

Why are some parts of the service sung and others aren't? How do you decide what to sing in worship?

Throughout history and across cultures, music has been recognized as a powerful vehicle for, or form of, prayer. "Those who sing pray twice," Augustine (one of the church's most influential saints) wrote in the fourth century. The psalms are the most ancient hymns, or songs, of our faith tradition, passed along over hundreds and thousands of years, the original music long lost, new tunes emerging over time, bearing witness to the most exalted, as well as the most despairing, possibilities of human experience. Even without words, even with words that ultimately fall short of expressing the encounter we wish to name, the right music can lift our spirits to articulate the deepest of truths.

Which is all by way of introducing what is ultimately quite a simple answer: congregations can sing whatever they want. Although music has always played a central part in Christian worship, as well as the worship of our Jewish brothers and sisters, you will find that there is enormous variety across denominations, across the Anglican church even, or across services offered in one congregation (note: at St. George's that our 8am service is entirely said, whereas the 10am service is liberally peppered with music) in what and how much is sung.

Consider these various possibilities:

-Some of the most famous composers of previous generations received their bread and butter salary as church musicians and were expected to set the various parts of the Mass to music (Kyrie/Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei). Many great works of music resulted from this work, stunning four part harmonies which would have been led by well-trained choirs. When I used to sing in the cathedral choir in London, Ontario, we learned a different mass setting each week.

-In some churches, usually of a more Anglo-catholic bent, not only will there be hymns and service music, but even the Scripture readings will be sung. The *modus operandi* is that as much of the worship that can be set to music, *should* be set to music.

-A current trend in church music is called 'paperless' music. It uses short, repetitive pieces of music which can be easily learned without written music and can be woven through worship as a means of prayer, to open our hearts to what we are about to hear, to accompany us in our rituals, to allow meditation, contemplation, reflection.

Here at St. George's, we have some traditions and priorities in how we choose what to sing:

-we are very blessed to have a first class Director of Music, John Butler, who not only directs our choir and leads the music in our worship, but also composes. There are parts of our worship which I've already mentioned, which are used week by week as the consistent parts of our communal prayer (Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, as well as the responses sung at the time of the Gospel reading), which John has set to music for us. He has two different versions that he has created, and we use one or the other every week.

-traditionally the psalm is led by the choir at St. George's and is done in the form of "Anglican chant," which allows the words to be sung in phrasing that is similar to spoken word, but which is set in four part harmony. The choir, each week, also offers an anthem, which reflects on the themes of the day and allows time of reflection, to be lifted in prayer through the voices of others.

-and we know that St. George's is a 'singing congregation'! We are always developing the hymns and musical opportunities in worship with an ear for how the music we choose – lots of favourites, with some new pieces to keep us fresh -- allow us all to lift our voices and pray together through the gift of music.