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Music and the arts

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Editorial

Jonathan Dueck

We classmates—both Indo-diasporic Canadians and non–Indo-diasporic Canadians—sat in semicircular lines on the stage in a corner of a thoroughfare through the Fine Arts Building at the University of Alberta. The *tanpuras* (long slender buzzy lutes) established the drone, the *om*. Singing, we moved up and down the melodic world we were trying to inhabit—the raga, which includes all kinds of little melodies, patterns, and meanings that exceed a Western scale. The *tabla* (beautiful tuned drums that speak in patterns like syllables) established a pulse. And then, as we moved into the composed song, a *tala* (a rhythmic cycle, repeated and beautifully elaborated) coordinated our activities so all our explorations of melody and meaning arrived on the *sam*, the initial beat of the tala.

Singing, we moved up and down the melodic world we were trying to inhabit—the raga.

We sang the composed song, a lively *bhajan* (hymn) to Krishna, together. When the song reached its peak, I—a rank beginner but a lucky student in this North Indian ensemble class—had the chance to sing *tans* (an improvised melodic melisma, a little like the scat singing in jazz). Riding on the wave of rhythm and the ever-present drone, we played together in the melodies of this sacred song.

Our teachers, Mrs. Wasanti Paranjape and Mr. Vinod Bhardwaj, both Hindus, and my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Regula Qureshi, sat and listened to us, along with fine arts and design students and professors. A little older group, the parents of Indodiasporic students (Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians) sat and listened, shaking their heads and saying *Wa* (pronounced *vah*) together as we reached the peaks of the melodies. They were not separate from the performance. After we finished the song and the little concert, these parents came to the group, embraced their children, and talked with those of us who were not their relatives too.

"Thank you for singing."

"The bhajan was beautiful."

"Where did you learn those gamak tans?"

What was happening as we sang together? Was it appropriation or apprenticeship? Was it a community-owned performance or a university power move? Or something in between? Was it validating or stealing meaning?

All of these are possible readings of the story. But I experienced it as a moment of warm relationship and connection, of momentarily but deeply *feeling* and *sounding* together. Singing a text about Krishna prompted me, as a Christian, to imagine Jesus's playfulness, beauty, sense of duty, comradeship. It deepened my experience of Jesus. But, more profoundly, being greeted by the parents of my Indo-diasporic classmates, who expressed such pleasure at hearing us all sing music close to their hearts and religious experiences, gave me a sense of the abiding presence of the divine and the possibility of connecting across difference when we sing together.

In Mennonite contexts, we sing our theology. When we sing, we embody and instantiate our ecclesiology.

I tell this story—one intentionally chosen as musically and religiously "far from home" for at least some North American Mennonite congregations—as a way into the three strands this issue of *Vision* explores: (1) congregational music and identity (including race, racialization, culture, ethnicity, history, and gender) in the diverse North American Mennonite context; (2) theological and musical leadership and power—and its problems—in church contexts; and (3) the making of *Voices Together*, a hymnbook that tries to draw together a diversity of Mennonite voices at the present moment.

In Mennonite contexts, as contributor Adam Tice has elsewhere suggested, we sing our theology.[1] And as I and others have also argued, when we sing, we embody and instantiate—we *make*, like raising a barn—our ecclesiology. This is not to say that we always do so well, nor that our ecclesiology is sound. But it is to say that in singing—and in other corporate, rhythmically organized moments of heightened speech like common prayer, responsive readings, or spoken liturgy—we experience being the church, with all its problems and possibilities together. And so *Voices Together* has had perforce to respond to the questions of identity and diversity, power and community, that comprise the denominational directions

1 Adam M. L. Tice, "Who Do You Sing That I Am? The Life of Jesus in Twentieth Century Mennonite Hymnals: A Case Study in the Use of Hymnody for Theological Research," MA thesis, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2007.

that Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada are navigating in their respective contexts at the present moment.

The trajectory of the articles in this issue is toward becoming more aware of worship's relational qualities—to worship is to relate to the church, which is to say the people, within and beyond the building—and to expand our singing and worship in ways that invite and include the church, now, across all kinds of difference.

Melissa Florer-Bixler begins theologically with a sermon about this trajectory, thinking of worship as sacrifice, as gift economy—that is, about the quality of relationship God and we (all of us) sustain with each other. Adam Tice then frames this trajectory historically and identifies the strategy in *Voices Together*: to teach Mennonite congregations that use the hymnal how to sing together with congregations that sing in many other ways, connecting them in mutually recognizable ways and in the experience of singing the church into being together.

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Contributors next tell stories and reflect—often from their own lives and standpoints—on how our singing and speaking together can exclude and include, disempower and empower. In doing so, they urge us to attend to each other in worship. Sarah Kathleen Johnson considers worship leading in predominantly white Mennonite congregations with "traditional" patterns of worship as gendered labour, as "women's work," urging us to think more inclusively about who leads worship and what it means to do so. Sarah Nahar talks about ways music both connects and divides us in a diverse church and in Mennonite peacebuilding activity, in Black and white contexts, and across Mennonite global diversity.

Carol Penner's two poems celebrate the ways music allow us to express deep diversity in church—how music allows more than one voice to sound at once. Paul Dueck retells the story of Mennonite World Conference worship as an experience of "unity in diversity." And Beverly Lapp tells the story of three worship spaces related to North American Mennonite history, tracing the experiences of worship and senses of tradition (of plainness, of sophistication) associated with each place and identifying

the ways that worship spaces can become sites of theological contest over how Mennonites should worship together.

Contributors also invite us to sing each other's songs, with respect and with the bravery to be taken out of our comfort zones. Sarah Augustine, drawing on her conversations with Indigenous people, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people, gifts us with a reflection on texts and hymns in *Voices Together* that expand our Mennonite identity by diversifying the images and texts in our worship. Darryl Neustaedter-Barg tells some of his own story as Mennonite worship musician and pushes us—if we are interested in inclusion—to engage seriously with popular music and the many Christians for whom it comprises "home" in church. In a similar vein, Anneli Loepp Thiessen's piece offers a practical introduction to songs in *Voices Together* "outside of our comfort zone" and the ways they might include others.

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Carl Bear and Sarah Kathleen Johnson point to a number of early and medieval church songs in *Voices Together* and suggest that singing these songs connects us to our history and draws us, as Mennonites, into a historical sense of Christian unity and a critical sense of our place within (and not as an exception to) Christian tradition, with its faults and its strengths. And Katie Graber describes the consultative and collaborative way that Indigenous Mennonites and the *Voices Together* team worked to thread Indigenous singing through the new hymnal, in ways that are both meaningful to Indigenous singers and accessible to non-Indigenous singers.

To conclude the issue, I offer a sermon on identity and difference in music and suggest that the particular histories of Mennonite identities should be not abandoned but expanded—identity and ecclesiology not evaporating but becoming (now and mapped back and forward in time) more fluid and polyphonic in the ways that music allows and dramatizes.

My hope is that you find this collection of sermons, articles, poems, and stories an invitation to sing together across difference and out of our comfort zones, welcoming each other and together being the body of Christ as we do so.

About the author

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Remember the gift, remember the Giver

A sermon on Leviticus 1

Melissa Florer-Bixler

Sacrifice as gift

Gifts return. And there is something unique, something precious about a gift that comes from sacrifice, from giving that comes spontaneously, out of joy, enough to take a piece of us and give to another.

The book of Leviticus lets us trace the contours of a gift of sacrifice. This book contains the regulations for worship in the tabernacle, the place where God dwells among God's people, Israel. Part of this book includes a list of laws for how to offer gifts—for how to give things away—only this time the intended receiver is God.

In Leviticus gifts are the way people draw near to God. The Hebrew word for *sacrifice* means "to come near."

The great anthropologist Mary Douglas described this system of sacrifices as a series of metaphors. Offerings work in all sorts of way, but most of the time the effect is on people. In Leviticus gifts are the way people draw near to God. The Hebrew word for *sacrifice* means "to come near." Offerings are about proximity—to God, to neighbor, to guilt, to fear—and how people managed through ritual a profound need for connection to God.

The first ritual in Leviticus, the burnt offering, is likely the original offering of the community, with the others added on later as more needs arose, as different parts of human life required redress. We suspect that pieces of the ritual were taken from the pagan tribes with whom the Israelites interacted, traded, and went to war. And we can also see in between the lines that Israelites practiced ritual sacrifice in ways that were meant to set them apart.

One difference is that the burnt offering is just that—burned up completely. God does not eat these sacrifices. God does not need to consume

food or imbibe wine. God is complete as Creator. All that we have belongs to God. Offerings do not satiate God or appease wrath. The sacrifice of Leviticus works differently.

God cannot be bribed or threatened or convinced to love God's creation because God is love. God's being emanates love; creation simply follows in its wake. And so it is that God expresses concern and even rage when people begin to use creation to manipulate God. Most the prophets are critical of sacrifices in one way or another. Here is what we read in Psalm 51:

> *O Lord, open my lips,*
> *and my mouth will declare your praise.*
> *For you have no delight in sacrifice;*
> *if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.*
> *The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;*
> *a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

And yet, none of the prophets wishes to abandon the system of sacrificial offerings completely. Why is that?

I suspect it is because gifts to God act in a mysterious way. And we get a glimpse of that when we see God's response to burnt offering: God smells the smoke of the sacrifice and is pleased. Smelling something is pleasure and recognition—or warning and revulsion. Newborn babies, long before their eyesight develops, recognize the smell of their caretakers. An infant can pick out the particular scent of her own mother's breastmilk. We do not need aromas to survive, and many people live happy and whole lives with amnosia, the inability to smell. Scent is something else. Our olfactory sense assists our memories and our emotion.

In the Mesopotamian tribes surrounding Israel, the priests were involved in the care and feeding of their gods with elaborate feasts and incantations, all attempts to convince the Divine to have mercy, send rain, bring success in war or childbearing. For the God of Israel, there is no need to convince God. Leviticus starts out with these words: "when you give a gift." When. Not *you must* but *you may*. You can give a gift, and here is the way that will work, how to do it in a way that is good and whole, in a way that brings God joy.

In Leviticus 1, God is happy to extend the bond of care to all people. The burnt offering could be offered by anyone—men and women alike, by sojourners, even gentiles raised in the community. A burnt offering is given not to forgive sins or clear away feelings of guilt. There are offerings

that offer this psychological balm. But the purpose of the first gift in Leviticus is to be gift and nothing more. It is for the pleasure and enjoyment of God. There are no threats. Nothing is taken away if such an offering is not presented. And there is no quid pro quo. God does not give out special benefits or prizes for bringing a burnt offering to the altar.

This is a gift of response, the gift given purely for the joy of its offering, a gift that comes as gratitude and love.

This is a gift of response, the gift given purely for the joy of its offering, a gift that comes as gratitude and love. Sensing the need for all people to participate, Leviticus includes instruction for a gift of birds, what the poorest Israelites could offer. This is the burnt offering Mary and Joseph, the impoverished parents of Jesus, brought to the temple. Anyone can draw near. Anyone can bring joy to God. Each offering in Leviticus is describes as a gift, a *qarban*. God receives the same joy and pleasure from any gift, whether it is large or small.

The breadth of the gift of burnt offering—its power to encompass the poorest and the wealthiest in Israel—offers more than a relationship with God, as important as that is. The gift also creates a people, a people whose possessions are liminal, who shift their sense of ownership about their goods and even their lives.

Gifts constitute a people

There are places among us that preserve the possibility of gifts constituting a people. Decades ago, a historian recorded stories of the Northern Cheyenne powwow that took place on Lame Deer Mountain. At the powwow, possession is altered through gift. For four days people gathered outside to dance and talk and sing. Everyone received rations of frozen buffalo, peanut butter, and Cokes. Each person had food, no one with more and no one with less.

One day Mr. Red Bird, the announcer, gathered everyone for a ceremony. Here is how the historian recounted what happened in that circle:

> *A young Cheyenne, perhaps fifteen years old, named Harry Has Many Horses, was joined in the center of the circle by a married couple from the Sioux Reservation at Standing Rock, South Dakota. The couple, Red Bird explained, lost their son in action in Vietnam. They had come to the powwow hoping*

> *it would help them shake off their grief. They watched Harry Has Many Horses dance. He danced just like their son. So they asked him if he would let them adopt him, thus taking the place of their lost boy. It is an old Indian custom, for parents who are bereaved to adopt someone else who reminds them of the lost one. Harry said yes. So did his parents. The adoption took place then and there, and Red Bird announced that after the powwow Harry was going to his new parents' home at Standing Rock for a visit.*[1]

I read several stories about this adoption process within the Northern Cheyenne tribal community. Each time the act is accompanied by a giveaway. People give away their possessions to one another—furniture, clothes, a war bonnet, money, or blankets. Other gifts are returned. I read one story from a woman named Belle. After her husband died, she and her sons held a feast and a giveaway for all the people who attended the funeral. "This is the way you show your respect for the person who has died," she said of the seven tables of gifts. "It comforts you to give away."[2]

The practice of the giveaway relativizes ownership. Gifts are swapped. What you have is only yours in a limited way, before it becomes a gift to someone else. Likewise, what we lack is returning to us, a gift to another passed on to meet our need. Our ownership of anything is temporary. We simply utilize in a liminal space between transactions.

A gift economy

The giveaway and the burnt offering are absurdities in capitalist systems that depends on vast accumulation. Capitalists will look at the burnt offering and see extravagant waste. The best parts of the animal are burned to cinder. Nothing is used, nothing useful for trading or feeding or eating. "Then the priest shall turn it to smoke on the altar."

Drawing near to God, to offer God the opportunity for joy from the spontaneous and freely given sacrifice—there is no calculable economic good here. And this incalculable gift is one we continue to practice today, alongside our Jewish siblings. We gather on Sunday mornings to waste our time.

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1 Stephen Ambrose, *Personal Reflections of an Historian to America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 33–34.

2 "Gifts of Love and Gratitude: Belle Highwalking," http://montanawomenshistory.org/gifts-of-love-and-gratitude-belle-highwalking/.

You could be making money on Sunday mornings, working your job or trading your stocks. The marketplace has done everything it can, has thrown the book at attaching your meaning and purpose to your work, to your job, to your career. You are what you earn, what you create, what you produce. Each moment must be calculated for its potential for earning. You only rest if this rest will make you more productive.

What looks like waste to others is the source of riches for those who participate in the ritual of the burnt offering. It produces a different kind of economics, a givenness.

Companies recognize the power of spirituality to connect our purpose to our labor. So they are hiring corporate chaplains to provide emotional and spiritual care for their employees, deepening their reliance on the workplace. You can now employ a company to create rituals for your employees, to blur the line between church, family, and office. Corporate bosses want their employees to believe in their product, to invest their whole lives in the company. You are what you sell.

