approached music in worship in New Zealand and had some firm ideas on what worked for him. They use the *Church Hymnary 4* as their main hymnbook which does not suit his needs. Too many Celtic tunes (yes he did say that) and no children's



Crathie Church, Scotland

section. He wasn't happy with the changing of words that were written of the time and believed they should be left alone. He finds the biggest downfall of current hymns are the tunes which he considers less than robust and that they often all sound the same, going nowhere. He recognises that his bias is to the old hymns is because they bring back the memory of times and events in his life and faith journey, especially at his advanced age. He particularly misses singing the psalms. In a separate conversation with the minister of the Parish, Rev Kenneth Mackenzie, we discussed the psalms. He said that he had a particular affinity with them and sees them as the heartbeat of the scriptures. He noted they weren't singing them as much as they used to and he needed to rectify that. Alan ought to be happy.

The next church I attended was at **Back on the Isle of Lewis** off the west coast of Scotland. This is where the Gaelic psalm singing I had heard on Youtube had been recorded and now I was there in person. The experience did not disappoint. I was moved to tears by the singing and would find it hard to describe exactly why. The majority of the service was in Gaelic with the odd introduction in English. I was certainly assured of the way in which God is present even when we don't understand the words – it was a powerful time of worship and the rhythms were intuitive. This church is part of the Free Church of Scotland that does not have any other sung music or instruments.

Speaking with the minister Rev Callum McLeod after the service, he expressed a concern for the sustainability of the speaking of the Gaelic as most of the attendees were 70 or over. The younger people and families of the church were meeting in the English speaking service held in the hall at the same time. He also talked in some depth about the connections that the psalm singing makes both within the church and outside. He quoted Professor Willie Ruff from the US Southern Black Baptist church who had visited and found similarities between their singing

and that of the Back congregation. And for both faith communities the way they lead the singing was originally because the people couldn't read so they learned the psalms through music. Both have the technique of 'lining out' which is where the precentor sings the first and second line inviting the congregation to join in after that. There are nine different psalm 'tones' and then variations within those at Back and they are of differing pitches and tones. Grace notes (short notes that 'decorate' standard notes) add to what otherwise might be a regimented tune.²⁷ The important difference between Gaelic psalm singing of Lewis and other psalm singing in the UK is that it is plainsong – where the tune is made to fit the words and in other examples eg Anglican and other Presbyterian traditions the words are shaped to fit a tune.



Free Church of Scotland, Back

There is a particular sound to the singing that defies words. I can only liken it to the weaving of a myriad of strands together, up and down and through, to create a cohesive sound of praise that doesn't fit any shape we might know. It doesn't matter, for instance, to be right on tune, and the grace notes are intuitive, never planned, adding texture, shape and spirituality to the whole. For all that, you can tell the difference between lament and praise and sending out with the latter being of lower pitch and stronger tone. There is the story related to me by the current minister at Back of another minister who stopped the singing of a psalm part

way through,, saying 'This is praise to God and we are singing it like a dirge. Start again!'

Callum Martin, the precentor at Back said: "*Originally, of course, it's a congregational form of singing, but within that congregation each individual is making their own act of worship by singing the words and melody in their own way, adding their own grace notes, and with all those individuals together, there's really no other sound like it in the world.*"

The idea of the music transcending all cultures was one that the minister was keen to expand on. He told the story of how an Australian man and a lass from Lewis were to marry in Edinburgh and wanted a Gaelic psalm. Callum ended up being precentor, having no idea how this would go down with the large number of Australians present. He said: "*The Aussies were gobsmacked – it was the talking point for the rest of the night.*" The singers had also gone to Northern Ireland to share the singing with a group of both Catholic and Protestant (including some serious separatists) and it was a time of binding and togetherness. He believes that the

²⁷ More detail can be found at http://www.stutler.cc/russ/sing_psalms.html

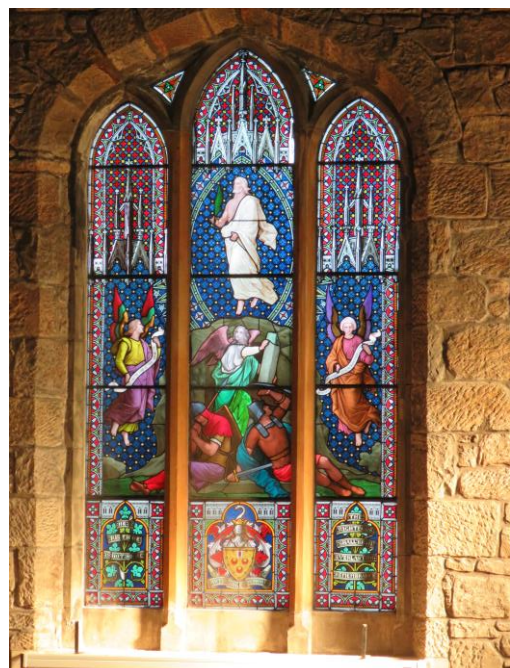
psalms have an impression beyond the ‘walls of the highlands’, have a sense of universality that speaks across cultures and denominations.

When I came away from this service at Back I thought about my immediate response. I realised that Gaelic psalms sung in this way give us time to embrace and experience the meaning of the words – unhurried and deliberate engagement with Scripture. Listening to the singing was very emotional – it took a few moments of listening to the first one for me to find the rhythm and for it to become cohesive. However there very quickly came a sense of soaring and anchoring – mountains and valleys. The low notes reverberated within, the grace notes were soaringly beautiful and always delightfully unexpected, and the high notes were invigorating and lifting – all were full of the presence of God.

I was invited to preach at **Kilsyth Burns and Old Parish Presbyterian Church** north of Glasgow, arranged through a family connection with a member of the Opoho congregation. It was a delight to be able to share some thoughts on music and worship within the context of a service and to hear that the sermon, once posted on the Opoho website, had spoken deeply to a member of my congregation too, reinforced to me the unity of the community of faith across nations. After the service I spoke with both the organist, Maureen Divers and Margaret, a member of the congregation. Maureen had just written a hymn for the 200 year anniversary of the current church building in 2016 and we sang it in the service that Sunday. They both expressed a need to be singing that which they would also be able to say. It was

not the old language they had trouble with but the ‘sinful beast’ type allusions. For Margaret the depth of power that good music and words had in her meeting God in worship meant that equally the ‘awful’ words or lyrics linked with unsuitable tunes would prevent her full engagement. Maureen, as a writer of hymns was not always sure where the music and words came from but she had a real sense of God moving and shaping them to God’s purpose. She has turned to the *Psalms* often for renewal and inspiration when her own thoughts run dry.

