



Sing Prayer, Sing Praise! About the songs

INTRODUCTION

About this Collection of Songs

This songbook, *Sing Prayer, Sing Praise!*, was developed as part of "Worshiping into God's Future," a church-wide initiative launched by the 24th General Synod of the United Church of Christ in 2003. The songs in this collection were selected and composed by musicians and writers in the UCC. They worked and interacted with a diverse group of pastors, educators, writers, and others in the context of a consultation on worship. They listened to research results and pondered the question, "How shall we sing in changing times?" They concluded that there is a need for short, simple songs that are easy to sing and have good theology. They decided early on that these new creations would supplement what the church already has, for example, good hymnody, and not be intended to replace it. The songs were all conceived with worship uses in mind--for example, songs for gathering, songs for baptisms, songs for communion, songs for prayer.

Sing Prayer, Sing Praise! along with the companion CD is presented in response to what was discerned from the first phase of research. It represents a next step of the project as it offers songs for congregations and individuals to try out and enjoy.

How to Use This Collection

The songs in *Sing Prayer, Sing Praise!* were conceived for congregational use in the United Church of Christ. In every case, the songs were written with the hope that in each congregational setting, worshipers would find ways to adapt them, to play them with the instruments that are available, and to sing them in their own styles. Additionally, they are presented with the hope that ways of using them would be open to creativity, not just limited to the suggestions given in this book.

The style of these songs

Many of the songs in this collection could be called praise choruses; some could be called mantric chants. Many of them are well-suited to being sung over and over again. They were not written to be hymns, nor were they developed to replace hymnody. They could easily be blended into a worship service that also has traditional hymnody. They will work best if they perform a clear function, for example a song to bring us to the font, a song for gathering at the table, or a song to send us out. For the most part, they will work with a song leader or a choir leading them. For example, the choir or song leader might sing the song once, and then help the congregation in singing it over and over as a chant. Let the use of the song dictate the way in which it will be sung. A song that is being used as a prayer, for example, might be sung over and over quietly as the congregation engages in meditation and contemplation.

It is possible that on some occasions, a soloist might sing the song for the congregation, but for the most part, these songs were written for group participation. Another exception is the meditation example on the CD, the Native American flute piece, which is intended for listening. (It would provide an excellent piece for serving of Holy Communion.) Finally, it should become apparent that this collection tries to capture the vision of a church of wide diversity of styles, at the same time acknowledging that in a collection this small, every style cannot be represented.

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NOTES ABOUT THE SONGS

As the Grain Was Scattered

Words from the Didache are adapted for this offertory song written for the time at which gifts of bread and wine are brought to the table during communion. The whole congregation can join in singing.

As-salaamu Lakum

Those familiar with the music of the Taizé and Iona communities know that something special happens when we put into our mouths the tongue of another. In this case, the composer has created a blessing to sing to each other in Arabic. The greetings used by Arab Christians, Arab Muslims, and Jews are similar—Arabic and Hebrew are both Semitic languages. The one

set to music in this book, *As-salaamu lakum* is the Arab Christian greeting *peace be with you*, and was said by Jesus (Jn. 14:27). Arab Muslims say *As-salaamu alaikum*; Jews say *Shalom Aleichem* in Hebrew.

The Muslim and Jewish greetings could also be sung as shown here.

Christian:	As- sa- laa___ mu la- kum
Muslim:	As- sa- laa- mu a- lai- kum
Hebrew:	Sha-___ lom___ A- lei- chem.

Pronunciation of the Arabic texts:

The pronunciation of the *a* in *As- sa- laa-* and in *la-kum* is between *e* as in *ess* and *a* as in *ask*; the *lai* in *alaikum* is pronounced like *lay*; *mu* is pronounced *moo*, the *u* in *kum* is pronounced like the *oo* in *loom*

Pronunciation of the Hebrew text:

Shah – loh m Ah – lay – chem. (*ch* as in *Bach*).

Bread is Broken

This brief, chanted phrase can be sung over and over by all as communion is served, or in preparation for communion. It may be sung as a round and accompanied by whatever instruments are available.

Come and Fill (All My Life)

Written as a song of healing, this chanted song can be used in various places in worship. The composer notes, “Holy Breath is a unique name for the third person of the Trinity—we know God’s Holy Spirit to be both gentle and fierce.”

Quando desciendo a las aguas (As I Descend in the Waters)

Sonia Morales-Matos wrote this song with the image of the baptismal pool in her church in mind. It can be sung by the whole congregation at a time of baptism, or as baptisms are remembered and affirmed.

Enter God’s Courts

This song provides an excellent way to begin worship. The composer has combined phrases from Psalm 100 and Psalm 118 in a light jazz feeling with a smooth $\frac{3}{4}$ beat. It could be repeated several times.

Every Step of the Way

This song about justice could be used in many ways. It was included in this collection, however, because of its appropriateness as a sending song. As the community goes out into the world, they carry the prayer of Micah 6:8 in their hearts. The work of the liturgy unfolds in our life in the world.

