



**WORSHIP**

# MY CONGREGATION ISN'T SINGING. WHAT DO I DO?

Servant leadership means we must facilitate worship and assist others in interacting with God. Sometimes, when we feel our congregation is not singing and interacting with the music, we can get frustrated in searching for a possible answer. The truth is, we can make a number of small changes or decisions to encourage and support better congregational singing.

## ***Keep the volume of your worship team in check.***

A person in the congregation should feel they are a participant, not just an observer. They should be able to hear themselves and those around them, not just the two or three people singing into a microphone.

## ***Choose music that your congregation sings well.***

If you are only using pieces that you like, but the congregation is not engaged in worship, the song choice needs to be adjusted.

## ***Be discerning as you introduce new music.***

If you only sing the same select songs over and over again, congregations may lose interest. It is important to introduce new music at a rate that your congregation is comfortable learning.

## ***Pick appropriate keys for congregations to sing.***

Be sure to pick keys that are in a comfortable singing register for both male and female voices, as well as age range.

## ***Be sure to make the melody clear to hear.***

Limit over-embellishing the music. This distracts from the words and melody. Make it singable.

## ***Be an encourager.***

Ask yourself, am I leading the congregation into the song or just expecting them to sing it? Stop encouraging the culture of singers versus non-singers. Anyone can sing!

## ***Use long instrumental breaks with caution.***

While a well-timed instrumental solo can be effective, if it is used too often, your congregation may not be responsive and may lose interest. This may make them feel isolated from the worship time.

## ***Have the instrumentation drop out occasionally.***

Allow the congregation to hear their voices singing together. It builds unity as a worshipping community.

## ***Give the congregation the music.***

Project music onto the screen, like a lead sheet for example, or print it off and give it to them. Projecting only the words doesn't teach people how to sing. They have to guess at the melodic line and what comes next.

While these strategies may be effective, you need to be patient.  
Changing habits is a process that requires effort, time and dedication.  
You can't expect success overnight.



# HOW TO INTRODUCE A NEW SONG

Introducing new songs can be a challenging task. Understanding your congregation's needs and putting them first as a servant leader needs to be your primary concern when introducing new music. A new song doesn't just have to be a song written recently. It could be an older song that is new to you or one you haven't tried before. You need to be sure that when introducing new songs you are not confusing new music with a new *style* of music.

Scripture implores us -

**Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvellous deeds among all peoples.**

**Psalm 96 : 1-3 NIV**

The point is not to sing new songs just for the sake of it.

New songs, new worship, should be a response to the "marvellous deeds" that God is doing "among all peoples" "day after day." It is your responsibility as a worship leader to share that response with your congregation as you present new music.

**Only introduce one new song at a time to avoid overwhelming the congregation.**

**Use a new song at a time when the congregation isn't singing (during the offertory, prelude or as a choir selection) so that they can hear the song.**

**Introduce a portion of the song. Sing the chorus one week and then bring in the verses later so that there is something familiar about the song.**

**Repeat sections of the song. Repeating a verse can help the congregation learn the melody before moving on to another section.**

**Slow the tempo of the song so that people can grasp the rhythm and melodic line.**

**You may need to simplify some of the rhythms if the congregation is having trouble fitting in the lyrics.**

**Print or project the music for your congregation. Those who read music will help others to learn the song more quickly.**

**Explain to your congregation why you chose this song for them. Talk about the message of the song.**

**Surround new music with familiar pieces. People are more inclined to sing out if it is a song they know.**

**Be aware of your congregation's posture as they learn a new song. They may be more comfortable sitting while they are singing something unfamiliar.**

Once you've introduced a new song and your congregation is comfortable with it, don't forget about it. This doesn't mean you should sing it every Sunday. However, if it remains unused for months at a time, it will be like teaching a new song all over again when you revisit it.

Sometimes, a piece of music just doesn't work with your congregation for any number of reasons. Let it go. It's okay. There is a lot of music out there. You just need to find what it is your congregation needs.

# EVALUATING YOUR WORSHIP SET

There are two main areas of evaluation to be considered after leading worship.

## Your Team

How did you sound?

What went well?

Were there any obvious moments where things weren't working?