Our first stop in Ireland was at Carrickfergus northwest of Belfast. In one of those ‘coincidences’ that travel encourages, we were taking photos in a church graveyard and got into conversation with a gentleman there, Nigel McClintock, a member of the Church of Ireland (Episcopalian), who just happened to be the director of the choir at the **Catholic Cathedral in Belfast**. That a Protestant would hold this role in a Catholic Church was, Nigel said, unusual



Burns and Old Parish Church, Kilsyth

for Northern Ireland. It was noticeable to us as New Zealanders how often the Catholic Protestant divide was introduced into the discussions, whether about church or community. He suggested that Catholic congregations throughout Ireland don't engage in singing in the way the Protestant churches do and that they rely on the choir to take the lead in all music. It is not part of their traditions, he suggests. Further he sees the music that the choir offers as helping people to pray, especially when they don't know how. His work has been in building up a young male choir as a mission of the church with the community. To date they have some wonderful stories of young boys both discovering their talents and building a place of safe entry into the church. That is as important to Nigel as the value of the choir in the worship service. This missional aspect of music could also be seen in the way the Gaelic psalm singers move outside of the church context into community to bring what they see as a reconciling form of music as evidenced in Belfast.

Nigel believed that music in worship is more about the sound than the word, that when they sang in Latin it is not more or less prayerful and powerful in connecting the people with God than understood words. Even though the participation of the congregation is less than we might expect in other denominations, Nigel firmly believed that it was music that pulls us together in praising God. As the person who chooses the music he works between older and contemporary and always tries to have the music fit in with the readings and liturgy.

I did not have the opportunity to talk with anyone in the congregation or leadership in any depth at the next three churches we visited, so what follows are my observations alone.

At the First Presbyterian Church of Armagh in Northern Ireland, I was impressed at the breadth of music and their openness to new hymns in the service and that they were, according to the Minister, always trying to balance traditional hymns with new. I was very happy to leave them with two copies of NZ hymnbooks, one from Colin Gibson and another of Shirley Erena Murray's to add to their resources. The service was very relaxed and the choir very much part of the service rather than separate. I suspect I felt this because they were not robed, nor seated in a completely separate part of the church. One had the feeling they were congregants who liked to sing rather than singers who came to be part of the choir. This may or may not be true for all.



First Presbyterian Church,
Armagh

Totterdown Methodist Church in Bristol was the saddest experience in my travels – I would not be sure whether the music reflected the sadness or caused some of it but there was a general lethargy and sameness to the whole service that was almost overwhelming. Coming into the church was awkward with no-one to greet me at the door or down a long corridor littered with boxes and various other items. Those on duty seemed surprised to see a visitor although they greeted me warmly. Around 40 adults and no children attended that day but I was told that the previous Sunday's Harvest Thanksgiving Service the church was full of all ages. On this day, however, even the choir was unable to lift the sense of gloom –though they only backed up congregational singing. So sad to see in a Methodist church where the denomination emphasises the importance of music in praising God and hearing the teaching of Jesus.

St Mary Redcliffe Anglican Church in Bristol was, on the other hand, so full of choral music that one wondered if the congregation needed to participate at all. Of the three hymns for the whole church, we knew only one so that may have contributed to the sense of detachment for me – a salutary lesson perhaps. There was a full choir (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), and the prayers and psalms were also sung/chanted by the vicar and/or the choir. It was truly beautiful music for all that but somewhat outside my preferred experience of participatory congregational singing. On a side note it was for me wonderful to hear a sermon with fully inclusive language by a young woman who was assistant vicar, one of three services I attended on my travels where some care with language was taken. She said that no one notices and I was the first to say thank you. Rather sad.



St Mary Redcliffe
Anglican Parish Church, Bristol

The final service we attended in the UK was at the **United Reformed Church in Macclesfield, Cheshire**. On the Monday I met with the minister Rev Marion Tugwood, who told me something of the history of the United Reformed movement before we moved to discussing music in worship.

She made the point that music in worship also has to be chosen with a view to the capacity of the musicians and congregation – that it is important that the music not be over-complicated without the ability to deliver it well. They use the choir (all are welcome whether they read music or not) as the main avenue for introducing new hymns and they are often sung as the introit first and then the choir lead strongly if needed during the singing.



United Reformed Church, Macclesfield

Marion has a strong sense of music being part of the whole message of the service – as another way to share the teaching that is expounded in the sermon, prayers and scripture. The church enjoys a wide taste in music and has been known to have rock music as well as Latin responses. An interesting comment is that in a multicultural church it is sometimes helpful for all to sing in Latin than in English because all share in not singing in their first language. Her question is always, when choosing music: ‘Does it

move me?’ The current hymnbook they use (*Rejoice and Sing*) is very patchy in its inclusive language, even though it was the intention when published, and she uses it as little as possible. She was delighted to be offered a copy of *Alleluia Aotearoa*.

Marion feels both appropriate theology and language of hymns are important but that bad theology is more of an issue. Marion believes that this is also why there is such grief and distress when words are changed. Music is so powerful, so sustaining, so ‘remembered’ that it goes deep inside us and reverberates forever. So those in service leadership really do have a responsibility to use ‘sound’ theology in song as much as we do in liturgy and preaching.

We talked about occasions when the music transcends its parts and becomes an experience of God with us. She remembered the funeral where the favourite hymn of the person was played quietly and sensitively and there was the sense that everyone there took a part of it into them and away with them. She likens the mystery of sharing communion to the mystery of the power of music in our experience of meeting God.

We discussed whether, in our drive to have everything perfectly choreographed or perfectly in unison (tune and words) in our music whether we lose this sense of God moving in the midst. We agreed that there were times when, in striving for that perfection, we can lose sight of the primary purpose of music in worship which is praising God. Equally we acknowledge and embrace the God moments that supremely beautiful, cohesive music and singing brings.

But whatever else music’s purpose is in worship, it should be an expression for the congregation of what it means to be a Christ follower. Marion quotes the time she went to a worship service in Uganda and found that they only sang European hymns. Where, she said, is their theology and their expression of faith as a community of Christ. She has a strong belief in local music that reflects the desire to embrace the context of the congregation.