Judaism and its cousin Christianity are constantly pushing against a form of life that resolves our career, work, and earning into the meaning of life. As if anticipating our attempts to blur the lines of work and leisure, God institutes a day of rest, providing a structure for what is and is not allowed on the Sabbath. As if anticipating the attempts to smudge the lines of worship and product, God introduces a gift that serves no other purpose than to bring joy, that appears as waste to commerce and trade.

We gather in church to waste our time, to proclaim that your life is not calculable by its production value. Instead, this is what you were made for, to be freed from your life as reducible to a dollar figure, what you earn for the stockholders.

What looks like waste to others is the source of riches for those who participate in the ritual of the burnt offering. It produces a different kind of economics, a givenness—we are given to creation and for creation, all bound up in the love of a creative and creating God. And this means something different for our community, for the communal life we share. Our ownership of anything—houses and land, goods and products—is liminal. We are holding on before passing on.

Remember, Joy Harjo reminds us. Remember the burnt offering calls out. Remember all of this is gift passing between us, all of it gifts on their

way to some place else. "Remember the plants, trees, animal life who will have their tribes, families, their histories, too." Remember the gift, remember the Giver.[3]

About the author

Melissa Florer-Bixler is the pastor of Raleigh Mennonite Church, North Carolina. A graduate of Duke University and Princeton Theological Seminary, she is a member of L'Arche North Carolina and a steering committee member in broad-based organizing in her county. Melissa has written two books, *Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament* (Herald, 2019) and *How to Have an Enemy: Righteous Anger and the Work of Peace* (Herald, 2021), and her writing has appeared in *Christian Century*, *Sojourners*, *Geez*, *Anabaptist Witness*, *The Bias*, *Faith & Leadership*, and *Vision*. She and her spouse parent three children.

3 Joy Harjo, "Remember," https://poets.org/poem/remember-0/.

Sound faith

Mennonite hymnals and identity

Adam M. L. Tice

When my son was a toddler, I once heard him singing via a baby monitor. It was not a nursery rhyme or the alphabet that he sang but the eighteenth-century English hymn text "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," paired with the nineteenth-century American tune NETTLETON. This was one of our go-to sing-along songs in the car and at bedtime, and he could sing every word of all three stanzas. By internalizing this song, he joined generations of people for whom this style of poetry and music forms a core canon of congregational music.

Songs sung repeatedly over the course of years provide an enduring part of communal and individual faith formation. Songs are far more memorable than speech or prose. (It is said that no one has ever left worship humming the sermon.) They reside in a deeper part of the brain than other forms of language. Evidence and experience consistently demonstrates that even when speech is lost due to injury or dementia, song often remains. Because of this, the selection of music for worship, and the creation of a canon of congregational repertoire, is a key element in faith formation. Our shared song shapes not only our theology but also our perception of the church. Is what we sing a reflection of our congregations, of our faith tradition, and of our denomination? What cultures are reflected in and cultivated by our canon?

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For those who use hymnals, the congregational canon may seem obvious. The hymnal itself is one form of canon. However, a hymnal typically contains much more material than any given congregation will use. Repetition, cultural affinity, associations with particular events or people, and theological resonance are all factors in what becomes part of a canon. Certain songs may seem essential to one congregation, region, or conference, while being relatively unknown in another. Because of its size, a hymnal's

canon has the capacity to represent far more than any one congregation within its binding. In doing so, it can reflect a broader church and provide ways for disparate parts of that church to learn about one another. In my master's thesis for Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary—titled "Who Do You Sing that I Am?"—I examined how Mennonite hymnals presented the life and person of Jesus. In this article I attempt to describe how the contents of Mennonite hymnals have changed to reflect our evolving denominations. We might ask, "Who do we sing that we are?" The question here is not so much about the textual content of the material—although that would be a fascinating question to explore as well. Instead, I look at what source material has shaped our hymnals.

Mennonite hymnals have drawn on several different streams of congregational song to create canons. The history of these hymnals may be described in terms of streams joining and integrating a greater variety of song over time. The succession of hymnals has reflected an expanding vision of the church they served—and for each hymnal, decisions were made, for better or worse, about what types of music were suitable for worship. In this brief tour through a century of the English language hymnals of the denominations that formed Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, I examine how those genres have shifted over time in these canons. A sampling of few writers and composers traced across those canons provide a snapshot of those changes.

Early twentieth century

The "Old" Mennonite Church produced *Church Hymnal* in 1927. It is primarily shaped by English language singing traditions, with a heavy reliance on the works of Isaac Watts (50 texts) and Charles Wesley (33 texts). Its committee "made its selection of hymns with a view to the Scriptural teaching rather than to the spiritual emotions expressed in the hymn. . . . It was the impression of the Committee that it was more advisable to encourage the use of the earlier type of Church music, with its richness of devotion and reverence to the holiness and majesty of our God and Savior, than to cultivate the desire for the lighter and more emotional song form of the modern age."[1] Despite that stated concern, a decree from the Mennonite Mission Board in 1925 obligated the editors to include a substantial number of "songs with refrains," meaning (white) Gospel songs. Mennonite hymnologist Mary Oyer lamented that decision, writing, "I

1 *Church Hymnal* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1927), v.

have always attributed the 'grayness' of the *Church Hymnal* to that rather high-handed act in 1925."[2] One writer associated with this style of music is Fanny Crosby; eleven of her texts are included. A few items by Mennonite writers and composers also appear.

Mennonite Hymnary, published in 1940 for General Conference Mennonites, is explicit in naming the streams from which it draws. The editors describe the bulk of the book as "standard hymns, selected from ancient and modern sources."[3] Those make up the first four hundred and two items. Next are "Hymns for Children." Those are followed by "Gospel Songs," which prompted a paragraph of explanation from the editors. They describe the controversy surrounding this genre in terms that sound remarkably similar to criticisms of contemporary worship music in recent years: "Some think the words of the Gospel songs are too self-centered and individualistic in their thought; the tunes, with their snappy choruses, too sentimental and undignified to have a place in church worship." The editors defend their inclusion, although they conclude with the hope that "no congregation will confine its singing to the Gospel songs to the neglect of" the other genres.[4] Ten Fanny Crosby selections appear. Gospel songs are followed by "The Church Year in Chorales," of which the editors state, "In all of our hymnody there is nothing finer than these [German] Chorales. They are noble, dignified and powerful."[5] Metrical Psalms and a section of "Responses, Chants, Doxologies, and Amens" complete the musical portions of the hymnal.

The editors describe the controversy surrounding "Gospel Songs" in terms that sound remarkably similar to criticisms of contemporary worship music in recent years.

The elevation of German material in *Mennonite Hymnary* stands in contrast to *Church Hymnal*, for which the "Music Committee's Notes" references its reliance on English language sources, stating, "German language, the language of our forefathers, is rich in hymns and tunes of the highest spiritual value but it was found that generally translations from

2 Mary Oyer, *Exploring the Mennonite Hymnal: Essays* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1980), 67.

3 *Mennonite Hymnary* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1940), v.

4 *Mennonite Hymnary*, vi.

5 *Mennonite Hymnary*, v.

German have proved unsatisfactory in form and expression of thought."[6] Compared to *Church Hymnal*'s eighty-three Watts and Wesley texts, *Mennonite Hymnary* included twenty by Watts and twenty-four by Wesley; the *Hymnary*, however, features twenty-five translations of German texts by nineteenth-century writer Catherine Winkworth, while none of her work appears in *Church Hymnal.* In *Mennonite Hymnary*, few Mennonites are named among the authors and composers.

Late twentieth century

The Mennonite Hymnal of 1969 was a joint effort of "Old" and General Conference Mennonites. This merging of streams is reflected in the materials selected. There are thirty texts by Winkworth, twenty-eight by Wesley, and thirty-seven by Watts. Among the Gospel song repertoire are twelve pieces by Crosby. In the introduction, Mary Oyer describes the blend in this way:

> *Mennonites who have remained close to their German background still sing Lutheran chorales; chorale texts and tunes are well represented. Those who spoke English in the early nineteenth century absorbed the American tradition of Watts' texts—along with authors such as Wesley and Newton—and replaced their Germanic past with American tunes and folk hymns from the singing-school tradition. These strands—German and American—join in this book to enrich the resources of each. The Mennonites' use of the more recent Gospel Songs is perpetuated in this book with a collection in a separate section.*[7]

To these resources, the hymnal adds three translations from the earliest Anabaptist hymnal, *The Ausbund*, as well as a few tunes by Mennonite composers. Significantly, there are six "non-Western" hymns, which Oyer describes as a token of "the committees' interest in being a part of the worldwide church."[8]

Hymnal: A Worship Book was published in 1992, continuing the partnership of General Conference and "Old" Mennonites and adding the Church of the Brethren. "Gospel" music from white singing traditions

6 *Church Hymnal*, v.

7 Mary Oyer, "Introduction," in *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1969).

8 Oyer, "Introduction."

was no longer separated into its own section of the hymnal. Five examples of Black Gospel music are included, along with fifteen Spirituals. Music from around the world appears throughout, including nine from Spanish language sources. In the introduction, managing editor Rebecca Slough writes, "Our singing has been shaped by hymns created throughout the centuries of Christian history, and expanded by hymns set in contemporary idioms. The presence of African-American, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, and African hymns deepens our sense of unity in Christ through the Spirit."[9]

The cultural and ethnic makeup of the Mennonite denominations in North America was changing, and that evolution influenced the hymnal.

The cultural and ethnic makeup of the Mennonite denominations in North America was changing, and that evolution influenced the hymnal. In addition, there had been significant expansion within white, Euro-American singing traditions that shaped the hymnal's contents. In the two decades following the publication of *The Mennonite Hymnal*, the English-speaking world experienced a renaissance of hymn writing now commonly described as a "hymn explosion." The hymn explosion ignited in England but quickly spreading to the United States and Canada, as writers used common hymn meters so that their texts could be sung with familiar tunes. Composers writing in modern styles influenced by both folk and art song also emerged to provide new tunes. Several prominent writers represented by multiple texts in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* include Carl Daw (8), Ruth Duck (3), Fred Pratt Green (9), Christopher Idle (5), Fred Kaan (3), Thomas Troeger (6), and Brian Wren (14).[10] Mennonite Brethren poet Jean Janzen also created eight texts for the collection. Roughly ninety-four items in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* have Anabaptist origins for text, tune, or both.

Over the same period, Catholic churches were experimenting with new forms of vernacular song following the reforms of Vatican II. While the hymnal only includes a few examples of Protestant "praise and worship music" (as it was termed at the time), it presents a number of Cath-

9 Rebecca Slough, "Introduction," in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1992), iii.

10 While that total of forty-eight songs is substantial, historical material is still prominent; Watts, Wesley, and Winkworth combine for a total of sixty texts in the hymnal, and Crosby has eight among the book's Gospel song selections.

olic folk selections by composers like Marty Haugen (6 items), who is not Catholic himself but is closely associated with the genre.

The ecumenical Taizé community in France is the source for fourteen short refrains, which provide a repetitive, meditative way of singing. That function marks a substantial evolution from 1927, when the editors of *Church Hymnal* viewed the expression of "spiritual emotion" with suspicion.

Twenty-first-century

In the first decade of this century, *Sing the Journey* (2005) and *Sing the Story* (2007) further expanded the repertoire available to hymnal-using Mennonites. Of particular note is music by John Bell and the Iona Community in Scotland as well as compositions by Mennonite James Clemens. The books include more examples of Catholic folk and add other under-represented genres like jazz. A few more "praise and worship" pieces appear as well.

Clearly, the musical and linguistic palate available to hymnal using Mennonites grew substantially from 1927 to 2007. And yet, many Mennonites do not use the denominational hymnal as a main source for worship songs. Congregations that worship primarily in languages other than English are likely to draw on other sources, as do congregations that worship using "contemporary worship music" (now the preferred term for what has historically been called "praise and worship").

The committee that assembled *Voices Together* (2020) for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA (on which I served) had to consider both who it would *resource* (that is, what churches would be likely to purchase and use the collection) and who it would *represent*. We sought ways to engage material important to communities who would not be likely to use the hymnal. Our hope was to help hymnal-using Mennonites to learn to sing with non-hymnal using Mennonites. The distinctions among congregations are not clear-cut; many (perhaps most) Mennonite congregations in the United States and Canada were already engaging in music from outside of denominational printed resources. Contemporary worship music is a substantial part of many congregational canons. This led us to include approximately seventy songs in *Voices Together* that can be grouped under the contemporary worship music umbrella.[11]

11 The number is approximate because of blurriness of definitions and intersections between genres.

Additional shifts in the *Voices Together* canon were similarly oriented toward listening to the concerns of communities being represented. Historically there has been some disconnect between what Mennonite hymnals adopt from non-dominant communities and what those communities sing themselves. For example, while the African-American spirituals found in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* are historically important, they are only a small portion of the music sung in African-American congregations. We sought to learn what songs these communities considered essential rather than only seeking out what hymnal users might enjoy or find easiest to adopt. In conversation with African American consultants, we increased the proportion of contemporary material in *Voices Together*. Thirty-one pieces are indexed as representing "Heritage: African American," of which approximately half are Spirituals. Similar shifts occurred in relation to music from several other communities, including those that primarily use Spanish in worship. There was a major increase in the number of songs featuring the Spanish language, from eight in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* to forty-nine in *Voices Together*. Some fifty languages other than English appear in the hymnal among the songs and worship resources.

Shifts in the *Voices Together* canon were oriented toward listening to the concerns of communities being represented.

Voices Together also deepens the historical roots of our sung repertoire. There is more material adapted from early Anabaptist sources and an intentional spanning of the breadth of Christian history. Texts by Watts, Wesley, and Winkworth remain important, totaling twenty-eight texts. The (white) Gospel tradition remains strong, although it makes up a smaller proportion of the collection; Crosby is represented by five selections. The "hymn explosion" writers listed above have a combined total of fifty-four texts in *Voices Together*. More recent writers like Mary Louise Bringle (16 texts) continue to expand that style of repertoire. Marty Haugen has fourteen texts, and John Bell eighteen. The Taizé community is the source for fifteen songs. Among Anabaptist contributors mentioned in previous collections, Janzen authored five texts, and Clemens composed twenty-one tunes. In total, one hundred and eighty-three of the musical selections in *Voices Together* have elements of text or tune contributed by an Anabaptist—nearly double the number in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

For the first time in this lineage of hymnals, the composer of the most tunes (Clemens) and the author of the most texts (myself, 23) are both Mennonites. It is noteworthy that both of us have become well established in recent years in ecumenical hymnody, with multiple selections appearing in several hymnals of other denominations prior to *Voices Together*. Our work was anonymized before being reviewed by the *Voices Together* committee; presumably, the Mennonite "accent" of our submissions resonated even without revealing the identities of the creators.