Did the elements you rehearsed go as well as expected?

Is more rehearsal needed?

Were transitions effective?

Was communication clear and followed by the entire team?

Asking these questions as a team holds everyone accountable to put forward their best effort.

## The Congregation

Were they singing?

Did they participate and engage?

Did they look lost or confused?

Can you identify specific moments where something did or didn't work for them?

Pay attention to your congregation as you lead. Make sure you have your eyes open so you can see. Be an active listener to what you hear. This will help you evaluate the congregation's reaction and engagement.

You need to develop a healthy working relationship with corps officers/pastors, other leaders and members of the congregation who can assist you in evaluating congregational worship that you have led.

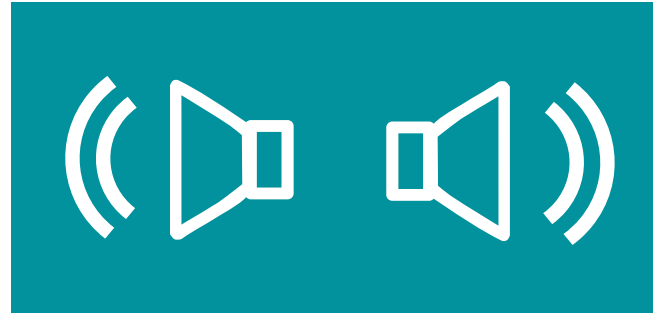
How effective was your pre-planning in ensuring success? Did you communicate with your corps officers/pastors effectively?

Be open to the feedback you are given and discern what will help you to be a better servant leader. Not all feedback is positive, but it may be something we need to hear if we have not done our best.

Hearing from others will help you to understand a different perspective and provide you with ideas on how to make improvements in your leadership. You should be constantly trying to do this for yourself, your group and the congregation.

**Giving your best is the least you can do  
as you try to steer your congregation toward  
an encounter with God through worship.**

# SPREADING OUT THE SOUND



Worship songs need to be clear and easy to follow. This doesn't mean you need to have simple arrangements. Most teams will have instruments that play in similar registers. You need to be aware of the instruments in your group and how they are contributing to the overall sound. Spreading out the sound ensures that multiple instruments are not playing the same notes regularly.

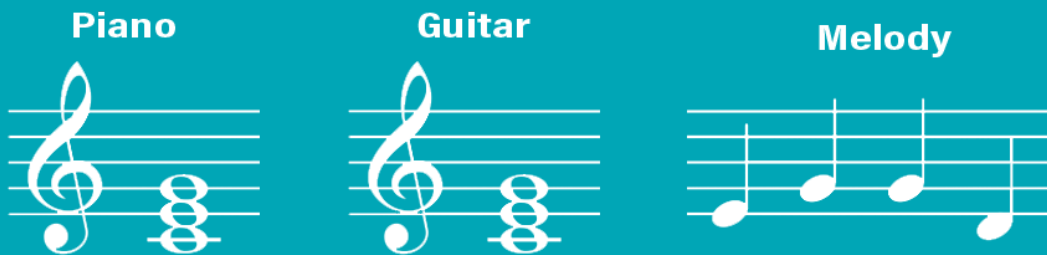
To spread out the sound of your group, you need to try to work in different registers. The register refers to the specific octave you are playing in. Doing this can accomplish two things:

- 1) Make a smaller ensemble sound fuller
- 2) Give clarity of sound to a larger group.

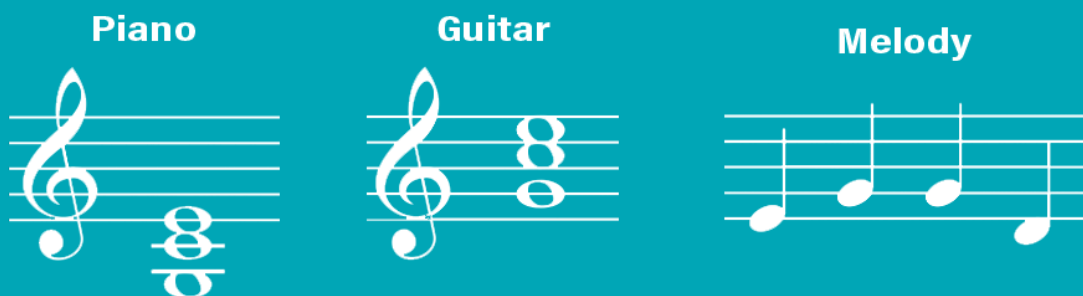
The chords used by piano and guitars, as well as the melody being sung, are usually in similar registers. This congestion can make a good arrangement sound muddy or undefined. If you can spread out the register (octave) that some of the chords are played in, or spread out the notes of a chord (playing arpeggios), there will be more definition to the sound. This clarity will help the congregation to easily identify the melody.