The final church of the study leave was in **Vancouver at the First Lutheran Church** on Reformation Sunday. What was noticeable here were the sung responses to prayers, readings and within the Communion liturgy. The order of service includes the music as well as the words for all of these. I had a brief conversation with the priest Lori-Anne Boutin-Crawford after the service and she too said that the words and theology of hymns were an important factor in her choosing what was to be sung.

Finally there were the conversations and questions raised closer to home, here in **Dunedin with two members of Presbyterian congregations** who participated in and had a good knowledge of congregational music and singing.

Performance versus participation was an issue raised with the first person. There are many examples in secular setting of performance being the primary engagement expectation and when, for instance, someone participates by getting up and dancing, there is a disconnect for most of the people there. At other events one expects to participate, for example folk clubs. Similarly, when the expectation in a church service is participation as the community of Christ, raising our voices as one to praise God, the performance factor is unsettling for many.

Another tension raised is the fact that we now have fewer people in churches and congregations who have been brought up with only a singular experience of worship and consequently there are many understandings on the 'right' hymns, tunes, versions. Also we have a huge range of choices for music, no longer do we use just the one pew hymnal to select our hymns from. So the need to both have good instrumental leadership and flexibility of known and new is really important. Equally, flexibility in how music is used in worship eg as prayer response is helpful in creating new experiences of music connecting us with God.

Much as we can find musical dissonance in services of worship we can experience worshipful moments in unintended way. They used the example of the Lord's prayer being sung as a piece of music by a choir in a concert and being received as a spiritual offering by them as a member of the audience.

We discussed the ways in which those who are not musical sometimes have difficulty in participating such as the experience of being in a Taize service with very slow unaccompanied singing as being only for those with harmonising voices. Should we join in anyway, in much the same way as a child plays a loud percussion instrument totally out of time but with great enthusiasm?

In conversation with the second person we discussed the issue of superficiality in music – what does that mean for each of us? The tunes that pall after a few hearings and the other ones that take us deeper each time will be different for each one of us but the concept holds for many. Similarly words can, for some, miss the mark completely and, to others, be deeply meaningful.

Repetition can both deepen or drag, wordy hymns can both stimulate or overwhelm. We wrestled with but found no easy answer as to how we define quality in a way that meets all needs?

Metaphor and simile, used well, can encourage the experience of meeting God for many, they believed, as can the finding more of the passion and less of the cerebral in our music and singing. This is a direct challenge to the early church's distrust of the emotions in sacred music.

Combined singing, whether choir or congregation, makes a sound that is bigger than itself. We talked about how to encourage the individual voice or approach that can change the dynamic of group singing, recognising that it can often bring new understandings. An example would be where a new rhythm was picked up within a fairly ho-hum tune by a strong voice. Suddenly your well-known hymn becomes something new. For this person, the theological difficulties are diminished when the music is good but equally a theology that you struggle with and a simplistic tune encourage detachment. Alongside this is the comment that they needed to understand the words they are singing to be able to go to the emotional core of the music.

There are a number of the implications and learnings that are developed in my sermon at **Kilsyth Burns and Old Parish Church of Scotland** on the 11th September. Titled '*How could we sing the Lord's Song in a foreign land.*²⁸' this sermon (appendix 3) began by exploring the role that sacred music had in the lives of those who emigrated from Scotland to New Zealand. The hymns and tunes they took with them would have, in many cases, sustained them in their uncertain journey of settling in a new land and yet in time the need to express their faith in the context they now found themselves began to grow and develop. This sense of belonging, expressed in tune and lyrics, reflects I believe an essential part of our vitality and connection as a church with our community. Again we hold the tension of where we have come from alongside who we are now. If our worship is only about our past then it will not always speak effectively to the now – but if it is only of our own understanding in our context, it neglects the wisdom of generations of faith and belief throughout the world. There is also the sense of our worship 'belonging' to the culture and world view we live in and have come from which is doesn't always do. The Rev Marian Tugwood of Macclesfield commented on the sadness of attending a church in Uganda where



[The emigrants](#), 1844, London,
by William Allsworth.

²⁸ Psalm 137

she knew the words and tunes of every hymn sung. They had not explored, in music anyway, she believed, their belonging as the people of God in their context.

A further discussion with the same local ministry group I spoke to before I went on study leave expanded on this understanding of how, here in New Zealand, our faith context is shaped by our bi-cultural journey with Maori. Using the example of James K. Baxter, the group explored not only the use of Te Reo (Maori language) in worship and in our music but the whole culture of embracing a Jesus that is of the people – as portrayed in Baxter’s poem *The Maori Jesus*.

*I saw the Maori Jesus
Walking on Wellington Harbour.
He wore blue dungarees,
His beard and hair were long.
His breath smelled of mussels and paraoa.
When he smiled it looked like the dawn.....*

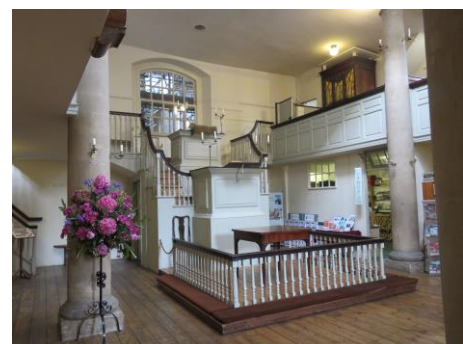
Baxter talked of the Maori Jesus as being communal, vulgar, hospitable, militant and marginalised. Is that Jesus reflected in our ‘Kiwi’ sacred music or in our worship or our theology, he would ask us today? That is a pertinent question for the mono-cultural churches of this land – all of them. How well do we embrace tangata whenua in our worship and our music?

Gathering the Threads Together

Graham Kendrick, a modern hymn writer, said: “*And as we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, and as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and as we take these truths upon our lips in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs for the sake of building one another up in the faith, we will find an ever greater response rising from our hearts bringing pleasure to God*”

I visited the first Methodist Chapel founded by John and Charles Wesley in Bristol – John wrote in his *Rules for Methodist Singers* to “*Above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim to pleasing God more than yourself or any creature.*”

How has this study leave enriched my understanding of the relationship of music to worship, of how music connects us with God and the barriers that hold us back from encountering God through music?