This brief overview of several hymnals does not consider the spoken resources that most of the hymnals provide. These sections also reveal an increasing diversity of sources and a growing influence of Anabaptist writers. A new kind of resource is also present in *Voices Together*: for the first time, visual art is included in the midst of the songs. Twelve selections in a variety of media expand our perception of what kind of art may be part of Mennonite worship. Significantly, all twelve pieces are by Mennonite artists.

In any attempt to represent a diverse church, there will be successes and failures. The core of English and German hymnody of the earlier hymnals still provides the musical foundation for *Voices Together*, reflecting two of the major streams that have contributed to our denomination's history in North America. While various additions and expansions have provided a broader picture, it is still incomplete. There are unfortunate gaps in our repertoire. For example, although the Mennonite church in Ethiopia, Meserete Kristos, is one of the largest Mennonite bodies in the world, *Voices Together* does not have any songs in Ethiopian languages or musical idioms. There are also emerging forms of congregational song that reflect rap and hip-hop styles, which are not represented. It is inevitable that the next group to create a worship resource for Mennonites will identify additional gaps and find new forms of song to fill them.

It remains to be seen how *Voices Together* will shape the faith of the church it attempts to represent. It takes its place among generations of hymnals that have each reflected and shaped worship.

It remains to be seen how *Voices Together* will shape the faith of the church it attempts to represent. It takes its place among generations of hymnals that have each reflected and shaped worship. Every hymnal

builds on what came before, setting aside some things to make room for new material. Each new book has provided the opportunity to understand anew what the church is and who it includes.

About the author

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The problem of Mennonite worship leadership becoming "women's work"

Sarah Kathleen Johnson

As a theologian and pastor, I celebrate the opportunities women have today to give leadership in the church, and especially in corporate worship, that were not available to previous generations and that in many settings remain limited.[1] However, it is necessary to look beyond the mere presence of women in leadership and consider the forms of leadership that women provide and the ways in which this leadership is valued by the church community. In this essay, I explore the possibility that worship leadership in some Mennonite congregations has become a form of "women's work" in ways that are problematic.

"Worship leadership," in the context of this discussion, refers to the role of designing and leading portions of corporate worship other than music and preaching. Depending on the congregation, this may include welcoming worshipers and facilitating announcements, offering prayers and readings, providing verbal introductions to songs, praying a congregational prayer, leading a time focused on children, and inviting participation in ritual actions, among other possibilities. In many settings, even if the worship leader does not give public leadership to these elements, they are responsible for coordinating the involvement of others. The worship leader is typically not the preacher or the song leader and is often a volunteer. This use of the term "worship leader" is specific to predominantly white Mennonite congregations that employ patterns of worship sometimes called "traditional," meaning they consist of a series of juxtaposed elements, usually centered on a sermon and drawing on mu-

Worship leadership in some Mennonite congregations has become a form of "women's work" in ways that are problematic.

1 "Women" in this context refers to individuals who name and perform their gender identity in this way. The focus on "women" and "men" is not intended to limit gender to binary categories.

sic from a hymnal. In the context of an hour-long "traditional" worship service, approximately twenty minutes may be dedicated to preaching, twenty minutes to singing, and twenty minutes to other acts of worship facilitated by the worship leader. There are many other ways that the term "worship leader" is used, including in reference to all leaders involved in all aspects of worship, which is how it is employed in the *Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition*, and in reference to the primary musician shaping the sung portion of a "contemporary" worship service—these uses are outside the scope of this analysis.[2]

Below I draw on my experience as the worship resources editor for *Voices Together*—a hymnal and worship book intended for use in Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA that was published in 2020[3]—for which I spent four years intentionally listening and learning about Mennonite worship practices through visiting congregations, facilitating focus groups, testing material at events, and coordinating dozens of other leaders involved in this project.[4] I begin by situating a discussion of women in worship leadership within broader conversations about gender and *Voices Together*. I then outline the sociological category of "women's work" and explore how these dynamics may be present in Mennonite worship leadership.

Gender and *Voices Together*

In this discussion, I assume that gender is socially constructed through discourse, especially through repeated rituals that cite social norms and that can either reinforce or subvert these norms.[5] Within this framework, worship is a significant site for the performance and construction of gender in Mennonite communities. Who leads worship, how worship is led, and the content of worship all have implications for the ways gender is understood and embodied.

Gender was a significant category of analysis in the process of creating *Voices Together*. The Mennonite Worship and Song Committee initially

2 Sarah Kathleen Johnson, ed., *Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

3 *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

4 I am grateful for initial feedback I received on this paper at the Women Doing Theology Conference held at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, in November 2018.

5 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

called to this work consisted of six men and six women.[6] In discussions surrounding the just and faithful use of language, the committee considered how to represent the gender of humans and God. We employed an expansive case-by-case approach aimed at balance across the collection, which resulted in the introduction of stronger feminine language for God.[7] We also attended to the gender of text writers and composers and made a significant effort to include more songs by women from across time and in a diversity of musical idioms. This resulted in 27.2 percent of sung texts and 18.4 percent of tunes in *Voices Together* being written by women, almost double the number than the previous collection, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.[8] In terms of how language and imagery is used in songs and the sources of songs, the focus was *increasing* the representation of women. To put this in theological and theoretical terms, these actions were directed toward constructing an understanding of women as created in the image of God and as creators of the song of the church.

The story of spoken worship resources is different: women are overrepresented rather than underrepresented. As in previous hymnals, *Voices Together* includes words for worship alongside songs.[9] Although spoken

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6 The Mennonite Worship and Song Committee consisted of Adam M. L. Tice (text editor), Benjamin Bergy (music editor), Sarah Kathleen Johnson (worship resources editor), Darryl Neustaedter Barg, Paul Dueck, Mike Erb, Katie Graber, Emily Grimes, Tom Harder, SaeJin Lee, Anneli Loepp Thiessen, Cynthia Neufeld Smith, and Allan Rudy-Froese (as a later addition). Bradley Kauffman was the general editor and project director. For more on the process of creating *Voices Together*, see Bradley Kauffman, "A Hard, Holy Work: The Making of 'Voices Together,'" *Anabaptist World*, 29 June 2020, https://anabaptistworld.org/hard-holy-work-making-voices-together/.

7 For more on language in *Voices Together*, see Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Adam M. L. Tice, "Our Journey with Just and Faithful Language: The Story of a Twenty-First Century Mennonite Hymnal," *The Hymn* 73, no.2 (Spring 2022); and the online resource and discussion guide "Expansive Language in Voices Together: Gendered Images of God" (Harrisonburg: MennoMedia, 2020), http://voicestogetherhymnal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Expansive-Language-in-VT-2.pdf.

8 Anneli Loepp Thiessen, "Noon Hour Concert: Still Singing—Women Composers in the 'Voices Together' Hymnal," Conrad Grebel University College, 27 January 2021, https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/noon-hour-concert-still-singing-women-composers-and-voices.

9 Ten percent of pages and 310 of the 1,069 items in *Voices Together* are non-musical worship resources, including spoken words, diagrams depicting American Sign Language, and works of visual art. *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969); *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992); *Sing the Journey* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2005); *Sing the Story* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2007).

material approaches imagery and language in similar ways to songs, in contrast to songs, women are *overrepresented* as authors of spoken resources attributed to individuals.[10] In *Hymnal: A Worship Book,* 65 percent of resources associated with a single author are written by women, which is 24 percent of the total number of spoken resources in the collection, compared to the 13 percent written by men. We recognized this tendency, and in *Voices Together*, 53 percent of resources associated with a single author are written by women, which is 20 percent of the spoken resources, compared to the 18 percent written by men. However, 34 percent of the words for worship attributed to men are historical resources attributed to figures such as Augustine of Hippo or Menno Simons, compared to only 8 percent of resources attributed to historical women. Therefore, women's voices are especially dominant in contemporary words for worship. This is indicative of broader patterns in Mennonite worship leadership.

Gender and Mennonite worship leadership

It was clear throughout the process of developing *Voices Together* that it is primarily women who are involved in Mennonite worship leadership in the narrow sense outlined above. While this rings true anecdotally at the congregational level, the process of creating centralized resources revealed the pervasiveness of this pattern. The vast majority of the authors who submitted spoken resources for consideration were women (81 percent). When forming worship resources screening teams in four regions to select resources for possible inclusion from published collections and submissions, we were not able to identify a male screening team leader and had to deliberately encourage each team to include at least one male member. When bringing together a group to develop resources for central practices, such as baptism, communion, and child blessing, it was women who had primary specialization in worship, and men who were poets, pastors, and preachers, which reflects that it is principally Mennonite women who have studied worship at the doctoral level.[11] When we sought to identify writers to commission for specific resources, almost all potential candidates were women. Similar patterns have played out in the reception of the hymnal. Of the thirty-four students who registered for the short course Worship Leader's Introduction to *Voices Together* at

10 Many of the spoken worship resources included in these collections are drawn from Scripture, are attributed to organizations such as denominations, or are anonymous.

11 The central practices group consisted of Irma Fast Dueck, Heidi Miller, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Isaac Villegas, Adam M. L. Tice, and Allan Rudy-Froese.

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2020, only two were men. In contrast, thirteen men were among the thirty-six students who registered for the short course Song Leader's Introduction to *Voices Together*.

It is difficult to know why it is primarily women who are involved in Mennonite worship leadership. One possibility is that this is an aspect of church life where there has been space for women to have a public voice. Only 30 percent of active pastors in Mennonite Church USA are women, for example, which suggests that the majority of sermons continue to be preached by men.[12] The dominance of women's voices in worship leadership is something to celebrate. It significantly increases gender diversity in public leadership. It gives women a strong hand in shaping the theology of the church at the local and denominational levels. It is empowering, especially for those who find worship leadership joyful and life-giving work. It is still work, however, and concerningly, it seems to have become "women's work."

When bringing together a group to develop resources for central practices, such as baptism, communion, and child blessing, it was women who had primary specialization in worship.

"Women's work"

In the sociological literature, "women's work" is a term that is employed to describe the gendered division of labor, especially in relation to "pink collar jobs"—professions dominated by women, such as nursing, teaching, secretarial work, childcare, and household labor, and that are often oriented toward coordination, hospitality, and caregiving.[13] Female-dominated professions tend to be associated with low status, poor pay, narrow job content, and poor prospects for promotion,[14] and are part of what drives an ongoing gender pay gap.[15] Which professions are considered

12 Mennonite Church USA, 2021.

13 Louise Kapp Howe, *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women's Work* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

14 Catherine Truss, Kerstin Alfes, Amanda Shantz, and Amanda Rosewarne, "Still in the Ghetto? Experiences of Secretarial Work in the 21st Century," *Gender, Work, and Organization* 20, no. 4 (2013): 349–61.

15 Amanda Barroso and Anna Brown, "Gender Pay Gap in U.S. Held Steady in 2020," Pew Research Center, 25 May 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts/; Anna Louie Sussman, "'Women's Work' Can

women's work is not stable but shifts over time with the "feminization" of different segments of the workforce. Certain professions can become women's work through increasing involvement of women in an industry, leading to changing perceptions of these positions: "the influx of women into certain professions has coincided with a perceived decline in salaries and status."[16] At the same time, which jobs are considered women's work is less about the demographics of a profession in a certain setting and more about the cultural value of different forms of work.[17] Two further characteristics of women's work relevant to this discussion are that it is often "concealed labor," in that the process or product of work is invisible,[18] and "emotional labor," in that it involves the management of feelings in a public facing role.[19]

Worship leadership as "women's work"

Worship leadership in Mennonite communities shares many of the characteristics of women's work. It has some traits in common with other female-dominated professions, including an emphasis on coordination, hospitality, and caregiving. For example, in many congregations, the worship leader coordinates numerous other people contributing to the service, serves as a host during the worship gathering, and cares for participants as well as others involved in leadership. Emotional and concealed labor characterize this low status work in which there is little opportunity for advancement.

The *emotional labor* of worship leadership consists of inducing or suppressing one's own emotions to tend to the emotional needs of the community and respond to events that occur during worship. One of the ways this is often described is that worship leaders need to "get out of the way" or be "transparent" so that others can enter into worship: "the less one sees or notices the leader and the more one sees or notices God, the better

No Longer Be Taken for Granted," *New York Times*, 13 November 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/opinion/sunday/women-pay-gender-gap.html.

16 Brooke Erin Duffy and Becca Schwartz, "Digital 'Women's Work?': Job Recruitment Ads and the Feminization of Social Media Employment," *New Media and Society*, 20, no. 8 (2018): 2975.

17 Duffy and Schwartz, "Digital 'Women's Work?'," 2976.

18 Duffy and Schwartz, "Digital 'Women's Work?,'" 2974.

19 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

the congregation is served."[20] This dynamic points not only to emotional labor but also to one of the ways in which the work of worship leaders can become invisible.

Much of the work of worship leadership can be considered *concealed labor*. Drawing on the example of the philosopher Husserl turning to his writing table to do the work of philosophy, Sara Ahmed describes this dynamic:

> *Being oriented toward the writing table not only relegates other rooms in the house to the background, but also might depend on the work done to keep the desk clear. The desk that is clear is one that is ready for writing. One might even consider the domestic work that must have taken place for Husserl to turn to the writing table, and to be writing on the table, and to keep that table as the object of his attention. We can draw here on the long history of feminist scholarship about the politics of housework: about the ways in which women, as wives and servants, do the work required to keep such spaces available for men and the work they do.*[21]

The worship leader does the concealed labor, the organizing, hosting, and perhaps even preparing the physical space, that is necessary "to keep the desk clear," to clear the space for the community to do the work of worship, or even "to keep the pulpit clear"—which is more likely to be occupied by a man. The work of worship leader at its best involves as much theological preparation, knowledge of the community, and communication skill as the work of the preacher, in addition to other more varied and complex activities; however, this work is often unacknowledged. When worship leaders are affirmed, it is usually in reference to the public elements of leadership, not the tremendous amount of thoughtful work behind the scenes.

Worship leading is *low status* work, especially compared to preaching and song leading. In Mennonite settings, worship is often thought of primarily in terms of singing and preaching, with little attention given to a multitude of other elements or the delicate work of weaving together

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20 June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough, *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 222.

21 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 30–31.

corporate praise and prayer. As someone who both preaches and leads worship regularly, I receive more substantial engagement and affirmation in response to mediocre sermons than to strong worship leadership. In the sociological literature, the lower status of women's work is evident in lower pay. While Mennonite congregations often compensate pastors, guest preachers, and occasionally musicians, worship leaders rarely receive any financial renumeration. For example, I am often offered an honorarium as a guest preacher but not a guest worship leader, even when I dedicate as much time to shaping the service in collaboration with other leaders as to preparing the sermon. This is also visible in how the creators of material used in worship are compensated, with centralized systems in place to compensate songwriters (CCLI and One License), the majority of whom are men, without analogous systems for the authors of spoken resources.

