



# EQUIPPING FOR... **WORSHIP**

## Why Worship with the Music of Global Christianity?

Written and produced by Canadian Ministries

*“All nations will come and worship before you, O God”  
—Psalm 86:9*

Over the past two decades “global Christian music” has crept into many worship services. As early as the mid-1980s there was recognition of this in churches in Canada, perhaps as a result of people experiencing worship at the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983. At that time:

“It became clear that the Spirit is working in new ways... Today’s hymnody... is ecumenical, drawing from all members of the family of God throughout the world. It is pluralist, recognizing that in the church we are a mixed community, and that our words and musical styles need to reflect that diversity. It is biblical and rooted in the Church’s story, being faithful in the great issues of justice and peace in our world means drawing nourishment from our past. It is inclusive, imaging and nurturing the wholeness of the body of Christ” (Foreword in *Songs for a Gospel People*, Wood Lake Books, 1987).

But what do we mean by “global Christian music”? And why is it becoming part of our worship?

### How would you define global Christian music?

“Any music found in the Christian church worldwide”  
—Roberta R. King

“A stranger’s song sung in our own land”  
—Andrew Donaldson

“Melodies and rhythms and themes [from] the diversity of the worldwide church”  
—Roland DeVries

### Globalization, global music and the gospel

Roberta R. King, associate professor of communication and ethnomusicology in Fuller’s School of Intercultural Studies, taught and lived in Nairobi, Kenya for 21 years. She believes that with globalization our churches, along with other parts of our society, are being affected by, and in turn are affecting, communities in other parts of the



world. In 2012 she wrote an article titled “Global Christian Worship: Music brings us together. The Impact of Global Christian Music in Worship” in which she said,

“Global Christian music is one of the many indicators of globalization’s interactive principle of reflexivity. No longer is the global village at our doorstep, but the nations have moved in and are dwelling among us.”

In the introduction to the songbook, *With Many Voices*, Binary Editions editors Andrew Donaldson and Donald Anderson write, “Is this not a vital expression of the gospel? After all, Jesus was a Jew, fled to North Africa as a refugee and lived out his ministry in a world very much like this one: a chaotic mix of Jewish, Roman, Greek and many other peoples, faiths, cults and cultures.”

### Questions

- 1 What have been your experiences with global Christian music?
- 2 How do you feel about worship that includes global music?
- 3 How do you react to the suggestion that global Christian music is “a vital expression of the gospel”?

### Did you know?

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has worshippers from many national and racial backgrounds in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. For example there are now more than 30 Korean congregations. The many different languages and styles of worship include English, French, Korean, Nigerian, Chinese, Ghanaian, Taiwanese, Hungarian, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese.

### Global Christian music and “Living God’s Mission Today”

What are some ways that we might benefit from singing worship songs of people from other communities, other cultures, other countries; and sometimes in their languages? The Committee on Church Doctrine has provided information on this subject in its 2015 report to General Assembly, “Living God’s Mission Today,” which states:

We have to find new words and even new deeds to show faithfulness to the gospel message in our situation. To help us do this we have the history of what Christians have done in the past, captured in the New Testament and mission history, as well as the task of discerning together under the guidance of the Spirit how to be faithful in ever new situations.

The words “enculturation” and or “contextualization” of the gospel are used to describe this process. Now that the gospel has spread around the whole planet, we also work with the idea of “interculturalization” in which we learn how Christians from different cultures and experiences do things differently. As we share together how things work in our situation, we are mutually enriched and grow in our depth of insight into the meaning of the gospel for us. We learn songs from other parts of the world, we discover how other Christians have read the same Bible in different ways in their contexts and languages, and we discover how they see things we miss completely and vice versa. (*Section 2.7*)

The church’s musical worship is a gift from God that allows it to express the richness and depth of life in Christ – lament, hope, joy, service, justice, redemption, peace, reconciliation, resurrection and grace.

The church’s musical worship (lyrics, rhythms and melodies) is to be a witness. Through it we can connect to the culture around us and speak in a language and rhythm familiar to our neighbours.

The church’s musical worship provides congregations with a vehicle to be attentive to the context in which they live – this attentiveness could be expressed instrumentally, lyrically and musically.

The church’s music should seek to link with the questions, aspirations and pains that are particular to the wider cultural context.

The church as a worshipping community should share musically with the community around it – listening compassionately for themes and struggles that provide an opportunity to witness to the reign of Christ.

The church should be in touch with, and share in, the music of global Christianity – so that it can learn from and be shaped by the gospel’s enculturation in other contexts. (*Section 14*)

**Questions:** With what parts of the above report do you agree and disagree? What might be the implications for you and your congregation?

### Receiving from the global church

“Some local churches are more than aware of the ways that our worship can be enriched by the melodies and rhythms and themes of global Christianity.”

—Roland De Vries

“Worshipping God and praying in an unfamiliar language are ways of identifying with the people whose language we borrow, of seeing the world and the God who loves it through their eyes.”

—Andrew Donaldson & Donald Anderson (editors) in *With Many Voices*, binary editions

“They say you don't really know someone until you walk a mile in their shoes, but I think relationships begin when we sing one another's songs.”