Wesley Chapel, Bristol

As we are a diverse people gathered as one people in Christ, so the ways in which we engage with music in worship also needs to be diverse yet towards a sole focus. We limit our experience of God so much if we believe there is only one way. I do not believe there is only one tune, one set of words, one way of playing any one hymn, and I would encourage embracing the diversity of our musical heritage as a way of new experiences of the sacred. I do not believe that only contemporary music (or one traditional hymnary) is sufficient breadth and depth or resource, that there is a much wider world awaiting us and we should explore it. I find it sad when we think only congregational singing is permissible to God, or where choral music is the predominant praise medium with a congregation looking on. I hope the unfamiliar and the diverse become a new and powerful way to encounter God as we explore all the possible arrangement of notes and tones and ourselves as we bring praise to God.

I believe that the role of music in our memorisation of words and tunes is profound. Those of us who have been part of church communities all our lives may well remember the hymns of our youth, especially as we get older. We seem to remember the words we sing so much more easily than the words we hear – they are ingrained in us in some deep way through the music. So the words we sing need to hold a degree of theological integrity and reflect our context, past and present, as these will be the memories that some younger members may hold in the future? It is not just about the words we sing, however, but how sing them. Is it with emotion and passion as well as mind, for if it is the engagement with God will be so much more meaningful and remembered? I disagree with some early theologians including John Calvin that ‘emotion diminishes the Word’ – the opposite can be true. We all have hymns or songs of our worship experience that bring an immediate sense of God’s presence – to me one of those would be the sung Lord’s Prayer as arranged by Guy Jensen.²⁹ And we are reminded that this deep link is why it is so troubling for some to be presented with even slightly different words – and it is sad that for some people this can enough to take their mind away from their ability to be part of the ‘harmony’ of praise.

It was interesting to, on the one hand, attend a service where only the scriptural psalms were sung (at Back on Lewis) and, on the other, to reflect on worship experiences here in New Zealand over the past few years where only the scripture focussing on personal salvation was reflected in the music. Neither would sustain me long term as they are only part of Scriptural truth and the concept that our music and singing should reflect the breadth of the Scripture is important to me. Hymns of justice and equality can equally predominate as can the ‘judgement and sinfulness’ style of hymn. My training for ministry in the traditional Presbyterian liturgy and my experience here at Opoho Church acknowledges an established pattern of worship that has us gathering as community, that brings us to confession, the assurance of pardon, the listening to the Word, responding to the Word in the world and the sending out. So too should our hymns reflect the full pattern of our Christian worship. There is a tendency for some

²⁹ *Alleluia Aotearoa* no. 112 Richard Gillard and John Smith, arr. Guy Jansen.

contemporary hymn writers and worship leaders to concentrate solely on our response to a gracious God (the 'I' hymns) – forgetting the need to hear God to speak to us, challenge us, gather us in – the truly great hymn writers of today, as of yesterday, will be remembered for their whole experience of the grace of God.

Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;
sun of delight succeeds the velvet of night,
warming the earth's exultation.

Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,
searing the darkness of fear and despair that could blind us,
touching our shame with love that will not lay blame,
reaching out gently to find us.

Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion;
lifeblood of right, resisting evil and slight,
offering freedom's transfusion.

Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey before us,
who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us;
in them we see the new creation to be,
spirit of love made flesh for us.

Words: Kathryn Galloway, Tune: Lobe Den Herren

Our Presbyterian tradition reflects the diversity of our living; culture, ethnicity, emotions, highs and lows, laughter and sorrow are encountered in our services and I would look for this to be reflected in our music as well. I have heard the question asked: 'Why do we sing Maori songs when there is obviously no one here of that descent?' That we sing hymns in Te Reo should for us, as bi-cultural New Zealanders, be a given. That we have an increasing number of songs and hymns that use both Maori and NZ English – 'kiwi' hymns – is good and I look forward to that increasing.

Where mountains rise to open skies,
your name, O God, is echoed far,
from island beach to kauri's reach,
in water's light, in lake and star.
Your people's heart, your people's part
be in our caring for this land,
for faith to flower, for aroha
to let each other's mana stand.

Words: Shirley Murray
Alleluia Aotearoa 155

How refreshing to hear a number of the people I talked to understand that we are part of the world community of faith and to sing African or Mexican or Samoan hymns is to celebrate that every week. At Opoho we have hymns and songs and music of different countries and enjoy remembering we are part of a global church.

The church need hymns of celebration and praise, music of contemplation and renewal, laments, challenging hymns of how we practice justice and compassion and grace, music of delight and joy, silly songs that remind us to not take ourselves too seriously, hymns that remember where we come from, and celebrate who we are now in Christ and hymns that anticipate the kingdom of God that is to come.

In all forms of church music there should be an awareness of inclusivity even if it is not always possible or perfect for everyone. In fact it never can be. The person who is appalled that some liturgy and words of hymns suggest the Christian faith is for men alone will be balanced by the person who honestly cannot see the point of difference because we all know what it means. There are many ways to exclude: whenever we give a particular gender, culture, age or social standing pre-eminence in the midst of a gathered and diverse community of faith then we are failing to acknowledge the value of all people. The one thing I would expect is that contemporary writers of hymn lyrics would be very aware of these inequities, not just to involve all but also because when we limit God to our narrow experience, we are actually shrink-wrapping our understanding of God into a small and exclusive box.

I do wonder if there are times when our church music, especially the singing in unison but in other ways too, has excluded those who may lack musicianship. I have heard too many stories of people who have silently mouthed their way through the singing of hymns for most of their lives (myself included) because they weren't sure they could sing in tune. We all have the ability to encourage and include those on the edges musically by, for instance, making sure the melody line is clearly played in less familiar tunes, by repetition, by not looking askance when the enthusiasm out-paces the skill. We have already discussed the fact that there are no 'right' words just as there is not 'right' language to sing in. When the person behind sings different words, or in their own language, or slightly out of tune surely we are celebrating the diversity of human talent and experience as we raise our voices in praise to the Lord. This is the differentiated unity and unified diversity that Stephen Guthrie speaks of.