While Mennonite congregations often compensate pastors, guest preachers, and occasionally musicians, worship leaders rarely receive any financial renumeration.

Finally, there is *little opportunity for growth or advancement* for worship leaders. One way this is manifest is in an absence of resources and training. This is a difficult reality for me to name as someone who is grateful to be involved in developing substantial resources in recent years.[22] However, music, not worship resources, was the driving force behind *Voices Together*. Together in Worship, an online collection of free resources form Anabaptist sources, was a grassroots development.[23] The Anabaptist Worship Network is primarily a volunteer endeavor. There are no denominational staff in the United States or Canada focused on supporting worship. Worship is not central subject matter in our theological schools. The level of training that we expect of our preachers in theology or of our song leaders in music greatly exceeds that of those who lead worship. The difficult work of worship leadership is primarily undertaken by generous and dedicated yet largely untrained and unsupported volunteers. As with other women's

22 A Mennonite Church Eastern Canada grant allowed me to work full-time on worship resourcing for one year. I have otherwise worked on *Voices Together* and Together in Worship as a volunteer.

23 The website togetherinworship.net is a free collection of online resources from Anabaptist sources. The initial development of the website was funded by a Teacher-Scholar Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

work, this has a cyclical effect: high turnover, weak outcomes, and limited aspirations reinforce attitudes toward worship leadership as insignificant and unworthy of investment.[24]

The way in which worship leadership in Mennonite congregations has become women's work has far-reaching consequences. It results in a lack of support for women giving theological leadership in the church through developing worship resources and leading in worship. Since worship contributes to constructing our conceptions of gender, treating worship leadership as concealed and low status work renders women invisible and undervalued in our congregations. It also represents a failure to nurture the gifts of the entire congregation, including men. Furthermore, it devalues all aspects of worship that are not music and preaching, weakening the worship life of the church, and spiritually impoverishing our communities. All of this is a cycle that reinforces itself—and from which we must break free.

A call to action

It is crucial to emphasize that the problem is *not* that women are leading worship. The problem is that the prevalence of women in worship leadership has changed the perception of this role, leading to the devaluation of worship leadership. This is not because worship leadership is undemanding or unimportant work; it is both demanding and important. To lead worship well requires training, practice, and ability. However, like other professions, when worship leadership is seen as something just anyone can do—"even women"—we do not invest in it or in those who undertake this role. I wish to propose two concrete actions we can take as initial steps toward addressing this issue.

First, we can create space for people of all genders to be involved in all aspects of worship: worship planning and leading, developing worship resources, preaching, and leading singing. Specifically, pastors who identify as men can show leadership by investing their time and effort in worship leading as well as preaching. Instead of seeing women worship leaders as "balancing" predominantly male preaching and song leading, men can take the initiative to move toward gender balance in all roles.

Second, we can recognize, resource, and celebrate the work of worship leadership and the women and others who serve as worship leaders. We can make visible and honor the substantial work that worship leaders

24 Truss, Alfes, Shantz, and Rosewarne, "Still in the Ghetto?" 350–51.

do both in public and behind the scenes. We can prioritize providing meaningful feedback to worship leaders as well as preachers. We can offer financial compensation to worship leaders as well as musicians and preachers. We can invest in opportunities for growth and advancement of worship leaders, through creating strong supporting resources and options for continuing education. Summoned by God's vision of justice and equality and imagining a world where the worshipful work of all who are made in God's image is valued, we can live into a future where worship leadership as women's work is no longer a problem.

About the Author

Sarah Kathleen Johnson is a visiting assistant professor of theology and worship and Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow at Vancouver School of Theology and St. Mark's College at the University of British Columbia. She was the worship resources editor for *Voices Together* and is the chair of the TogetherInWorship.net leadership team. Sarah holds a PhD in Theology from the University of Notre Dame and master's degrees with a focus on worship from Yale Divinity School and Conrad Grebel University College. She is originally from Waterloo, Ontario.

Music and inclusion in Mennonite worship and peace-justice work

An interview with Sarah Nahar

Editorial note: On August 4, 2021, I (Jonathan Dueck) conducted an interview with Sarah Nahar, which has been edited for length and clarity.

Jon: Think of a story from your experience of Mennonite worship—a time when you felt included in the music or the music felt like home. What's the story that you think of? And why do you think the music worked the way it did?

Sarah: Well, I grew up in a predominantly white Mennonite congregation, and so I learned to sing many of the songs from the various hymnals. I didn't know all the songs of the blue hymnal, but as it was being introduced, people would have hymn sings, and so I went to one of those. A lot of people were asking for different songs to be sung, and something told me to choose the African American spiritual "Steal Away." And I think that when that was happening, I was also learning about slavery and the importance of songs and messages that helped our people escape brutality. Initially, when I chose it—I was only in third grade or something—I remember most of the songs were really peppy, and I didn't know what "Steal Away" sounded like. And so I remember the worship leader going, *Oh!* And I first felt nervous, like I picked a bad song or something—like it caught them off guard. They then explained a little bit what the song was and what it meant. And so, all of the gathered body sang it, and it was really calm, and I had never heard it before.

I went to a hymn sing. A lot of people were asking for different songs to be sung, and something told me to choose the African American spiritual "Steal Away."

It wasn't until college that I learned that the historically Black Fisk University choir at the end of their first tour began to sing "Steal Away," and the way that they sang it, and the heart with which they sang it, was actually the most memorable thing that their choir had done. I realized that even in third grade, even though "Steal Away" was way different than

all the other songs that were being chosen, there was some kind of ancestral connection to that song, and I wanted to learn it and to understand what it meant. I stay connected with that song in many other arenas of life—with the question of fugitivity and being able to find a safe space for refuge and rest, and the way in which the song functions as a spiritual, and the spiritual life of resistance.

And I want to share about another song. During that time here in Elkhart-Goshen at the Nappanee Missionary Church, the African Children's Choir came and visited, and we listened and heard them sing many songs. I remember "Siyahamba" because I knew that one, and they sang "Asithi: Amen sikyadumisa," and later I was flipping through the pages in the hymnal and I found "Asithi: Amen." One time we also sang that at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, and to have heard the African Children's Choir sing it, and then to hear our congregation sing it also with gusto was really helpful for me in terms of tying my different life experiences, my Black world and my white world, kind of, together. So having those songs appear, even though they were few and far between, connected me to bodies outside of just the Mennonite Church.

Jon: I love that story! If I'm not mistaken, we met at Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship while you attended the historically Black Spelman College, right?

Sarah: Yes, and it was while I was at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and prominent Black musician and civil rights activist Bernice Johnson Reagon was a visiting professor there. We did a project—my first and only ethnomusicology project—where we traced the lines of various spirituals, and we walked around Atlanta. To do this project, we would sing the spirituals, or study where their words showed up, or how the music was moving in the world. She also taught us about how the people who marched in protest in Augusta, Alabama, and Georgia, the places she was active, "stood in her sound"—she and the Freedom Singers (one of the precursors to Sweet Honey in the Rock) would stand behind the frontline of protestors and accompany them as they did nonviolent direct action. Activists were bolstered and sustained by the sung melodies—they could also join in and feel power in their vulnerable bodies as their voices swelled with the crowd.

Studying with Reagon helped me also understand how our religious traditions are social movements as well. They're just really long ones, but they have existential claims that—like all social movements—are seeking to

shift what is happening on this earthly plane, by way of shifting worldview. And it helped me appreciate the importance of sound and sonic power and resonance and sonic healing within all of those communities.

I can feel us doing theology in our songs. I can feel what's happening in my body and theology similarly; it happens in the body.

I remember when Sweet Honey in the Rock came to visit Goshen, and they did their concert, and it was amazing. And Mary Oyer led us in *singing* a thank-you to them, rather than just applauding. We all stood and sang 606, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." It was really powerful, and Sweet Honey was also very moved at that type of exchange. It's one example of how I've seen our choral music used in a powerful way. At seminary someone mentioned that John Howard Yoder said once that we don't do theology in our songs. Everyone that I knew at seminary said that Yoder was wrong on this. I agree with them because I can feel us doing theology in our songs. I can feel what's happening in my body and theology similarly; it happens in the body.

Jon: Did you go to AMBS too, then?

Sarah: Yeah, I'm a 2011 MDiv graduate of AMBS. So I was at Spelman till 2006, and then I was a 2007 Fulbright Scholar in Argentina, and then I returned to Elkhart to be at AMBS, and I've done a lot of community organizing around Elkhart since then. Though I've lived a lot of places since then, I still have my membership at Prairie Street. I just have a lot of love for the community that raised me.

Jon: You know, music has power, and when you're leading music, you have power. And it can be good and bad, but you have to think about it. It's not inert. But it's a hugely negotiated power space. I remember studying worship in Edmonton and watching what happened when people would set tempos wrong. Imagine the congregation like a pool of water that's kind of moving in a wave, but you can see that here, and here, and here out in the congregation are the really strong singers. And around them, if you set the wrong tempo, you'll see a little ripple of tempo move out from them, and it will change. And up there you'll have to change what *your* tempo is. That's a long way of saying one of the things I like about your two stories is that you have a lot of agency, and calling "Steal

Away" and then having people try to figure it out. Then the other one seems like a kind of gift happens in the area, but then *you* make the connection between these things. I like the *you* acting in these stories. I like the meanings that you're making.

Sarah: Yeah, I think I spoke very directly to Black cultural music traditions in the context of white Mennonite spaces that I grew up negotiating in the church. People were talking often about how to diversify and how to sing the songs of other people so that our theological imaginations expand. This was way before the conversations around cultural appropriation; it was an effort to expose people to the fact that others sing in a beautiful and powerful way—not just us—and that one way we can appreciate that is to learn the sounds of others.

Jon: So, on the other end of this, can you think of a time when you felt alienated or uprooted or excluded by music in Mennonite worship, and what do you think was happening there in the music?

Sarah: Ironically, this story comes from Mennonite World Conference, the Global Youth Summit in 2009 in Paraguay. We were desiring to sing a lot of the songs from around the world, and we invited each country delegation to bring a song. The US and North American congregations chose songs to share that were in languages other than English, in an attempt to showcase their multicultural acumen. Most of the delegations from the Global South chose songs that were American or Canadian in origin to demonstrate their relevance and modernity. The impacts of globalization were clear. Not that they have to sing indigenous music—they certainly don't—but what does that represent about the gathered body and the aspirations that we have around who we want to be in the world? In the end, the only type of singing that we all knew was "contemporary." And the Mennonites from the Global North were upset because they didn't like the contemporary music and the theology it espoused. What we saw was one result of how missionization happened, and how at one point it was connected to Americanization. Having not grown up on contemporary worship music, I wasn't sure

Having not grown up on contemporary worship music, I wasn't sure what to do. I felt sad. I didn't feel excluded, but I felt unrooted. And I felt really bad about the impact of US imperialism.

what to do. Am I supposed to join them in song, or mostly just listen to them sing up front because they're the best singers? So I felt sad. I didn't feel excluded, but I felt unrooted. And I felt really bad about the impact of US imperialism. It was also a different experience than I had in 2003, when we had a song exchange.

Jon: Because you think it showed a kind of truth? You've described the frame of the event, and clearly it's framed so people were trying to connect with one another, they're trying to sing something they think of as a symbol of how the other part sings. They're saying we're all connected. But you think that what happens when Mennonites from many other places are singing what they think of to connect with the US Mennonites, they're singing a truth about the United States and a truth about US missions and how it has impacted them?

Sarah: Yeah. It was real! It was a real experience of, *Wow, this is also how music can be used*. The flip side of this is another story that I wanted to tell that kind of illustrates how music in my work in peace and justice building shows the possibilities of using music in that kind of work and what kinds of power I observe for music in these contexts. My church was a little nervous that I wasn't going to a Mennonite college when I chose to go to Spelman in 2002, and when I went to Spelman I realized just how Mennonite I was. I can't get it out of me: the way I eat, the way I read the text of the Bible with an emphasis on peace, reconciliation, and justice, and also the fact that I couldn't really dance, but you know, I got to practice that a lot at Spelman.

Jon: Yeah!

Sarah: Thank goodness, thank goodness, because to have had lost the body through our religious practices is a massive, massive loss, and I'm glad that people are trying to bring it back in many, many ways. I got back home and said, *Hey church, I'm still Mennonite!* And they're so happy, they're like, *Great, would you be our representative for Mennonite World Conference?* That was in 2003, and so that is how I had chance to go to Zimbabwe, and I got to meet Mennonites: some who danced, some who didn't; some who had a robust theology of peace and justice, some who didn't; some who lived simply, some who didn't. So I realized that being Mennonite meant a whole lot of things in different contexts, but holding at the center of their faith a trinitarian understanding of God, holding

at the center of their life community, and holding at the center of their work reconciliation (to quote Palmer Becker's *What Is an Anabaptist Christian?*). And that was also a really great time to be on the African continent, as well because Spelman is an all-Black women's school, and so I had a wonderful time learning and feeling and understanding my way to what it means to be a person of the African diaspora with deep connections to the continent but also the experience of being gone from the continent for so long.

During that time at the Global Youth Summit we did exchange songs, and we learned a tune from Indonesia: "Hari ini, harinya Tuhan" (This is the day, this is the day, that the Lord has made"). I wrote it down in my notebook. I kept it. I practiced it. It was really meaningful because "This is the day" is my grandmother's favorite verse, and it's a song that my parents, particularly my mom, would wake us up to each day when we were children. And so to know it in Indonesian was really meaningful to me. And I also got to learn another song from Ghana, "Da na se, da na se, da wo nyame na se." And when I was in Ghana, people would ask, *Do you speak any Twi?* And I'd say, *No, but I know this song*, and I'd see them brighten up, the smile on people's faces. And the same with people I would meet from Indonesia. So these itty bitty song lines allowed me to say, *I don't know your language but, I respect it, and I respect your music or song.*

When I was in Ghana, people would ask, *Do you speak any Twi?* And I'd say, *No, but I know this song,* and I'd see them brighten up, the smile on people's faces.

In 2015 I was on a Christian Peacemaker Teams (now Community Peacemaker Teams) delegation to learn what was happening in West Papua, and West Papua was dealing with this tremendous amount of racism from most of Indonesia, and it has not had a chance to have self determination since the vote of 1969, that was either become independent or become part of Indonesia, after the Dutch left, placing this gorgeous region in quite a limbo. In many ways, West Papuans are cousins to the Australian aboriginal indigenous peoples; they don't eat rice, they live in the highlands, so they feel really significantly different and have been oppressed by the central Indonesian government. And not only that, but Indonesia is transmigrating its population to Papua, that part of the country, changing the demographics, and minoritizing indigenous Papuans as second-class citizens. We were there to learn about the human rights viola-

tions of Australian-funded and US-backed policing forces that are putting down the resistance and self determination efforts, similar to how the United States and to a lesser extent Canada participated in supressing Latin American peoples movements. There is a strong sense of religiosity all across the many islands of Indonesia. Though there are different types of religiosity and different types of ritual practice, there's a lot of respect for religious practices. This came in handy for us as spiritual activists there.