Ferry Our Prayers

The words of Maren Tirabassi for a liturgy in time of disaster inspired Agaiotupu Pouesi to set them to music that might be used for congregational singing. The song could be combined with times of silence and spoken prayer.

God Tender and Just

These simple words and easy tune provide a response for worshipers to sing after sentences of prayer.

God's Love Endures Forever

This high energy song could be done by leader (verses) and congregation (chorus). It was composed as “a welcome to worship as well as a proclamation that in God’s realm of enduring love, all aspects of our lives are welcome—our fears, dreams, and needs.”

Holy, Holy, Holy!

The composer has offered a setting of the communion song “Holy, Holy, Holy” that “both youth and adults would find joyful, that would express commitment to justice and ecology.”

I Need You

The composer has provided the following note with the song: “This piece is not for solo use only, but for large and small congregations to sing. Feel free to experiment with the chords. It’s all right to add in 7th’s and 9th’s to the chords.” It may be repeated as many times as desired.

In Our Prayers

This simple tune with its few simple words asking God to receive our prayers could be used either before or after specific prayers. The composer recommends it be sung in “an easy and mellow style” He has also provided a Samoan translation that may be sung with the following pronunciation guide.

Vowels are *a* = *ah* as in *car*; *e*=*eh* as in *let*; *i*=*ee* as in *machine*; *o*=*oh* as in *both*; *u*=*ooh* as in *tooth*. The *au* in *Lau* is like *ow* in *now*, *lo’u* is sung as two separate vowels like *loh* - *ooh* (as if there were two eighth notes in the place of the quarter note).

Let Us Sing Praises

The composer’s notes for this jazz style song recommend it be sung with energy, light articulation, and accented words along with percussion, guitar and keyboards. It could be sung as many times as desired. The “alleluia” part is optional. This is a good song to gather or begin worship.

Pour Out Your Spirit

Christopher Grundy writes, "As the birth of our son Liam approached, I went to the psalms for birth images. I am increasingly convinced that there is a crucial, under-recognized continuity between the sacredness of birth and the sacredness of baptism." This song could be used in various ways, perhaps preceding Baptism as people gather around the font, or as water is poured.

Santo Espíritu (*Holy Spirit*)

This song composed in the popular, slow-beat, Latin American bolero style could be sung by a soloist, congregation, or both. It might be used as a call to worship, or to precede prayers, scripture, a rite, or sacrament. It can be played with instrumentation available to the congregation.

Te alabamos en todo momento (*We All Praise You Every Moment*)

Coritos are very popular praise songs of Latin America usually with short verses in upbeat tempo. Congregations sing them together, clap, play instruments of all kind, and sometimes even dance to them. *Te alabamos* has several verses, but the middle section (the refrain) resembles a corito. It could be sung in either Spanish or English, with a soloist or group singing the verses and everyone joining in the refrain. An easy way to invite congregational participation is to have them join in singing only the words "Te alabamos" or "We all praise you" (if in English). Encourage the use of varied instruments and Latin percussion. The rhythm of this piece is salsa, a very popular Latin beat played in New York City, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Columbia, and Panama. The style continues to spread to other countries.

This is My Child

These words from Jesus' baptism put the words of God on the lips of the congregation, so that as the composer puts it, "the congregation becomes the sacramental sign of God's acceptance and grace. This is as it should be. This song would work well following the baptism of a child of God, no matter what age. In the case of an infant it could be sung as the baby is held up for all to see.

Waiting for you

The composer writes "How can God not be here already? How do we sing about the change that happens when we open ourselves to God's presence.?" This song was originally included as a gathering song, but it could also serve other occasions when we open ourselves to God, such as a time of prayer.

We Lift Up Our Hearts

Part of the prayer of great thanksgiving for communion is the ancient *sursum corda* text (Lift up your hearts). This new interpretation of the moment employs fresh language and rousing music to engage the energy of the congregation as they approach communion. It could be used with equal effectiveness as a call to worship or gathering song.

When I Was Baptized

Maren Tirabassi wrote a text with the images of Maundy Thursday and Baptism intermingled. The composer chose to set this portion. The song could be used around the subject of Baptism, especially when we affirm our baptismal vows. Although the whole Samoan translation is provided, English speaking congregations might enjoy singing just one phrase in Samoan, *vai ola*, which means “living water.” Pronunciation is *vah-ee ohlah*.

Yours is the Wheat

This musical setting of a communion text by Maren Tirabassi is easy to sing and written to be in a “transcultural” style that should be accessible to many churches of many cultures. It could be used as an offertory, at the time of consecration of the elements, or simply as a communion song for all gathered to sing.

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This resource has been prepared for provisional use by the Worship and Education Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ as part of *Worshiping into God's Future: A Worship Initiative of the United Church of Christ*

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and Instrumental tracks of Sing Prayer, Sing Praise! CD

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