We also know the completely stunning moment when the music, instrumental or with singing, in its absolute beauty brings a moment of deep connection with our Creator and sustains us through our hard times. In my travels I heard one consistent claim for music in worship: that there are times when, through it, we experience something far greater than the parts that make it up. Suddenly the slightly off key or warbly voices are no longer heard, the music that is not quite in time is forgotten, the awkward theology is passed over without a murmur as the individuals come together to worship the living God: in all their diversity of faith, the

congregation is unified. The grace of the moment sanctifies all the elements into one stunning transcendent moment of oneness with God and each other – the body of Christ is one. I experienced this at an Otago Synod meeting in 2016 when, during worship at the end of the gathering, the whole hall raised their voices to sing, unaccompanied, the well known version of Psalm 100, ‘All people that on earth do dwell’ to the tune ‘Old 100th’. It was a moment when a very distinctly different and sometimes divided people remembered whose they were – it was a moment of supreme oneness with each other and God. This experience does not only come from participating in congregational singing – Rev Callum McLeod talked of the impact of the Gaelic psalm singing on those listening for the first time, and I well remember the playing of a lament on the Uilleann pipes at a funeral where all the pain was held in the tune that mourned with us. And there are the moments at Opoho when the music played after the benediction holds people in their seats and in silence as each in their own way reflects on this time of worship.



Back Church - no musical instruments

How might we expand our experiences of music in worship? Opoho Church has services with contemplative singing such as Taize, we explore the use of different instruments and have times of silence or background music. We recently used some recorded piano music that is wonderful for reflective silence as it neither begins nor ends, nor does it carry us into memory of lyrics nor has it soaring or sad moments; it simply is.

The idea has been raised at Opoho church of the possibility of a service without any congregational or other singing. This arose from a comment made to a musician at Opoho Church by a man who would call himself a Christian. He did not like going to services where there was an expectation of singing – he did not like to sing. And so we discussed the service of worship where we let the instruments and their music alone speak to us of the presence of God! It might be jazz or classical or reggae or ancient lute music or even no music at all. What might that bring to our experience of worship?

In conclusion, there can be no rules for what is right or wrong in how we approach music in worship, in our faith journeys or in our lives because everything is held in context. But there is a bottom line, I believe. If we need a measure of what we should or should not sing or play in church, let it be that of being focussed on praising God and growing in faith in community. Whatever impedes that, we need to question. Whatever includes and brings us together with each other and with God is to be embraced and explored. While church music will never please or meet the expectations of all of the people all of the time, the attitude we bring, especially to that which is less pleasing, speaks of our personal theology of music. Recognising the diversity

of the gathered community, can we accept that not all will be to our personal satisfaction and that God is still in the hymn with the ‘wrong’ tune?

The early theologians were right to be concerned that church music always pointed to the Word, to Jesus, to God. For all our diverse contexts and understandings it is in the coming together as the people of Jesus Christ and our desire to live in Christ’s way that our music, instruments, voices, and choirs bring us into the presence of God. May it continue to be so.



We come full circle – learning to sing the 23rd Psalm in Gaelic at Opoho Church with Catriona Parsons, March 2017

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Appendix 1

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. We understand the analogy of harmony of music reflecting harmony of the body of Christ. Are we however being exclusive, discouraging those who sing out of tune and out of timing or simply don't sing? How might we include them?
2. Do we pursue novelty in music, somehow making it the focus of worship? If we only sing new songs and change all the time are we in danger of worshipping novelty? Equally do we hold onto unchanged music refusing all new expression of praise?
3. How much do music leaders engage with or know the purpose of singing and the theology of worship? How much do the congregation understand the purpose of music within the service?
4. Some theologians believe that music in worship is completely about congregational singing to build, teach and unite the body. Where is the place of purely instrumental music, choirs, contemplative or even no music in the worship service?
5. How well does the choice of hymns or songs reflect the breadth and depth of scripture and of human experience of life? What is missing?
6. What is important in choosing hymns re words and theology? What could be made of John Longley's comment – *“there are some hymns where the good parts are stronger than the bits that give concern. The good sanctifies the moment.”*
7. Good music goes deep inside and reverberates forever – therefore there may be grief when words are changed. What can be done to acknowledge this and yet recognise the diversity and evolving of tunes and words that has been going on for centuries?
8. How important is it for the words and music to be in sympathy and to relate to and expand on the liturgy and sermon? How might this alter how music is included in the service?
9. How does the act of engaging in sacred music shape our faith and connect us with God?

To discuss the importance of music in worship seems similar to discussing the role of breath in our lives.....The relationship between wind and breath and spirit and song is a wonderfully messy one. Leonard Enns

Study Leave Report 2016: A brief overview of the churches and the services.

Manchester Cathedral, Church of England, Manchester, England; Sunday 4 September <http://www.manchestercathedral.org/>

The current building was established in the 1200s although there is some evidence of a Saxon church in around 700 AD. The cathedral is currently undergoing refurbishment including the replacement of the organ so the service was held in a smaller space at one end. The congregation was boosted by members of another church supporting the induction of their vicar to the cathedral but looked to be about 100+. Very much a tourist attraction, the cathedral walked the tightrope of public and worship access well.

The liturgy was traditional, choral, and formal. A small but extremely effective choir of six men sang as part of the service including one acting as cantor for the psalm. The president (dean) led the service and the bishop preached. A service sheet was used with all the hymns printed and this is a relatively new innovation allowing them to bring in music outside of the hymnal especially that which reflects particular occasions such as harvest and baptism. The hymns for the service are chosen by the priest in overall charge of the music who confers with the choir director on choral pieces. Congregational singing was strong on known hymns but struggled with new ones and there seemed to be no method of introduction of unfamiliar tunes.

St Columba by the Castle, Scottish Episcopal Church, Edinburgh, Scotland; Sunday 11 September <http://www.stcolumbasbythecastle.org.uk/>

Situated in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle, this current church was founded in the 1840s by those wishing to respond to the poverty and horror conditions of the ‘Old Town’ and was a relocation of the rundown Episcopal Chapel of St Paul’s. The force behind the move, the Rev John Alexander, did leave some of the congregation to go elsewhere when he decided to establish the new church in the ‘High Church Scottish Communion Office’ style. This church, while still in the ‘high’ tradition, has a reputation for being a pioneer of liturgical renewal. The current rector, Rev David Paton-Williams, has been there for about six months.