We were in a meeting with some community leaders, and we're listening to the story of a massacre of civilians by authorities in Biak. We internationals were responding, and we were also singing some songs together. And then the secret police showed up and were asking what we were doing. Scary! Our representatives went out and said, *These folks are in a prayer meeting. They can't be interrupted.* And the secret police wouldn't interrupt a prayer meeting. So the representative comes back and says, *Keep praying; keep talking. If anyone knows a song, sing–sing songs so that they can hear you and so we can delay any oppression by the secret police.* We all looked around at each other. I asked people whether they knew the song "Hari ini," and they *did*! And so, even though they do have their own indigenous languages—Bahasa Indonesian is a lingua franca—and so we sang it and sang it and sang it and sang it until the police went away.

Jon: You just waited them out?

Sarah: We waited them out, and they just left. And we interspersed the song with a few other things, but it was something that the group—which has a lot of Australian Quakers and number of other international people, but mostly Papuans there—ended up using the song to create a shield of protection and connection. So it was really powerful to have that experience—a certain song for a moment. That was a time when a song really helped in peace and justice building. It was the song I had learned at the Global Youth Summit of Mennonite World Conference.

Other times songs have helped are in the work to challenge Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Being invited to learn some singing traditions from Islam—particularly from Sufism and the *zhikr*—has been meaningful. There's a chant rhythm song singing that I experienced in the context of western Sufism that was really awesome to learn about and to participate in.

Jon: Allahu!

Sarah: Right, *Allahu!* Yes. We repeat the phase about the oneness of God as we sing in a moving circle—going around, and around, and around. Losing yourself in the sound of all together. And also *nigunim*. These wordless melodies have been really powerful in contributing to learning about Jewish songlines.

Jon: Did you sing them in inter-religious contexts?

Sarah: I definitely have sung them in inter-religious contexts, as well as in the context of celebrating *zhikr* and in the context of Jewish folks being together for *davening*—that is, being in prayer. There's also an initiative called "Let my people sing." It's a post-Zionist Jewish initiative around learning and singing songs together in the Diaspora.

Jon: In Israel/Palestine?

Sarah: This happened in the US context in which people are negotiating what is considered secular space and bringing to bear their religious convictions on that. Singing together in the context of Israel/Palestine carries a whole other charge.

Jon: I think it's really interesting to think about *zhikr* and *nigunim* together because neither is very representational, right? They're not narrative; they're both kind of sonic entrainment things. They're about experiencing time together—the bigger meaning of it is that we're doing this together.

Sarah: Emile Durkheim would call that collective effervescence. There's certainly something to that. And that kind of goes into some stories I might offer Mennonite congregations as they begin to sing from a new songbook. I really enjoyed meeting the songbook at convention. We had great guidance from the people who were so deeply involved in the immense amount of discernment around what got in, what was left out, what order things are in, what worship resources look like, and so on. And I knew that that was hard because AMBS emerita and *Hymnal: A Worship Book* editor Rebecca Slough explained a bit of the process to us with regards to the blue hymnal—what it was like to work on that committee. I loved to learn that. It gave me a lot of compassion for the people who were working on *Voices Together*. Even more so since it became available during COVID-19, a time when it was dangerous to sing with one another.

The inability to sing together showed how important song is to some people's connection and also the amount of grief and loss that there was

during that time. Communities all over the world have been dealing with a lot of disruption for a long time, and now mainstream US society has felt it in a fashion. If we let it, these realizations can really help us have increasing compassion. To realize, for example, that we can't sing if we can't *breathe*, so part of wanting everyone to be able to sing together is to support Black Lives Matter and to make sure that people still have breath in their lungs. To protect everyone not only from being choked by a police officer but also from environmental racism and from spiritual traumas that people have experienced as a result of abuses of power.

We can't sing if we can't *breathe*, so part of wanting everyone to be able to sing together is to support Black Lives Matter and to make sure that people still have breath in their lungs.

I guess I would encourage people to teach more people how to lead singing and why it matters. This is a long roundabout way to say I enjoyed meeting *Voices Together* at convention because the people who helped put it together were able to give a little bit of explanation and information around songs and what they meant and why they chose them. Doing this is really helpful for ritual—like for the song of response, saying why that song got chosen. For example, I often use 323, "Beyond a dying sun," after I preach from the book of Revelation, and I'll ask the worship leaders to make a bridge to say, *In this song we'll speak about the type of eschatology we have, and so sing it like you mean it.*

Jon: That makes me think of your first story of "Steal Away"—where the worship leader talked about the song, where it came from, what it meant—because when you told that story, the connection that made for me is that "Steal Away" is kind of a heart song or a memory song that's tied to HBCUs as an institution, going back to Fisk. You would hear songs like this from Morehouse College choir. And I thought of "In the Rifted Rock" for some Mennonites. And you talk about fugitivity, which makes a lot of sense for "In the Rifted Rock." Like a lot of those Russian German Mennonite heart songs, they're not about prosperity. They're not about winning. They're about some little place where you can be safe from the things that are happening to you and the big world that's beyond your control. And when I lead singing in a Mennonite church now for me to not talk a little bit about why "In the Rifted Rock" is there, you know, I

like the idea of telling stories and song leading because I think that's part of how they connect us, and if you leave it unspoken it's hard to *include*.

Sarah: I think that there's a possibility as well, through that practice to say, *Here's what "Rifted Rock" meant for that generation*, you can invite people to connect with that generation. But you can also say, *Sing this and see what it means to you today in your context*, because how the Dutch-Russian Mennonite story gets told has a lot of implications for people's politics, their openness, their recognition of their complicity in power, or their sense of ongoing solidarity with the marginalized. So you can do a couple things with the song, depending on how it's led and depending on what's happening in the congregation that day.

About the Author

Sarah Nahar (neé Thompson) is a nonviolent action trainer and interspiritual theologian. Now as a PhD candidate in Syracuse, New York (Haudenosaunee Confederacy traditional land), she focuses on ecological regeneration, community cultivation, and spiritual activism. Previously, Sarah was a 2019 Rotary Peace Fellow and worked at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Atlanta, Georgia. She was a founding member of the Carnival de Resistance, a theological circus focused on environmental justice, intentional community life, and the arts. She has been the executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams (now Community Peacemaker Teams), She attended Spelman College, majoring in comparative women's studies and international studies, minoring in Spanish. At Spelman she was the student government president and founder of the AUC Peace Coalition, a group that built on the work of Atlantan Civil Rights leaders to resist US militarism. She has an MDiv from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in her hometown of Elkhart, Indiana (traditional Potawatomi land). She is currently on the board of Buddhist Peace Fellowship and part of the Black-led and Indigenous-led coalition to return the metals captured in the form of a Columbus statue in downtown Syracuse to the earth, in order for the earth to have the chance to regenerate anew the ancient story in its/this place. She is married to Jonathan, and together they are parents of Belén.

Poems for worship

Carol Penner

The whole score

God breathes and the world answers
in a symphony of faithfulness.
Songs of services in chapels, halls and tabernacles,
arias of councils and conferences and conventions,
oratorios of missions and campaigns and committees.
The devoted bursting forth in a hundred million hymns,
harmonious, dissonant, raucous and serene.
The voice of the church exhaling its devotion,
praising Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer and Friend.
Angel voices and the saintly crowd of witnesses
hum along as God's kingdom call echoes in the world.
For so long we've tuned into only one part, ours,
examining it, analyzing it to the nth degree,
arguing over our notes, perfecting them, enjoying them.
We know our part by heart,
we sing it lustily.
Then one day God turns the page
and we glimpse the whole score,
infinitely intricate,
more voices than you can shake a stick at,
unclouded, unconcealed, unconstrained.
God the great scorekeeper nods
as we suddenly hear the age-old chorus,
the melody of grace in stereophonic surroundsound.
It's there for those who have ears to hear.

Song of Peace Prayer

Thank you for the gift of music,
for melodies and harmonies,
for voices of every pitch.
Thank you for composers and poets,
for instruments and musicians.
Thank you for ears to hear
and minds to comprehend
the gift that was given so long ago.
Immanuel, God with us,
be the song we sing,
each and every day.
Let yours be the melody we carry,
your song of peace ringing out
through everything we say and do,
grace notes in this season of discord.

About the Author

Carol Penner is a Mennonite pastor currently teaching theology at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. She has served congregations in Ontario and Alberta. The above poems are from her website, Leading in Worship (https://leadinginworship.com), and are reprinted here with her permission.

The experience of music at Mennonite World Conference Assemblies

Paul Dueck

In the summer of 1978, I attended my first Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly.[1] Mennonites from forty-eight nations gathered in Wichita, Kansas. It was a thrilling experience for me to sing under the leadership of Mary Oyer with the thousands that had gathered. I distinctly remember the choir from the Soviet Union. It was the first time that representatives from Russia attended, and their singing was received with thunderous applause and tears of joy. Nelson Mandela once said, "Music is a great blessing because it gets people free to dream. It can unite us to all sing with one voice." This experience shaped my love for singing with the wider global faith community and sparked an interest within me to search for intercultural songs that could be experienced in local congregations.

In the summer of 1978, I attended my first MWC Assembly. Mennonites from forty-eight nations gathered in Wichita, Kansas. It was a thrilling experience for me.

Having grown up in Asuncion, Paraguay, I was already familiar with some music from Latin America. It was there that I had the opportunity to learn to play the Paraguayan folk harp and learn some of the traditional music of that country. Later in life, I returned to Paraguay with my wife, Linda, and our three daughters, to teach at the Mennonite Seminary (CEMTA). Students from Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay added to the international flavor of the community. My love for intercultural songs was further increased.

1 A previous version of this article appeared on the Menno Snapshots blog as part of a series on *Voices Together*. It is reprinted here with permission. See https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/the-experience-of-music-at-mennonite-world-conference-assemblies/.

In the summer of 1990, I had the privilege of participating in the music team at the MWC Assembly in Winnipeg, led by Marilyn Houser Hamm and Holda Fast. The *International Songbook*, which was compiled by Doreen Klassen for this gathering, is a rich collection of eighty-six songs from five continents that affirm unity while also expressing diversity.[2] It was a highlight for me to sing these songs and experience them together with some 13,000 people from the wider Anabaptist community.

The *International Songbook* is a rich collection of eighty-six songs from five continents that affirm unity while also expressing diversity.

I will never forget the final gathering at the Winnipeg football stadium with around 32,000 people in attendance.

In the fall of 1990, I began teaching music at the Mennonite High School (UMEI) in Leamington, Ontario. The songbooks that were available to the students for the daily chapels were *The Mennonite Hymnal* and the songbook *Sing and Rejoice!*[3] Having just come from a thrilling gathering of Anabaptists, I wanted the students to be exposed to some of the global songs that were shared at MWC in Winnipeg.

How wonderful it was that we were able to purchase the *International Songbook* for the school. One disadvantage of this songbook (for those of us that read music) is that the melody appeared on one page and the text in numerous languages on the opposite page. What joyful surprise it was that two years later the school purchased the *Hymnal: A Worship Book*,[4] which included numerous songs from the *International Songbook*. Our musical world was greatly enriched.

The wide range of musical styles provided a wonderful variety to our chapel services. The enjoyment of singing was so evident that every week one day was set aside for "music chapel." In addition to the *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, we added collections that were used at national youth assemblies since they contained more of the popular contemporary Chris-

2 Doreen Klassen, ed., *International Songbook* (Carol Stream, IL: Mennonite World Conference, 1990).

3 *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1969); Orlando Schmidt, ed., *Sing and Rejoice!* (Scottdale, PA, Herald Press, 1979).

4 Rebecca Slough, ed., *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992).

tian songs. It is this idiom that is more broadly represented in the new hymnal *Voices Together*.[5]

Participants from sixty-three nations came together to celebrate bonds of faith at the 15th MWC Assembly held in Paraguay in 2009. The assembly began with a procession of banners from congregations, conferences, and other groups from around the world accompanied by a Paraguayan harp orchestra. It was a feast to the senses. Together with a very talented and diverse international music team, we helped lead the people in singing. I will never forget the experience when the electricity went off and we sat in total darkness. It was an impromptu decision to sing together, and I still recall the songs we sang. Three of the songs were "Grosser Gott wir loben dich," "Alabaré," and "Siyahamba." During that last song ("We are walking in the light of God"), the electricity miraculously came back on. Singing each other's songs was a mountain-top experience for me.

I will never forget the experience when the electricity went off and we sat in total darkness. It was an impromptu decision to sing together, and I still recall the songs we sang.

It was a daunting task to decide on forty-four songs that would make up the MWC songbook. How could we represent the Anabaptist global community in such a small collection? The MWC music committee actually debated whether a songbook was necessary at all since so many people do not read notes. In the end, the decision was made to go ahead with a downsized version. People still appreciate taking a songbook home and perhaps teaching some of the songs to their home congregations.

At all the MWC Assemblies that I have attended, the highlight for me has been the choirs. They always provide such a glorious, diverse representation of singing in our global family.

Hearing a 160-voice choir made up of eleven Paraguayan ethnic groups was a powerful symbol of unity for me. Adding traditional instruments like Paraguayan harps, accordion, charango, conga drums, and other percussion instruments gave it a Latin American flavor. Again, a feast to the senses!

5 Bradley Kauffman, Benjamin Philip Bergey, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Adam M. L. Tice, and Katie J. Graber, eds., *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

To sing each other's songs still remains for me one of the most beautiful ways to experience unity in diversity, and so I am very grateful to have been able to participate in the collection building for the new *Voices Together* hymnal.

About the author

Paul Dueck is a retired music educator and presently employed by Mennonite Church Manitoba at Camp Assiniboia. He is passionate about congregational singing and has led music at numerous Mennonite assemblies. Paul was a member of the *Voices Together* worship and song committee.

Three Mennonite worship spaces

On the interplay of culture, theology, and aesthetics in Mennonite worship

Beverly Lapp

Three Mennonite worship spaces

This is a story of three Mennonite worship spaces in North America built across the span of two centuries and of some of the ecclesiological values expressed through music in these spaces. The first and oldest is a meetinghouse called Plains—named not for its austere style of sanctuary or for the plain dress its members wore for many decades in the mid-twentieth century but rather because of the relatively flat expanse of land it resides on among the rolling hills of southeastern Pennsylvania. First built in 1765, Plains Church was founded by colonist Mennonites who were descendants of the radical Anabaptist movement in sixteenth-century Switzerland and southern Germany. It is the oldest congregation in Lansdale, the township that eventually formed around it. The Plains Meetinghouse sits on the ancestral land of the Lenape people.[1]

This is a story of three Mennonite worship spaces in North America built across the span of two centuries and of some of the ecclesiological values expressed through music in these spaces.

