

## Hymn-Playing Protocol

Mike Carson

### Our Purpose as Organists

“Inspirational music is an essential part of our church meetings. The hymns (1) invite the Spirit of the Lord, (2) create a feeling of reverence, (3) unify us as members, and (4) provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord (The First Presidency, *Hymns*, 1985, p. ix).

The following are important hymn-playing principles and skills, which will enable organists to accomplish the four points stated above.

- I. “Invite the Spirit of the Lord” – DEMO: Opening Hymn, #216, “We Are Sowing”
  - A. Hymn Introduction
    1. Reflects the spirit of the hymn; should have “distinctive” sound
    2. Introduces tune, tempo, mood, style, and volume of the first verse
  - B. Match Hymns to a Topic (“When feasible, the bishop and his counselors choose meeting topics well in advance.” –*Handbook*)
    1. Reinforces the topic of the meeting; more meaningful
    2. Allows advance preparation and practice for organist and music director
  
- II. “Create a Feeling of Reverence” – DEMO: Sacrament Hymn, #184, “Upon the Cross of Calvary”
  - A. Registration – “Get enough organ on!”
    1. Flute chorus and modified flute chorus for reverent hymns
    2. Principal chorus and beyond for jubilant hymns
  - B. Extending Sacrament Hymns
    1. Play the entire hymn as the introduction (Preparation of the emblems of the sacrament begins with the first chord of the introduction.)
    2. Play an interlude between two of the verses.
    3. Quietly and slowly play the hymn following the singing.
  
- III. “Unify Us As Members” – DEMO: Intermediate Hymn, #66, “Rejoice, the Lord Is King!”
  - A. Hymn Tempos
    1. Fast enough to sing a phrase; slow enough to be devotionally powerful.
    2. Consult metronomic markings for tempo suggestions.
    3. “We depend on our [music directors] and organists to lead us at the prescribed pace. Too slow or too fast can detract from a worshipful mood” (“Worship through Music,” Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Nov. 1994).
    4. Rehearse tempos with the music director in advance, preferably NOT five minutes before the meeting begins!

- B. Hymn Interludes
    - 1. Provide a short rest for the singers, a second wind
    - 2. Provide a bridge before the last verse to spur the singers on!
    - 3. Should be related in concept to the hymn
  - C. Breathe for the Singers
    - 1. “Complete lift” (Rhythmically release all fingers and feet.)
      - 1. At end of the hymn introduction
      - 2. Between verses
      - 3. At the end of complete sentences or phrases in the text
    - 2. “Partial lift” (As the text dictates, release soprano and alto parts, while sustaining the bass and tenor parts at commas and semicolons.)
    - 3. “Carry over” (Sustain voice lines between phrases where the text dictates.)
  - D. Interpret the Text of the Hymn as You Play
    - 1. Using “breathing” techniques above
    - 2. Altering the registration to reflect differing moods in each verse
- IV. “Provide a Way for Us to Offer Praises to the Lord” – DEMO: Closing Hymn, #304, “Teach Me to Walk in the Light”
- A. Hymn Codas
    - 1. Occasionally, short codas (such as in hymn #300, “Families Can Be Together Forever”) can heighten feelings of reverence or praise.
  - B. Additional Verses
    - 1. “...do not routinely shorten a hymn by singing just the first one or two verses. Singing the verses printed below the music is encouraged” (*Hymns*, 1985, pg. 381).
  - C. Familiar Favorites vs. Lesser Known Hymns
    - 1. “Try to achieve a good balance between familiar favorites and less well-known hymns” (*Hymns*, 1985, pg. 381).
    - 2. Choosing hymns according to the topic of the meeting helps less well-known hymns have more purpose and meaning.
    - 3. “If the hymn is unfamiliar, playing it completely through as an introduction can help the congregation feel more comfortable with it” (*Hymns*, 1985).

**Special Arrangements:**

Fughetta on “Upon the Cross of Calvary” –arr. Carson, [www.CarsonHymns.com](http://www.CarsonHymns.com).

“Rejoice, the Lord Is King!” – arr. Carson, [www.WardOrganist.com](http://www.WardOrganist.com).

“Teach Me to Walk in the Light” – arr. Carson, [www.CarsonHymns.com](http://www.CarsonHymns.com).