The service was strongly musical and liturgical – and the congregation participated in almost everything. A beginning prayer was sung beautifully by an individual voice – a woman – and the minister led the plainsong chant of the psalm with the notes written in the service sheet. The sung Benedictus (from Church Hymnary 4) was particularly powerful with the congregation singing the chorus. The musical director, John Longley, had also recently come to St Columba and had a background in the evangelical movement and Eastern Orthodox – we sang one of his hymns. Five hymns (chosen by the minister in consultation with the musical director) and four readings were in addition to the sung prayer, psalm, Benedicite and Angus Dei and elements within Communion.

**St Giles Cathedral (High Kirk of Edinburgh), Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland:
Sunday 11 September 8pm <http://www.stgilescathedral.org.uk/>**

Known as the Mother Church of Presbyterianism, this church is situated in the middle of Royal Mile. The title ‘cathedral’ is a recognition of a long heritage of Christian worship in the place and it has the Chapel of the Order of the Thistle within its walls. The evening service was held in the side chapel and was a simple and traditional liturgy with well known hymns taking half an hour. The organ was out of commission and the much simpler piano was very suitable for the small number present. There was no service sheet or responsive liturgy of any kind – the service involved hymn, prayer, readings, hymn, sermon, prayer, offering, hymn and benediction.

**Parish of Braemar and Crathie, Church of Scotland, Cairngorms, Scotland; Sunday 18
September <http://braemarandcrathieparish.org.uk>**

The minister, Rev Kenneth MacKenzie, has been in the parish 12 years and also carries the title of ‘Domestic Chaplain to HM the Queen in Scotland’. For two months of the year, while the Queen is in residence, there are guest preachers for every service – this Sunday it was the Rev Calum McLeod from St Giles in Edinburgh. The visiting preachers are vetted for suitability before being invited as they stay as guests of the Queen in Balmoral.

Braemar Church

The current Braemar Church was the third iteration of a church building on the site – first built by the breakaway ‘Free Church’ in 1843 as a wooden building, it was replaced by a stone building two years later and a third church was constructed in 1870. The minister who encouraged this new Gothic style building died just before it was completed and is unusually buried in the church just behind the pulpit. The pulpit is prominent in the centre of the cross shaped church. Braemar is a hugely popular tourist venue and the visitors typically outnumber the local congregation.

Crathie Church

This church is close to Balmoral Castle and is the church that the royal family attend while in residence. Consequently anyone wishing to attend is required to go through strong police security and visitors are sat in the back half of the church, keeping the front for the local congregation, one side of the apse for the local estate of Invercauld and the other for the Royals. There are a number of busts of kings and queens within the church crossing. The Royals enter from a separate door. The service was remarkably normal apart from the odd bow and the singing of the national anthem. They have a church officer who brought in the bible.

A community choir sang at both services and the liturgy was the same for both apart for the addition of the National Anthem at Crathie. They use CH4 for all their hymn singing and print a service sheet which included the full text of the readings. Most hymns were of

measured rhythm and the only one that was a bit lively was sung by the choir (Lord, the light of your love is shining). They always have five hymns in the service and the sung doxology before the sermon. The minister noted that they are not always singing a psalm and he would like to get back to using the psalter each Sunday.

Back Church, Free Church of Scotland, Back, Lewis, Scotland; Sunday 25 September

<http://www.backfreechurch.co.uk/>

Back Free Church is situated on the east coast of the Isle of Lewis, about 10 miles north of Stornoway. It dominates the skyline and looks out to mainland Scotland. There are two services on Sunday morning, one in the church which is predominately in Gaelic and one in the hall at the same time which is in English and tends to draw the families and young people. Their membership is around 300 and the Gaelic service normally draws about 80 and the English 150. The minister, Rev Calum I McLeod, was born on the island and his previous (and first) church was in Barvas on the west coast of Lewis.

The Gaelic service was occasionally in English including small parts of the sermon and the minister led the whole service from the pulpit. The elders sat at the base of the pulpit facing it (history says to support the minister but younger elders prefer not to be separated out like this) and the precentor sits directly under the pulpit facing the congregation. The only singing was that of the psalms, where the precentor led the first line and the congregation used bibles to complete the verse. The psalms were read out first. The congregation stood for the first prayer and remained seated for the rest of the time. Readings were from the *Epistles* and *Revelation* and of course the *Psalms*. Every person had a bible with them and had them constantly open and being referred to. The offering was received as you came in and there was no offering prayer or blessing.

Burns and Old Parish Church, Church of Scotland, Kilsyth, Scotland; Sunday 2 October

<http://www.burnsold.org/>

The town of Kilsyth is north east of Glasgow and a thriving town of about 10,000. There are two Church of Scotland churches in the town, and both are well supported. This church congregation is a joining of a Free Church and Church of Scotland parishes in 1975 and they have in 2016 celebrated 200 years of the current building. A book on its history is in the Opoho Church library. There are a substantial number of other rooms, many of which are used by community groups. Hymn music was introduced in 1873 and instrumental music in 1886. The parish is currently vacant and is very active in the community and overseas. The service I attended was Harvest Festival and the church was fully decorated, especially with flowers as well as produce, and the attendance was around 150.

There was a real sense of relaxed and familiar worship in the service – people knew each other well and were gathering with anticipation. There were five hymns plus a choir anthem. All worship apart from the children's talk and the blessing were lead from the pulpit. They use the

hymn book *Mission and Praise* as well as other sources and all is on the screen. The Bible is carried in and out by the church officer.

St Peter's Catholic Cathedral, Belfast

<http://www.stpeterscathedralbelfast.com>

We did not attend a service at the cathedral but did have an engrossing conversation with the musical director, Nigel McClintock, in a chance encounter at his home town of Carrickfergus. As a Protestant (Episcopalian) he was in the unusual position of being part of the church without being a member of the church. It was noticeable how deeply the divide between Protestant and Catholic informs almost all conversation and colours perspectives – not necessarily in an aggressive way, but simply as the prevailing culture.

Opoho Church has a copy of a CD of the choir (O Vos Omnes) in the library and this is a [link](#)³⁰ to the BBC documentary made in 2010.

First Church, Armagh, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Armagh, Northern Ireland;

Sunday 9 October

<http://firstarmagh.co.uk/>

We were invited to attend this church by the owners of the hotel we were staying in. I found a vibrant congregation of all ages. This also was a Harvest Thanksgiving service with higher than normal attendance numbers. The minister, Rev Tony Davidson, leads a very engaged and active church as can be seen from the [annual report](#).³¹ All were very welcoming and I was given a CD of the service (in the Opoho Church library) as well as copies of an anthem that the choir sang. The first Presbyterian church in Armagh was established in 1673 and moved to one other site before the current church was completed in 1879. They have modernised the interior to accept technology but have, as claimed, retained the integrity of the original architecture.