The second space is named Alexanderwohl, and it is found on some of the real plains of North America, on the ancestral land of the Osage tribe. First formed in the Przechowka village of West Prussia by a group of Mennonites in 1820, the congregation chose its name after Czar Alexander I greeted the group and wished them well as they traveled to their new home in Molotschna Colony in southern Russia (now Ukraine). To avoid new military conscription requirements, they

1 Richard J. Lichty, *Meetinghouse on the Plain: Plains Mennonite Congregation, Remembering 250 Years* (Harleysville, PA: PMT, 2015), 6–7.

later journeyed together in 1874 to Goessel, Kansas, as nearly an entire village and congregation. After they spent several decades of worshiping in immigrant houses and one-room schoolhouses, in 1886 a large church in the Dutch Mennonite architectural style was built for the Alexanderwohl congregation, with several additions and renovations since then.[2] Alexanderwhol is one of the oldest continuing Mennonite congregations in the world.[3]

The third space, the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount, was built in 1965 as the chapel for two Mennonite seminaries sharing a campus in Elkhart, Indiana. It sits on the ancestral land of the Miami and Potawatami. Mennonites with mostly Swiss-German roots opened the Goshen Biblical Seminary, while Mennonite Biblical Seminary was formed by descendants of the Russian Mennonite migration to North America. The two seminaries eventually merged into what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). The 1965 service of dedication program offers a brief explanation of the chosen name for the chapel, stating, "Jesus brings faith and life together in His sermon recorded in Matthew. This uniting of faith and life is the goal of the seminary community."[4]

The role of instrumentation in Mennonite worship

The Plains church, where I grew up, is now two hundred and fifty years old. During some of those years in the mid–twentieth century, pianos and other instruments were not allowed in the sanctuary. Some North American Mennonite traditions taught during this time that instruments were too ornamental and too soloistic to support the simplicity and community that should be the focus of worship. With an assist from the popular singing schools of the early twentieth century, the spiritual concern that led to a ban of instruments in church services helped a robust four-part a cappella singing tradition become normalized in many Old Mennonite congregations.

An organ was first added to the Alexanderwohl worship space in 1943. Once settled and prospering in their third home since leaving West

2 Judith Unruh, Kris Schmucker, and Brian Stucky, "Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church (Goessel, Kansas, USA)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, January 2021, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Alexanderwohl_Mennonite_Church_(Goessel,_Kansas,_USA)&oldid=169740.

3 Brian D. Stucky, *Alexanderwohl Names: 1622–2020* (Goessel, KS: Emma Creek), 6.

4 Service of Dedication program for the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount, June 3, 1965.

Prussia nearly a century earlier, the Alexanderwohl congregation seems to have had little question about bringing an organ into the sanctuary. In time, chorister-led congregational singing made way for organist-led hymns.

In 1974, over thirty years after Alexanderwohl added its organ, an upright piano was rolled into Plains sanctuary for a special program. The church member who played the piano that evening was overjoyed that the ban was ended. However, to the dismay of her and others, the piano was promptly removed after the program. A dance between the lingering ban and the push to relax such rules ensued for five years as the piano was allowed for some events but always removed before Sunday morning worship.[5] The dance finally ended in 1979 when I was ten years old, whether through exhaustion or deliberate decision, and the piano remained in the sanctuary.

The plain Mennonites of mid-century North America elevated simplicity and service as matters of discipleship, and spending time and resources on the instrumental arts, as with the visual arts, was antithetical to this aim.

J. Lawrence Burkholder's essay "Words and Music" reveals spiritual concerns about the role of instruments in Christianity that pre-date particular Anabaptist-Mennonite debates like the struggle to keep a piano in the Plains sanctuary. Burkholder observes that Christianity has historically preferred words to music, and music without words is "considered by many to be either devoid of meaning or a threat to faith."[6] He goes on to challenge this idea: "Christianity's fear of the unspoken is exaggerated and needs to be transcended. Reality cannot be reduced to its totality in language. Words spoken specify, but at the same time, limit."[7]

Fear of the unspoken was not the only concern about instruments in church, however. The plain Mennonites of mid-century North America elevated simplicity and service as matters of discipleship, and spending time and resources on the instrumental arts, as with the visual arts, was antithetical to this aim. Discipleship required careful monitoring

5 Lichty, *Meetinghouse on the Plain*, 109

6 J. Lawrence Burkholder, *Sum and Substance: Essays by J. Lawrence Burkholder* (Goshen, IN: Pinchpenny, 1986), 15.

7 Burkholder, *Sum and Substance*, 17.

to guard against artistic pursuits and other worldly distractions that led one away from focus on devotion to God and service to others. Art in support of worship was more acceptable. One might expect, then, that once the Plains sanctuary had a piano permanently, it would be primarily used only in service to sacred hymn texts as accompaniment to congregational singing. Conversely, instrumental accompaniment can be seen as adding a layer of complexity to the aural atmosphere of hymn-singing, which may be too ornate. It is not clear that either of these considerations mattered as much as culture around hymn-singing at Plains. Four-part a cappella congregational singing led by a chorister was such a deeply rooted tradition at Plains that for several more decades the piano was primarily used for solo prelude and offertory music and rarely to accompany hymns. If fear of the unspoken—as represented by solo instrumental offerings within the music service—was at the heart of the instrument ban in churches like Plains, it was quickly transcended as the rules relaxed.

If fear of the unspoken—as represented by solo instrumental offerings within the music service—was at the heart of the instrument ban in churches like Plains, it was quickly transcended as the rules relaxed.

After college I met my future husband, and when I visited his family for the first time in 1992, we went to the Christmas Eve service at Alexanderwohl, his home church. Although I knew some of the historic and cultural differences between North American Russian Mennonites and the Old Mennonites of Swiss descent, my assumptions about the arts and beauty in Mennonite ecclesiology were jolted as I entered the balcony-surrounded sanctuary. Not only was there a pipe organ and concert grand piano, there was an abundantly decorated Christmas tree on the generous and high worship platform. The organist played prelude and interlude music, at a level I had previously only heard in organ recitals in graduate school, and expertly accompanied robust congregational singing of hymns. These were hymns I knew well but was used to singing without instruments. More accomplished singers performed from a choral loft facing the congregation. As I experienced the strangeness of a different worship culture, I both loved and judged the full embrace of aesthetic richness it represented.

Culture, theology, and aesthetics in Mennonite worship

Now I work at AMBS and attend worship twice each week in the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount. When I sit in this space, I see elements of the careful austerity of plain Mennonite meetinghouses typical of the seventeenth century and the unassuming exuberance of Russian Mennonite churches built in nineteenth-century North America. The chapel at AMBS is both plain and sophisticated.

The chapel was designed to represent Anabaptist theological convictions that run deeper than particular Mennonite stories. Built at an angle, the chapel faces neither east nor west, and there are no square corners to be found. These features communicate nonconformity and courage to be different. The dark interior suggests refuge, perhaps symbolizing the hidden spaces sixteenth-century Anabaptists needed to worship safely. Solemn brick rises from a low and modest platform to point worshipers upward to natural daylight or moonlight beaming through a small skylight above. The low platform represents that status is no higher for those leading worship, and the skylight invites our focus on God's presence above us. Moveable chairs allow worship in formations that make us aware of each other and God's presence around us.

The chapel at AMBS was designed to represent Anabaptist theological convictions that run deeper than particular Mennonite stories.

The inclusion of a pipe organ was in the building committee's plan from the beginning of the project, and the instrument was ready in 1968, three years after the chapel was built. Already paid for by donors, crafted by its builders in another location and disassembled for delivery, the organ was in boxes in those uneven corners of the chapel when a small group of students held a protest outside a board meeting. They wanted to see if they could persuade seminary leadership to not move forward with installation. The protest was unsuccessful, and the organ was in place and fully functional within a few months.

Some students continued to object and call for its removal for at least another year. Letters and documents reveal intense theological and ethical questions at the heart of their concern.[8] Student Denny Weaver was lead

8 Erland Waltner, interview by Gayle Gerber Koontz, January 21, 1997, Elkhart, Indiana.

signer of a March 1970 letter to the seminary board that decried an organ in the chapel as entirely misaligned with Anabaptism:

> *Organs are part and parcel of the broader, established middle and upper class American Christendom (which is identified with and part of the church-state image). It is from this style of church that the Anabaptists/Mennonites separated themselves over 400 years ago and from which we have sought to differentiate ourselves ever since. We feel that our Anabaptist/Mennonite emphases on simplicity, modesty, brotherhood, discipleship, and stewardship are not in accord with the mainstream of American Christendom nor with an expensive organ.*[9]

Students Don Klassen and Jim Klassen wrote their own letter to the board that same month, decrying church organs as materialistic and another example of Christianity's tendency to ignore suffering in the world:

> *We pull down the shade, turn up the thermostat, and turn the stereo up loud. On Sundays we can even sit in padded pews, look through stained glass windows, and have the organ drown out the sights and sounds of pain and despair. . . . Organs, etc., are as inconsistent with Christ's Way of Life as war is. Will the Board of Directors help direct the Seminary in leading our Churches by putting the needs and concerns of the crying and dying over our "aesthetics"? If not, we may as well close all discussion of Discipleship on this campus.*[10]

In response, Esko Loewen, pastor at Bethel College Mennonite in North Newton, Kansas, urged Don and Jim Klassen to consider that rejecting the organ was not the way to activate against a society weighed down by materialism and greed. He wrote that a skillfully crafted organ is nothing less than a profound statement of faith, and that in order to transform our broken society, the musical and worship needs of a community must be met first.[11] Loewen made the argument that beauty is not an add-on. It's not for later or for only *if* all the other needs are taken care of.

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9 Denny Weaver, letter to the Board of Trustees of Mennonite Biblical Seminary, March 1970.

10 Don Klassen and Jim Klassen, letter to the Board of Trustees of Mennonite Biblical Seminary, March 1970.

11 Esko Loewen, letter to Don Klassen and Jim Klassen, March 17, 1970.

If I had read the student letters when I was a college student wavering about whether a music major was practical or adequately of service, I may have needed Loewen's rejoinder that the arts were worthy pursuits. Joy in developing my craft as a musician continued to mingle with vocational doubt as my piano studies continued through graduate school. My worship preferences were never in question, though. The sound I most treasure in worship settings is still unadorned voices in harmony. I experience this way of worshiping as a uniquely powerful embodiment of Christian community.

Lutheran minister and public theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber offers her reason for the same preference in an April 2021 blog post:

> *Singing hymns, acapella and in 4-part harmony is the thing I miss most about church. One of the strongest opinions I have about worship is that the primary musical expression of the gathered should be congregational singing. Because while lofty organ music and praise bands might have their place, they can never replace sung hymns. Because when we are on our death beds surrounded by loved ones, when fast falls the eventide, we will have only our own human bodies with which to pray and sometimes the most potent prayers we have are the songs of those who have come before us.*[12]

With maturity, I better understand how culturally embedded our preferences are around music in worship, and that this is both a gift and a limitation. Singing our heart songs in community in the style we are most at home in is a sacred gift. Only worshiping in ways we are most comfortable limits us, however, from fully knowing God and God's people. Indeed, what Bolz-Weber and I may see as authentic and inclusive in a cappella hymn-singing can be experienced as strange and exclusive to others.

The intersection of culture, theology, and aesthetics that lead worshiping communities to consensus or toward conflict is complex, as is the interplay of factors that make any one individual feel comfortable, or alienated, by a worship style. The ecclesiological traditions of these three spaces were formed and transformed over time and by each generation of worshipers gathered within. As a worshiping Christian, my faith and my

12 Nadia Bolz-Weber, "Singing Hymns Alone," *The Corners*, April 17, 2021, https://thecorners.substack.com/p/singing-hymns-alone

musicianship has been formed and transformed by each space and the stories within. For this I am profoundly grateful.

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Expanding our identity in worship

Sarah Augustine

Singing together has always been a primary pathway to connecting with the Creator for me. When I was a small child, music was a central way I spent free time together with my family. It was my first vocabulary for praise. My mother taught my siblings and me simple hymns, for which we improvised lyrics to meet our moods and games. Singing was a way of being together, accessible to anyone. I sang hymns in harmony with my sisters and brother to entertain company under the supervision of my mother and just for fun when the four of us were goofing around together.

My voice was absorbed in the body of voices, and I was communicating the ineffable. I truly experienced the Spirit reaching back, and I felt surrounded by the Holy Spirit.

In middle school and high school, I sang religious madrigals in choir—often complex pieces in Latin and Italian. Some of my earliest memories of participating in something larger than myself—in something holy—were standing still, surrounded by the voices of my classmates, reaching for the divine. My voice was absorbed in the body of voices, and I was communicating the ineffable. I truly experienced the Spirit reaching back, and I felt surrounded by the Holy Spirit. I would take my insecurities and worries to these performances and open myself to the Spirit. Romans 8:26 comes to mind when I think about this experience: *We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit itself pleads our case with unexpressed groanings*.[1] I experienced a kind of transformation in singing I can describe only as prayer.

Music is of central importance to Indigenous worship as well. Among many peoples, songs are transmitted by both nature and Elders during important milestones as a type of medicine. I have found this to be true in my identity as a Mennonite also. Music has power. And how we worship together matters.

As the co-founder of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition, I want to reflect here on how elements of our worship together

1 This gloss is slightly altered from the Common English Bible translation.

reflect our vision of identity. What is invisible in our worship? What is visible? What do these things say about us as a people? Our society is in such a heightened state of flux, as together we experience Truth and Reconciliation and justice movements for Indigenous Peoples, climate change and the call for environmental justice, conflicts at national borders and advocacy for immigrants' rights, the so-called culture wars, Black Lives Matter and the cry for civil rights—just to name a few of the groanings for justice we face. Conflict is inherent in all calls for change, and so conflict surrounds us. Are church and worship a "safe space" where we find rest from the conflict that surrounds us or a staging ground where we struggle together to seek justice collectively? I ask these questions as descendant of the Pueblo (Tewa) people and as a Mennonite.

The Doctrine of Discovery and the coalition to dismantle it

The Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery (DDofD) Coalition is a group of Anabaptist leaders who work together to mobilize the church to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. We proclaim an Anabaptist spirit of discipleship rooted in the call to love of neighbor, seeking right relationship and reconciliation through active nonviolence.

The Doctrine of Discovery is a theological, philosophical, and legal framework dating to the fifteenth century that historically gave Christian nations moral and legal rights to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous Peoples. This pattern of oppression began with Papal bulls, or decrees. One of the most infamous is Romanus Pontifex, issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1455. Romanus Pontifex justified enslaving and seizing the land and possessions of anyone who was not Christian, setting the stage for colonization as well as the enslavement of African people by Europeans.[2] The Doctrine of Discovery is not simply a historical framework but also a current legal doctrine that determines land tenure in the United States and in nations around the globe today.