The more instruments you have playing the same notes, the greater the volume those notes will be. You need to be constantly aware of balancing the melody. The melody carries the lyrics which the congregation worships through. This, rather than the chords or rhythm of a song, is the most important part.

## *Chords played in the same register as the melody*



## *The same chords **spread out** and played in different registers*



*This gives the melody its own space in the music*

# MUSICAL TRANSITIONS

Musical transitions require planning and practice. A solid understanding of music theory will be helpful as you plan and navigate transitions.

Here are some tools for musical transitions:

**Selecting Keys** - If possible, either select songs that are in the same key or take the songs you've chosen and put them in the same key. Be very careful to check what this does to the melodic range. It may put a song in a register that is way too high or low for congregations to sing comfortably.

**Key Changes** - When it is not possible to put your chosen songs in the same key, there are techniques that can be used to change key without stopping between songs. Using relative keys or playing the dominant chord of a new key as a transition chord are some of the methods you can try.

**Manage Tempo Changes** - The leader and members of the rhythm section need to communicate effectively when there are changes to the tempo of songs. Changing the tempo during the last section of the initial song can help establish the tempo for the next song. A prolonged chord held by some instruments and a rhythmic drive into a new tempo can also provide a tempo change.



**Ambient Sounds** - At the end of an initial song, synthesizer or pad sounds played on a keyboard or guitar can provide space in the music and allow a new song to be established. These sounds should have less melodic features and more background presence.

**Using "Hooks" from Songs** - Elements of one song can be incorporated into another to establish a transition. This could be a melodic line, a chord progression or a rhythmic pattern. These elements are an audible cue for the congregation that the song is changing.

**Just Switch** - Sometimes, there is no musical element that can tie two songs together effectively. Even some key changes can sound awkward. When this occurs, it is okay to finish one song and start the next one.

It is important to **PLAN** and **PRACTICE** your musical transitions.

# THE OTHER STUFF THAT'S NOT MUSIC

There are other factors to consider in supporting your group as they lead the congregation. The most important is the words on screen. These need to be large enough to read and presented in a clear font. While it may be nice to add color and pictures to some of your slides, if it distracts from the lyrics, then it will distract from the singing and the opportunity to engage in worship.

Be sure the displayed slides change ahead of time so there is an awareness of what is coming next and lyrics aren't missed. People will sing more confidently if you can time this well.

Have your words/slides in the order you will sing them. Jumping back and forth between slides is sometimes required. Be sure the person operating the words on screen can see the worship leader's gestures, or hear their instructions, to indicate which set of words should come next. It is ideal if the person who is changing words on screen is a part of your team and rehearses with you. It will help make this part of the service as seamless as possible.

Personal equipment, such as amplifiers and instruments, are the responsibility of the owner to ensure they are cared for and kept in working order. There is other equipment that your group will use regularly that they should know how to care for. For example, cables, stage monitors, microphones and stands are all essential to the effectiveness of your group. Ideally, you should have a person on your team that can help you look after all of this equipment and teach the team to do the same.

Understanding how to communicate with your sound technician is vital when it comes to hearing yourself on stage. A monitor mix is designed to help your team hear themselves while playing. This can sound totally different from what the congregation is hearing. Working with your sound technician in rehearsal is the best way to deal with this, before you have the added responsibility of leading the congregation.

Using a microphone properly is important. Be aware of the type of microphones at your ministry unit and the correct way to use them.

**AUDIO/VISUAL technicians need to be a part of worship team rehearsals. They are part of the team and therefore are part of leading the congregation in worship.**