This was a very relaxed service with a combination of new and older music, a sermon with multiple literary quotes and a choir that sat at the front and provided an introit and anthem. The whole service apart from the children's talk was delivered from the pulpit. The sung Aaronic blessing featured before the final hymn. The prayers of intercession were wide ranging and relevant. The *Old Testament* lesson was read before the children's talk.

South Bristol Methodist Church, Totterdown, Bristol, England; Sunday 16 October

<http://www.southbristolmc.org.uk/sbmctotterdown.htm>

Totterdown Methodist Church was originally a stand-alone parish and is now one of five preaching places within South Bristol with two full time ministers and one council. It is a strongly multicultural area and this is reflected in the attendance at Sunday worship and their engagement with the different groups. The building was in a state of disrepair and it was mentioned that it was nice to not be raining as that would mean no leaks. The entrance way was not encouraging to newcomers and, judging from the tentative welcome, visitors were not

³⁰ <http://www.stpeterscathedralbelfast.com/music/videos/>

³¹ <http://firstarmagh.co.uk/third-level/a-annual-report.html?>

that usual – the numbers were also small. However the previous Sunday they had a full church as it was Harvest Thanksgiving! The web page is not that current and it was difficult to find any history of building or congregation.

A visiting minister made it difficult to get a feel of the congregation's engagement as he was rather wooden and detached. He used some computer generated music for both listening and introducing a new hymn from the hymnbook. The choir of 6 helped with the singing and two sang a duet for the Communion hymn. Communion elements were brought up with the offering and people came forward to kneel to receive the elements – ushers made sure that enough went up in groups and then all served and blessed as one and then the next group went forward. Unfortunately the music was quite morose with very slow hymns which could otherwise have been more inspiring.

St Mary Redcliffe, Church of England, Bristol, England; Sunday 16 October
<http://www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk/>

We attended the Choral Evensong service at this inner city church in Bristol. This is a parish church although both the building and the service might have suggested Cathedral. They have four services on a Sunday and two vicars with four associate clergy who lead various worship services. They appear to be an active outward facing congregation with big banners raising the issues of climate change and modern day slavery. A café downstairs is run by a halfway house. The building itself is a Grade 1 listed heritage building with worship on the site since Saxon times. The current church was established in the 12th century and was described by Queen Elizabeth I as 'the fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in England.'

The service was very formal with full choir and both vicars participating. Most everything was sung or chanted as it has been for hundreds of years. The congregation participated in three hymns and the psalm along with prayers were sung by the choir and/or vicar. The vicar led a prayer from the prayer book that stretched his abilities with a voice that was fine with acting as precentor in some of the responses. The preacher was the assistant vicar and was one of the few in our worship experiences in the UK who practiced any form of inclusive language. When thanked for this afterwards she was intrigued that it was noticed as it was rarely commented on. She also commented on the tension of being a church that was firmly held in its history yet needed to not compare itself by that history – we are who we are now. The organ music was particularly impressive filling the building with a sense of deep and meaningful connections with God.

Park Green Church, United Reformed Church, Macclesfield, England; Sunday 23 October
<http://www.thechurchparkgreen.co.uk/>

The United Reformed Church in Britain was formed 40 years ago from English and Welsh Congregational and English Presbyterian congregations and has been added to by the Churches of Christ and the Scottish Congregationalists. Their webpage states inclusivity,

interculturalism, diversity of opinion and approach as core values of their reformed life. The church in Macclesfield has over 100 members and hosts a wide variety of community groups and activities. Despite having a Grade II listing, in the last 6 years most of the pews have been replaced by chairs and the ornate and intricate pulpit has been relocated to the back of the gallery. There has been a church presence on the site for over 800 years and a congregational presence from 1788. They retain examples of the boxed pew with full sized doors that could be rented and reserved for particular families. The minister, the Rev Dr Marion Tugwood, has been there for around 8 years and is committed to social justice, community involvement and a welcome to all people.

The service was Harvest Thanksgiving and did not have the usual choir presence due to a family bereavement. It was also the day when groups of guides, scouts, brownies, cubs and sea scouts presented their flags and participated in the service. Hymns were on the screen and in the hymnbook and unusually all were from the hymnbook. Gifts from the harvest service were going to local foodbanks and the flowers were given out to various members of the congregation. The service theme was care of creation beginning with a reading of *Genesis 1* (*Message* version) and preaching on our role in contributing to the accelerated climate change. A cuppa was offered in the back of the church which opened up into the gathering and kitchen area.

First Lutheran Church, Vancouver: Sunday 30 October,

<http://www.firstlutheranvancouver.com/>

This church is the one of the early faith communities in Vancouver. It was founded by Scandinavian fishermen in the 1890s and this is the third building, built in 1957. The current pastor or president Pr Lori-Anne Boutin-Crawford, has led the congregation since 2012. Around 100 people attended worship when we were there and there was a sense of energy and purpose in the gathering. It is best described as highly traditional liturgy with a very inclusive and diverse congregation.

Appendix 3

Sermon, Burns and Old Parish Church, Church of Scotland, Kilsyth, Scotland, Sunday 11 September, 2017

Readings: 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Psalm 137:1-6

Prayer: Gracious God, we have gathered as your people to praise, to pray, to hear your word for us and to go from here renewed in your grace and mercy, that we might be the people of Christ s you call us to be. May we open our ears to hear your word for each of us today and may our hearts be moved to renewed discipleship in Jesus name. Amen

Psalm 137, a cry from a people in exile. ‘How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?’

My study leave from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is to explore the place of music in our worship, to find the ways in which our singing and playing helps us to know God more deeply, to hear the stories of when music has opened the door to experiences of God and when it has not. This is a topic with very few boundaries and infinite possibilities, and I am still not sure what the end result will be. I have questions on the language we use in music, the way it connects with the liturgy, how to keep it fresh and yet honouring where we come from, and how it expresses our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. There was one thing though that I was particularly interested in before we set out – and that was the singing of the Psalms - and I have learned much about the love that especially the people of Scotland have for them.