The Doctrine of Discovery is not simply a historical framework but also a current legal doctrine.

The Doctrine of Discovery is enshrined in both church and state. It is a legal doctrine that is practiced in international law and policy and in

2 Sarah Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2021).

the domestic legal systems of countries around the globe. It is still practiced by Christians of various traditions around the globe as well, who systematically dispossess Indigenous Peoples of their ancestral lands and human rights. One example of the Doctrine of Discovery embedded in a Christian tradition and belief is the narrative that as God's people, we have been provided a "Promised Land" in North America as reward for obedience. Because the Doctrine of Discovery is a Christian doctrine, it is evidenced in many church narratives, images, and rituals. To effectively dismantle it, it is necessary to think about ways that we reproduce it from one generation to the next in our theology and ritual.

Voices from the margin in worship

What is the purpose of addressing voices from the margins in worship? How does Mennonite worship as ritual, ceremony, or performance connect with power identity? To address these questions, I consulted with representatives from four congregations in the United States actively engaging in relationship with the DDofD Coalition. I selected these four congregations because they are diverse geographically (San Francisco, Tucson, Albuquerque, and Kansas City), while also diverse in composition (all congregations were a mix of Mennonites by cradle or conviction), race (two congregations were made primarily of folks from the dominant culture, two were quite racially diverse), LBGTQ orientation, and age. I asked pastors and worship leaders to reflect on how their communities have been impacted by the struggle for racial justice and how that is evidenced in worship.

Inclusion in worship challenges us to acknowledge and reaffirm our commitment to active peacemaking.

One theme that emerged as I spoke with folks in San Francisco, Tucson, Kansas City, and Albuquerque is that when we address voices from the margins in worship, we acknowledge the diversity of our congregations and our commitment to collective discernment. Inclusion in worship challenges us to acknowledge and reaffirm our commitment to active peacemaking. Passively reinforcing a homogenous identity, particularly for congregations made up primarily of folks from the dominant culture, affirms the narrative norm of erasure. Diversifying images and rituals in worship acknowledges the reality of a diverse society where privileges are not universally shared. The pastor with whom I spoke in Kansas City explained that expanding images, reading materials, and the objects in

the sanctuary challenges congregants to break the white-centered gaze by choosing to make racial diversity visible.

Land acknowledgement

A concrete step many congregations are taking to incorporate marginalized voices in worship is adopting a land acknowledgement statement. This is an intentional statement that acknowledges the First Peoples of the land where the congregation is geographically located. The Land Acknowledgment Guide created by the DDofD Coalition states, "Wherever we are, we are on Indigenous land. Any time settlers come together for a formal gathering, we have the opportunity to open with respect by acknowledging the land and Indigenous Peoples who have tended that land for many generations."[3] When repeated regularly in worship, such statements of collective recognition put ongoing structural violence front and center, thereby resisting the cultural norm to erase the reality of injustice faced by the vulnerable among us. Not all congregations read their land acknowledgement statement in every worship service, but all voice that it has had an impact on the life of their community. Each community I spoke with explained the process by which their congregation discerned, drafted, and adopted a statement. In each case, this was done collectively. The process itself sensitized communities to the issues facing Indigenous Peoples in their communities, whether or not Indigenous folks attend services. Collective engagement in naming Indigenous neighbors and recounting the history of Indigenous removal from the land equips congregants with understanding specific to their own community. This concretizes as actionable what might otherwise be a vague and abstract idea about injustice.

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I asked pastors and worship leaders to describe the impact land acknowledgement statements have had on congregational identity. The Tucson folks named an awareness and reverence for land and for Indigenous neighbors. San Francisco reported investigation into Indigenous

3 Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition, *Land Acknowledgement Guide* (2021), 2; https://dofdmenno.org/land-acknowledgement/.

neighbors has resulted in an ongoing relationship with Indigenous activists. They further reported that repetition of the statement Sunday after Sunday has "formed us as people committed to this Gospel work." Kansas City stated that personal connection to an Indigenous member propelled the process to adopt a statement, and the wish to incorporate it into weekly candle lighting, seeking to ground it in action as well as words. The Albuquerque congregation adopted a land and watershed acknowledgement statement, acknowledging the sacred water itself and their dependence on it. As they stated, the weekly reading of the statement "makes us realize the American dream was based on land that did not belong to us."

Singing in worship and *Voices Together*

I have found singing in worship to be a source of comfort and belonging. By singing with my community the songs I have known and loved throughout my life, I share experientially my sense of the sacred, while engaging mutually in the affirmation of a shared identity. This process of singing beloved songs together can also act as a barrier of exclusivity that prefers the familiar to forms of worship that are inclusive. This barrier that can feel like warm, insular comfort to insiders can be experienced as exclusion to those who are not from a traditional Mennonite background.

By singing with my community the songs I have known and loved throughout my life, I share experientially my sense of the sacred, while engaging mutually in the affirmation of a shared identity.

What I have heard called "the New Hymnal," *Voices Together*, strives to include familiar hymns sung easily in four-part harmony *and* a breadth of worship songs that stretch traditional identities. I am particularly moved by selections in the "Reconciling" section that name and deny systems of death.

"Come Now, O God" (143) reads, "come when our bed-rock of faith has been shaken, come when our deepest hopes are mistaken / come, break the systems of sin that enslave us; come, though we wonder if you can still save us / come Emanuel." This lyric challenges our faith in easy political ideals, challenges us to seek truth beyond the religion that we grew up with. "God, Give Me Time" (144) reads, "God, give me time to deal with the words that threaten and destroy; the easy words of politics that kill creation's joy; the speeches that proliferate economies of greed; the thieves of children's heritage, the poison in the

seed." This is a challenge to grapple with injustice, even when it benefits us, including the "economies of greed" that include resource-extraction industries that displace, disease, and kill Indigenous and vulnerable peoples. "Touch the Earth Lightly" (145) calls on the God of the whole earth to deflect us, indicting, "We who endanger, who create hunger, agents of death for all creatures that live, who still foster clouds of disaster, God of our planet, forestall and forgive!" "Lord Jesus, Come and Overturn" (146) goes on, "Lord Jesus come and overturn the powers that corrupt and bind. Transform our temples with your love and claim our conscience with your mind / where mercy answers every need and great ones humbly serve the least." "Forgive, Forgive Us, Holy God" (149) confesses, "Our blood is on each other's hands, we die from hunger, lies and fear / Forgive us that our souls are numb to scenes of terror, screams of pain; that while we pray 'Your kingdom come' our world is still a battle plain / Forgive us that our household gods are self and safety, private need; forgive us all our fitful prayers, the token gift, the token deed." These selections push us to move beyond our comfort zones by acknowledging our participation in systems of death and persuading us to choose life and the way of peace.

A preference for homogeneity and comfort may be receding as the call for justice becomes more prominent in our worship together.

There are also selections calling us to action. "Peace to You" (168) reads, "Peace confounds the wealthy, peace lifts up the poor. Peace disrupts the mighty; peace is heaven's door. Peace comes from the Spirit; peace comes like a breath. Peace reveals a new world; peace does not fear death." The peace described here is not the absence of conflict; rather, it calls us to action without fear.

Voices Together greatly expands international selections, including those not only in German but also in Spanish, Swahili, Chin, and many other languages. The topical index demonstrates an entire Indigenous Communities Resources theme and Racial Justice and Economic Justice themes. A special favorite I was amazed to see is "Hey ney yana / I walk in beauty" (836), a traditional Ute song.

What may have been invisible in Mennonite worship traditionally, a preference for homogeneity and comfort, may be receding as the call for justice becomes more prominent in our worship together. As we incorporate into our worship commitments to mutual identity that actively seeks

justice, inclusion and repair, we expand our "safe space" to include the vulnerable and excluded. While not every congregation has composed and affirmed a land acknowledgement statement, nearly every congregation has accepted *Voices Together* into their community. *Voices Together* offers us the opportunity to expand our vision of who we are. My prayer is that we are ready to embrace this vision.

About the Author

Sarah Augustine is cofounder and cochair of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition and executive director of the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties. Augustine, who is a Pueblo (Tewa) descendent, has written for numerous publications and academic journals and is the author of *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Herald, 2021).

Toward multiple musical languages in worship

Darryl Neustaedter Barg

The musical journey from *The Mennonite Hymnal* (1969) to *Voices Together* (2020) represents my journey as well as that of my people. The old adage, "Tell me what the people are singing, and I'll tell you what they believe," may once have referred mostly to theology and text but no longer. Join me on my little journey, and I'll tell you why it means so much more.

I am a lifelong church musician, not an academic. It is only in more recent years that identifying questions of power and privilege as a subtext that accompanies this musical journey has become part of my reflection.[1] Why do we sing what we sing? Who gets to choose? Who influences the choosers? Who defines excellence? Who doesn't?

Church music and camp music

Apparently I didn't start my life with *The Mennonite Hymnal*, as I was born in 1968, a year before its release; however, that is the hymnal that accompanied the first part of my faith story, as did singing in the various church choirs from the beginning of my memory. Formal music lessons also contributed to a particularly "Western Art Music" track of musical expression. The first time I recall being moved by other music was as a young camper at Bible camp. I hated camp as a camper, but the music moved me. The next major transition was being allowed to listen to rock music on the radio when I was in the seventh grade. Immediately, two particular songs gripped me with their sheer power and presence. I sat by my little clock radio hoping these two songs would get played again and again.

Thus began the dual track of my musical life: Church music with its classical underpinnings, and contemporary rock and roll. Moving into later adolescence, working at camp, picking up the guitar, and beginning to lead singing there solidified the finding that my spiritual life and expression was nurtured as much or more by music at camp than at church

1 While this piece obliquely references issues of power, colonialism, and racism, it was written as a personal reflection. The *Voices Together* team has tackled these issues more directly in two online webinars. See Launch Resources at http://voicestogetherhymnal.org/resources/.

proper. Further, my abilities and progression as an accompanist of music on the guitar was influenced by what I was hearing on the radio. There was no leading from guitar at church.

It was abundantly clear in those days that my "camp music" wasn't really welcome at church. I quickly bumped against assumptions and structures that made it clear that the camp music should stay at camp. I only learned later how traditional the church of my upbringing was. We only sang "proper" hymnody. The catchy gospel songs introduced to our church in the Anhang (appendix, or directly "the section that hangs at the end") of the 1945 German Mennonite Hymnal were termed "Hups Lieder" (roughly translated "jumpy songs") by many in the congregation. In the transition to English worship and *The Mennonite Hymnal* (1969), the Gospel Songs section was decisively avoided.

Heart songs

Early in the process of creating *Voices Together* we settled on the concept of the "heart song" as a means by which to honor the songs that have a special place in people's faith journeys. "Favorite song" didn't seem to get to the depth of the matter. The Heart Song Survey was an invaluable source of data and inspiration as we slowly gathered together the music that would become *Voices Together.*

Early in the process of creating *Voices Together* we settled on the concept of the "heart song" as a means by which to honor the songs that have a special place in people's faith journeys.

How do songs become heart songs? We've long known that music has a special way of taking a text to a deeper place. One of our hymnal creating forebears reminded us that, while text is critical, we needed to ensure the music works, or the song will never find its place in the hearts of its singers. The musical elements of tune, harmony, and rhythm combine with text attributes to create what might be a fine song; however, once the song is adequately known, context or community and the Holy Spirit make it a heart song. A holy mystery—or is it?

I've often queried the hymnological giants in my life about what the context was in which "Praise God" (Dedication Anthem; *Voices Together*, 70; *Mennonite Hymnal*, 606) could flourish and become a heart song. There is general agreement that Mennonite Church and General Con-

ference Mennonites of the mid-twentieth century worked hard at singing together well. In the United States, the singing schools and, in Canada, the "Saengerfests" (Singing Festivals) were crucial to the musical, spiritual, and social fabric of our people. When "Praise God" was introduced in 1969, "the people were ready," George Wiebe once said to me. Apparently this is also combined with the more somber nature of the music we had been singing. This joy-filled, slightly more challenging anthem gave an opening to an experience and expression that was quite new for many. Combine that with repetition and its use at all sorts of community events when a joyful expression to God was called for, and you have what we have: a widely beloved heart song.

If even some of this is the recipe for a heart song, then what happens when young people get together and sing in joyful voice in a setting where the Holy Spirit is invited to move in what might be considered a new musical language? Simply, new heart songs that probably don't sound much like "Praise God" or anything else in *The Mennonite Hymnal*.

Music as language

The idea of music operating like language is not new, but it has become, to me, a helpful way to talk about shifting musical landscapes and the tensions that have surrounded these shifts. My sister studied in the Suzuki Method, and I remember seeing a Suzuki video from the 1950s of very young children with reel-to-reel tape recorders a third the height of their bodies, worn like backpacks as they were out in the playground playing.[2] By my sister's time, it was vinyl records on incessant repetition in our house. By all accounts, it worked in our home: my sister is a brilliant violinist and musician. I think it also worked for me, as I immersed myself in the unique rhythm guitar gifts of Pete Townshend of The Who, Alex Lifeson of RUSH, and eventually many others. *Brilliance* may not be the operable word, but I think I became formed in a musical language by a different set of skilled musicians.

2 The Suzuki Association of the Americas describes the Suzuki Method this way: "More than fifty years ago, Japanese violinist Shinichi Suzuki realized the implications of the fact that children the world over learn to speak their native language with ease. He began to apply the basic principles of language acquisition to the learning of music, and called his method the mother-tongue approach." See https://suzukiassociation.org/about/suzuki-method/.

Daniel J. Levitin's *This Is Your Brain on Music* was another formative stop in my understanding of the role of music in worship.[3] We all recognize that music is powerful and complex, but now the neuroscientists can prove it. Levitin's book is designed to be an accessible read on how our brains respond to music. My learning was that, indeed, music operates expansively in our brains, but more crucially, we can become deeply familiar with certain styles or genres of music to the exclusion of others. Musical genres are different enough that they operate as different languages. For example, we now know that the part of the brain where rhythm operates is understood to be quite primal. If you grew up with the emphasis to be on the first and third beats of the bar (as in much Western Art Music), and you hear something where that is flipped to second and fourth, where the backbeat of rock and roll lives, you may experience a visceral, negative response.

We can become deeply familiar with certain styles or genres of music to the exclusion of others. Musical genres are different enough that they operate as different languages.

What then, if you speak one musical language and I speak another? What are the words by which my language is described? That depends on who has the authority to do the describing. Do you say my language is harsh and ignorant and not worthy of use in worshiping God? No, you acknowledge you don't understand it. Do you belittle it among your peers and disempower its expression? No, we understand this to be racist, colonial behavior. It's not that long ago when this was precisely how the music I participated in was treated. Among other things, it was based on the assumption that this was simply a poorer version of the same language, a position that I likely accepted for a long time. Perhaps my music didn't belong in church as a poorer expression of music in general.