—Hilary Seraph Donaldson

### How can global Christian music be introduced to a congregation?

Roland De Vries recommends the songbook of worship music *Global Songs for Worship* (Faith Alive Resources, 2010):

“In its own right, such music is a tremendous gift to any worshipping community. It is a reminder that the good news of Jesus Christ comes to expression in distinct ways across the globe – which reflects, of course, the truth of the incarnation, by which the Word becomes flesh in a particular time and place. This music also comes to us as a source of enrichment or challenge or even correction within the particular cultural manifestation of our own Christian faith. It makes us consider what we might have missed or neglected in our own life of faith in Christ and with others...there is, above all perhaps, some small reminder that the church is a wide and beautiful community of those who live in relation to the risen Jesus. Worship is not simply us in our own building, or our own city, or our own country – our voices are joined with those of others across time and space.”

<http://presbyterianrecord.ca/2015/05/11/global-songsworship2/>

### How to sing another's song

Hilary Donaldson, pastoral musician and worship leader, has prepared teaching tips to help choir directors introduce songs from other communities, in other languages, to their choir and congregation. In a free “how-to” web video accompanied by a written plan, Hilary explains and demonstrates how to teach, rehearse and use the Ndebele chorus from Zimbabwe, “Sithi Haleluya”. See *Break into Song* Episode 3 <http://www.transformingeveryguest.com/p/break-into-song.html>

The Binary Editions' book *With Many Voices* is another book that can help introduce diverse music. It is a collection of varied worship songs with texts in many languages “to help English-speaking congregations worship with many voices.” Its introduction includes 10 suggestions about how to use the songs. The editors also share this “tip”: “When introducing unfamiliar language, we try to convey a sense of what the words mean through a translation or paraphrase. This is critical to worshiper's confidence in the process of learning to sing in another language.”

### Singing the music of our neighbours

Singing the music of global Christianity is singing the music of our neighbours worldwide. We don't have to look far for a starting point to introduce such music into our worship services. The Book of Praise (1997) has hymns (some of them are old favourites like “Amazing Grace”) in 17 languages in addition to English, from communities around the world and about issues affecting them – related to mission, justice and peace. In addition, there are numerous other hymns (with English lyrics) set to music with origins in different folk traditions extending beyond the English, Scottish, and Welsh to cultures like Fijian, Africa-American, West Indian, Ghanaian and Israeli.

With a little introduction and context, these hymns can connect us to neighbours who live outside our communities and be integrated into worship, particularly when a justice theme or emergency appeal is being presented, or in a special mission service with a focus on the PCC's work in a particular community.

### Examples of hymns in the Book of Praise...with lyrics in other languages

- Chichewa (Malawi)** Njo, Njo, Njo #406
- Cree (Aboriginal, Canada)** Ka-ti-pe-yi-ci-ket ki-si-pas-ka-mi-kaahk #301
- Korean** Choo haw-naw-neem chee-oo-sheen moh-dun she-geh #332
- Mandarin** Zhè shi Tian Fu shi jiè #328
- Spanish (e.g. Guatemala)** Cuando el pobre #762
- Urdu (e.g. Pakistan, India)** Sara shrite ko malik tapaiylay #430

### Examples of hymns in the Book of Praise...with music from other traditions

- Fijian** This is the day #78
- Ghanaian** Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love #229
- West Indian** O God, our Father in heaven #789

### Sources for Contextual Information



The following sources can help worship planners gain information to provide context for a hymn from a different community and

culture. In addition, there is sometimes someone in your faith community or neighbourhood who has had, or has researched in anticipation of, an encounter with this culture and who would be happy to share their knowledge.

School teachers often go to an online resource like <http://www.countryreports.org/> to provide introductory information about a country to their students. Various United Nations' agencies and their country reports can be helpful depending on the focus and issue, for example: FAO (food and agriculture), UNICEF (children), UNPFII (Indigenous people), UNDP (poverty), UNHCR (refugees), UN Women (gender equality). Also country profiles of an organization like Amnesty International (with its focus on human rights) can be helpful.

### Sharing our neighbour's struggle through music

"On the Sunday when we announced the PWS&D emergency appeal to help flood victims in Mozambique, the congregation sang a song that is from Mozambique during worship...as we sang the words of their song and moved to the rhythm of their music, we felt more deeply their struggle and our own struggle—to live faithfully when bad things happen." —Rev. Hugh Donnelly in *Education for Mission Congregational Handbook*, PCC, 2005

The PCC website has information specific to our partners and the work of the church:

**Mission Moments** give brief descriptions (text and visuals) of the church's mission work (both through PWS&D and *Presbyterians Sharing*) in different communities across Canada and around the world. See <http://presbyterian.ca/mission-moments/>

**PWS&D** provides a map, information, and visuals about each country in which it works. See <http://presbyterian.ca/pwsd/where-we-work/>

**Presbyterians Sharing** provides information through International Mission staff and their blogs. See <http://presbyterian.ca/missionstaff/>

**Ministries supported in Canada**, see <http://presbyterian.ca/sharing/supported-ministries/>  
**Print and Visual Resources**, see <http://presbyterian.ca/sharing/>

Some of our ecumenical coalition partners have information and visuals about countries and culture on their website:

- KAIROS: Regions & Countries of Concern**  
<http://www.kairoscanada.org/countries-of-concern/>
- Canadian Foodgrains Bank: Resources**  
<http://foodgrainsbank.ca/resources/>

### Canadian Ministries wants to hear from you!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your story of a worship experience. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 ext. 271. Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/pccconnect](https://facebook.com/pccconnect).