So far in our travels Mike and I have worshipped at Manchester Cathedral, St Columba Episcopalian church and St Giles in Edinburgh, Church of Scotland in Braemar and Crathie and at the Free Church in Lewis – at Back (where the Gaelic Psalm singing moved me to tears) – and now here. It has been a journey that we have loved, missing our home but being welcomed as part of Christ’s body, his church in all these different places.

Perhaps if I could talk a little bit about where we come from, and the journey of faith that the early Scottish settlers took as they sailed from here to distant shores, then look at the ways in which hymn writing and singing has evolved in NZ and then share some thoughts of how music contributes to worship and to our faith journeys.

The cries of lament from the Hebrew people exiled to Babylon would, I am sure, resonated with the people of Scotland of the mid 19C – herded off their livings with often the only choice being to set sail or starve – how would they have felt I wonder? Bitter, angry at God even? Would they have found that being removed from the context of their faith shook their very foundations and left them bewildered like the people of Judah. Did they forget God, not

remember whose they were? I don't think so. I think they would have used the words of this psalm to remind themselves of God with them wherever they were. As Paul says to Timothy, as a gospel people they knew that there would be suffering and trial, uncertainties and challenges but that the power of God would hold them to purpose and that sound teaching would hold in the faith and love that is Jesus Christ. So they took their Bibles, sang their psalms, praised their God even if it was in a paddock or a sod hut far from all they knew. In 2014 we were 200 years since the first sermon was preached in NZ – on the beach to the tangata whenua, the Maori people of Aotearoa – and it was at Christmas. We have a hymn, a carol, written of it: *Not on a snowy night by star or candle light,But on a summer day within a quiet bay, the local people heard the great and glorious word.* (Willow Mackay – Te Harinui)

It was different in this new land – and it challenged our ancestors I am sure. They had to find some new ways to sing the Lord's song that not only was relevant for them but would also relate to a people who had never heard of Jesus before and had their own culture and spiritual understandings. Some of those early Christian settlers found ways to share their faith with grace and understanding and grow in their relationship with God and each other – others would have struggled to maintain their traditions without the rhythm of life they had left behind. Others would have been too inflexible, refusing to listen and learn and adapt to this very different land. Some of that inflexibility remains still. But generally, over time, there was a realisation that to worship God in a strange land was not just possible but brought new joys and understandings of God's word.

The music they brought with them was a large part of this sense of continuity – praising God with psalms and hymns. Remembering where they had come from but remembering also to be apostles and teachers and prophets in a new land. When we were in Back, I spoke with the Minister, Calum McLeod, and we talked about the threads that join us even now as a Christian people around the world, not just of faith, but of the way we engage musically as we praise our God, different though our ways might be.

And in fact it has, in NZ, taken us a long time to find that expression of our way as we have grappled with some of the different contexts in which we worship and sing. But local hymns have been emerging over the last 60-70 years that reflect our NZ story. Today, here in Kilsyth, is harvest thanksgiving – in autumn, a time of settling and preparing for winter – for us in NZ we have this around April (our autumn)– and this means around Easter of course. Easter falls for us not at the time of new birth, of spring, but in the season of thankfulness for what we have had and preparation for a time of reflection and quiet, of winter, before the hope of new birth. So we have to think about how we preach and sing our Easter when our origins have traditionally placed it seasonally at a time of regeneration. And so this hymn from Shirley Murray – one of our prolific NZ hymn writers:

*When evenings shorten and grow cool, as grapes turn purple on the vine,
as golden grain is safely stored, we see again our Easter sign
As rowans fade along the hill, and bush birds come to us for food,
in rain, or mist or bitter chill we meet again our Easter God.
As trees grow bare, we see the trace of life's new buds along the bough.
We do not need to wait for Spring; Our Easter Lord is with us now.
So let the Southern Church rejoice! As colour flames from hill and plain
we come with confidence to meet the Christ who died – yet lives again!*

Words: Shirley Smith, Tune: Gonfalon Royal

Then Christmas – the ‘depth of winter’ Victorian Christmas cards and hymns and carols just didn’t seem appropriate as our only music – we still sing them but also we sing also hymns that reflect our reality, this also from Shirley Murray: *Carol our Christmas, an upside down Christmas; snow is not falling and leaves are not bare..... Sing of the gold and the green and the sparkle, water and river and lure of the beach. Sing in the happiness of open spaces, sing a nativity summer can reach!*

And then there is finding words that have meaning for us as New Zealanders. Writing hymns that express our understanding of God, that help us to sing joyfully to the Lord in a meaningful way. Here are the words of another hymn where kauri is a tall strong ancient tree, aroha is love and mana is the worth that we hold others in. *Where mountains rise to open skies, your name, O God, is echoed far, from island beach to kauri's reach, in water's light, in lake and star. Your people's heart, your people's part be in our caring for this land, for faith to flower, for aroha to let each other's mana stand.*

Now some emerging thoughts on the part that music plays in our worship and our faith. In NZ in the Presbyterian churches we have a variety of styles of music and sad to say singing (or even reading) psalms would be occasional at best. We have choirs of differing kinds, we have music groups that lead with drums and guitars singing contemporary chorus music, we have strong congregational singing from various hymnaries, we have dance particularly from our Pacific Island churches, and we have Taize and Iona music too. All sorts. We have problems with some folk not understanding the difference between performance and praise, (a worry of the Gaelic psalm singers as their music becomes increasingly ‘popular’ in the secular world); we have differing opinions over which tune or verses or words are to be used. We sing hymns where the theology is either outdated or quite flakey, we think that if only we can get the words right and a punchy tune then we will fill the church with young folk and it is always a balancing act with our combination of old and new.

Yet, it is in the lifting of our voices in worship to God that all of these things seem to disappear – or fade at least – how many of you would have stories to tell of times when the music has just simply become the presence of God? The times when we have allowed the praise and the

joy and yes the lament to come from our hearts in our singing as we remember that we are never alone, that God is always with us, as we turn to face a new struggle and hold fast to Christ's teaching to get us through, as we know that we can and must sing the Lord's song in our new lands what ever they might look like. For you, for us, for Christians throughout the world and in all contexts let us continue to praise God with song and tune with all our hearts, for this is the good treasure with which we have been entrusted and that we carry with us wherever we go.

And to our God be all glory praise and honour – now and forever more. Amen.

Margaret Garland.