Further depths in this framework are available. Levitin suggests that a notable level of Dopamine (the chemical that produces pleasure when released by our system) is released when we hear something familiar but with a small element of uniqueness or surprise. In the context of language, we appreciate all the fine things a depth of native language learning gives us: nuance, sarcasm, various forms of humor based in puns or

3 Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession* (London: Grove/Atlantic, 2008).

unique turns of phrase. Much of this is not available to those for whom this is a second or third language.

This became clearer to me as my children began listening to contemporary pop and rap circa 2005 and on. I made fun of this music and belittled it, until I started trying to appreciate it and eventually create it. All the audio production tools I was comfortable with did not give me what I needed to create a proper groove or beat. Nothing in my musical studies at my Mennonite University gave me any help either. I still can't make beats that I would play for anyone, but I have begun to appreciate some of the masters like Timbaland and Dr. Dre in musical languages that are arguably the most popular and globally widespread today.

We can learn multiple musical languages, but it takes work. And, while we need not like all musical languages, we should approach them all with humility, curiosity, and hospitality.

We can learn multiple musical languages, but it takes work. And, while we need not like all musical languages, we should approach them all with humility, curiosity, and hospitality. I hold no grudges towards those who had no idea what to do with different musical languages in the 80s. We were a much more homogeneous collection of Mennonites, many still with roots in semi-isolated rural communities. The hymnal of the day was one of the few musical resources available. I once had a gentleman tell me that he didn't much like my music and my banjo was much too loud. I've never played a banjo, but he didn't know the difference between a banjo and a guitar. This was not an insignificant oversight to a guitar player but represented a complete lack of relevant language.

There are also aspects of music making that have meaning beyond the music and text. There are non-musical signs and symbols that go with our musical languages. At one time, for the keepers of our church's musical language, it was clear that a drum set was a symbol for music that was not appropriate for worshiping God. Now it is a symbol for a different set of people, that the church might have a certain kind of musical openness. Or for a younger generation, it may even represent something old and dated.

Musical languages in *Voices Together*

I'm not nearly the only Mennonite who has journeyed in our churches with multiple musical languages. The growth of idiomatic diversity in *Voices Together* is a testament to how our communities and capacities for change have increased. We now have the choice before us of holding to our traditional Mennonite language or of embracing hospitality. We have entered a time of rapid change and diversification of musical languages. The proliferation of personal listening options via smart phone and headphones means you can learn your own musical language much of your waking day. Seeing so many young people plugged in 24/7 guarantees this. (There are hundreds of genres of Electronic Dance Music alone.)

Voices Together represents the option and opportunity of becoming communities of radical hospitality. We acknowledge that there are now multiple languages represented, and we show grace when our own is not the music being led. This is hard work. It requires us to appreciate, while not fully understanding, the capacity for a particular musical language to represent our corporate journey toward God and one another. It is likely that we will never again have the kind of shared musical language that we did when "Praise God" topped the heart song lists. It is my hope that, as a church, we will greet future musical change with curiosity, humility, and hospitality.

About the author

Darryl Neustaedter Barg is a life-long church musician leading from his guitar, director of communications at Mennonite Church Manitoba, and media production coordinator and adjunct professor of communications at Canadian Mennonite University. He was co-chair of the Popular Idioms sub-committee on the *Voices Together* hymnal committee.

Discomfort and gratitude

Learning new songs in worship

Anneli Loepp Thiessen

And so we thank you,
For lyrics that push us past our reasons,
For melodies that break open our givens,
For cadences that locate us home,
Beyond all our safe places,
For tones and tunes that open our lives beyond control
And our futures beyond despair.
—Walter Brueggemann

The process of adopting a hymnal is unsurprisingly emotional. Through the songs and words of worship, we encounter a God who is moving beyond our understanding, a Christ who challenges our assumptions, and a Spirit who guides us to where we belong. After years of gathering weekly for worship, we become comfortable with what we know; a new hymnal pushes us beyond this. Many of the churches and communities I have worked with in adopting *Voices Together* notice increased anxiety and tension in addition to excitement and joy as they welcome a new hymnal. These are all natural responses to a process that is sure to expand our understanding and show us new ways of worshiping.

I believe that one of the unique gifts of *Voices Together* is its ability to help us grow beyond what we know. While there is beauty and connection in the familiar, we encounter God in new ways when we move into the unknown. I have heard Mennonite congregations profess that they are comfortable with any music "as long as it's notated." Others will try out any style "except for praise and worship music." Some are interested in new words to sing, but will "only sing in English." Yet Psalm 96 calls us to "sing to God a new song," a call we take seriously when we step beyond our comfort zones toward new ways of singing. Singing a new song doesn't necessarily mean singing new lyrics set to a familiar tune, or singing a new melody that sounds similar to the other melodies we know and

love. As we adopt *Voices Together*, singing a new song might mean trying something completely new.

In the above prayer included in *Voices Together* (882), Walter Brueggeman thanks God for three distinct gifts: lyrics that push us past our reasons, melodies that break open our givens, and cadences that locate us home. Amid nervousness and unfamiliarity, the gifts that Brueggeman outlines offer a way for us to thank God for this new hymnal, despite discomfort. The following reflections offer a way to encounter some of the newness of this collection with gratitude and appreciation for the new growth that accompanies it.

And so we thank you: for lyrics that push us past our reasons

As a church, we live in the world of reasoning. Many Mennonite churches form committees, sign community understandings, join book clubs, and write beautifully crafted articulations of what they believe. This reasoning is *good*, but sometimes we must go beyond it to experience God who is bigger than our understanding. We need lyrics that draw us outside of ourselves, that say things we might not think to say ourselves but desperately need to voice. We need lyrics that push and prod at our faith, that take us in new directions.

Voices Together contains so many rich examples of lyrics that push and prod me. Some of these songs, such as "Hakuna Wakaita Sa Jesu (There's No One in This World Like Jesus)" (68), are from other cultures that articulate a commitment to following Jesus that is different than I could express on my own. Other songs find new ways to name God, ways that might sound foreign at first but soon become names that feel like home—songs like "Like a Rock" (63), which describes God as a rock, a starry night sky, the sun. Some of these songs, such as "Lord I Need You" (155), remind me of my own shortcomings, naming my need for God. Other songs feature open ended poetry, pushing me to step into the mystery of my faith; songs like as "Word and Sign" (483) and "Open the Eyes of My Heart/Ouvre les yeux/Abre mis ojos" (401) are good examples of such poetic songs. Together, these lyrics ground us in a faith that is full, living, breathing, growing, and whole. Thank you, God, for lyrics that push us past our reasons.

And so we thank you: for melodies that break open our givens

Many of us can become comfortable with words that are new to us, but we have trouble with melodies that are not familiar. We come to church rife

with givens about our melodies: ideas of what our church music should sound like, what kind of harmonies should be present, how we should learn new songs. This poem calls us to be thankful for melodies that *break open* these givens, that provide us with what we do not expect.

I see these melodies in new kinds of music. Contemporary worship music, for example, is structured differently than four part hymns; it is built around verses and choruses and follows popular music styles. Those of us that are comfortable reading sheet music often come to expect that we will be able to learn new music instantaneously, and the process of relying on aural learning can be beautifully uncomfortable. If this is a new style for people, it breaks them open and makes them vulnerable.[1] Contemporary worship songs to try include "Build My Life" (92), which has topped the Christian Copyright Licensing International Top 100 list of most accessed songs, or "Oceans/Oceanos/Tu voz me llama a las aguas" (456), which works beautifully as a song for baptisms or renewal of baptismal commitment.

We come to church rife with givens about our melodies: ideas of what our church music should sound like, what kind of harmonies should be present, how we should learn new songs.

New, long, complex four part harmony songs can be hard to read, but the process of learning them makes us students. As someone who is classically trained but happiest learning music aurally, I sympathize with those who grow impatient when a song is difficult to learn. I experienced this when sight reading "The Lord Is Risen Indeed" (357), a beloved hymn that can be daunting to read for those who are encountering it for the first time. We can meet God in this learning, humbling ourselves as we make mistakes and open ourselves to the creativity of others. Thank you, God, for melodies that break open our givens.

And so we thank you: for cadences that locate us home

After addressing lyrics and melodies that push us, stretch us, help us grow, the final step is to thank God for cadences that locate us home. When

1 For more on contemporary worship music in *Voices Together*, see "Guide to Contemporary Worship Music in *Voices Together*," by Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Darryl Neustaedter Barg, Benjamin Bergey, and Anneli Loepp Thiessen, 2021, http://voicestogetherhymnal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CWM-in-VT.pdf.

we speak, the cadence is the rhythm of our speech, recognizable to those around us. In music, however, a cadence also refers to melodic and harmonic movement that brings music to rest. These cadences can be at the end of a phrase, a section, a movement, or a whole song. No matter where it lands, it is a place where we pause or stop.

Despite all of the newness, creativity, and excitement in *Voices Together*, we also need cadences that bring us to rest. These locate us home and keep us grounded, reminding us of where we came from. There is so much new to receive in this hymnal, but there is also so much that stays the same. While there is a call to grow, there is also a call to come back to what we love.

Throughout the *Voices Together* process, we did a lot of work with heart songs, or the songs that have been with us for our whole lives. Maybe they're songs you sang at your baptism, at a wedding, at the bedside of someone you love who was dying. These songs bring us home. They draw us close to God and bring us comfort. Some of the most requested heart songs for *Voices Together* were VT #549 "Be Thou My Vision" (549) and "10,000 Reasons" (111).[2] So while we thank God for what is new and stretching, we also celebrate what is familiar and comfortable.

As you engage lyrics that push you past your reasons, melodies that break open your givens, and cadences that locate you home, I hope you will feel, see, and know God.

As you engage lyrics that push you past your reasons, melodies that break open your givens, and cadences that locate you home, I hope you will feel, see, and know God. This is a holy journey, and we do not walk it alone. If you are part of a community that adopts this hymnal, you will meet others on the journey that you did not expect to meet but who had a message you needed to hear. You may need to let go of ideas you wanted to hold on to. You will find yourselves energized, exhausted, and full of new wisdom. You will receive the most when you allow yourself to become vulnerable to what is new. My prayer is that you will push yourselves beyond your comfort zones and have soft landings when you need to come home; that you will sing the words that you might not choose but that those around you need to hear; that you will find

2 For a list of top recommended heart songs, see "Guide to Adopting Voices Together," 2020, http://voicestogetherhymnal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Guide-to-Adopting-Voices-Together-download.pdf.

the songs that others overlook but that let you feel God's presence more closely than ever.

About the author

Anneli Loepp Thiessen is a PhD student in the Interdisciplinary Music Research program at the University of Ottawa, where her research promotes an interdisciplinary musicological approach to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in music industries and music education. Her dissertation examines the influence of complementarian theology and industry practices on women's roles in the contemporary worship music industry. She has presented her research at conferences around the world and is published in several journals. She enjoys writing congregational music, particularly when it enlivens expansive images for God. Anneli was on the *Voices Together* hymnal committee and serves as co-director of Anabaptist Worship Network.

Singing with the early and medieval church through *Voices Together*

Carl Bear and Sarah Kathleen Johnson

Creating a new hymnal and worship book involves looking to the past, as well as the future.[1] When shaping the contents of *Voices Together*,[2] the committee paid special attention to some of the oldest songs and prayers in the Christian tradition—material that is post-scriptural and from before approximately 1500 when the various sixteenth-century Reformations began. The committee informally referred to these songs and resources as "pre-Reformation."

Creating a new hymnal and worship book involves looking to the past, as well as the future.

Mennonites had already done important work including pre-Reformation songs in our repertoire, particularly in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.[3] Mary Oyer compiled an analysis of this material in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.[4] *Voices Together* builds on this work.

In addition to attending to the pre-Reformation texts and tunes in previous Mennonite collections, the *Voices Together* committee and consultants compared the pre-Reformation materials being considered for publication in *Voices Together* to recently published Protestant hymnals.[5] Ongoing analysis of resources from the first 1500 years of Christian history allowed the committee to do the three following things.

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1 A previous version of this article appeared on the Menno Snapshots blog as part of a series on *Voices Together*. It is reprinted here with permission. See https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/singing-with-the-early-and-medieval-church-through-voices-together/.

2 *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

3 *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992).

4 An image of Oyer's list is available at https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/singing-with-the-early-and-medieval-church-through-voices-together/.

5 This built on existing research. See Carl Bear and Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "Medieval Hymns on Modern Lips: An Analysis of Medieval Texts and Tunes in Twenty-First-Century Protestant Hymnals," *The Hymn* 69, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 10–16.

Singing the breadth and depth of our history

First, it allowed the committee to avoid unintentionally dropping pre-Reformation songs from the collection. It was important to the committee for Mennonites to be able to sing with Christians from every time period.

In particular, there is a strong tendency among Mennonites to skip from the early church of the New Testament to the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movements that must be counteracted. Singing pre-Reformation songs reminds us that the Anabaptist tradition was deeply influenced by and connected to the previous fifteen centuries of Christian history—both the bad and the good.

Owning this history as part of *our* history is essential for robust engagement in decolonial work for justice, locally and globally. It prevents us from failing to acknowledge our complicity in the foundations of colonialism established in this era, without which the Christian tradition, including the Anabaptist tradition, would not exist in the manner it does today.

At the same time, singing early Christian and pre-Reformation songs connects Mennonites to the essential and life-giving theological insights and artistic riches of ancient and medieval Christians, across cultures, with whom we join our voices and celebrate the ways in which God has been active in the church of all ages.

Singing the gaps in our history

Second, the analysis of pre-Reformation material was used to identify significant gaps, and then to introduce additional material to fill these gaps. Unsurprisingly, one of the most notable deficiencies in the pre-Reformation repertoire was the absence of material by women. Although *Hymnal: A Worship Book* did significant work in introducing texts based on the writings of medieval mystics, this is an area where there was room for growth.[6]

One example of a song added to the pre-Reformation repertoire in *Voices Together* is "God, Grant Us Mercy" (VT 142), which Katie Graber adapted from a text and tune written by the ninth-century Byzantine abbess, Kassia. The committee also added two songs by Hildegard of Bingen, in addition to one that was retained from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, which has been paired with a new tune ("O Holy Spirit, Root of Life," VT 376).

6 Jean Janzen, "Three Women and the Lost Coin: How Three Women Found Me, 1991," in *Entering the Wild: Essays on Faith and Writing, a Memoir* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012), chapter 11.

Of particular interest, Hildegard's text, "I Am That Great and Fiery Force" (VT 663), was set to a melody also by Hildegard, which tune editor, Benjamin Bergey, adapted for congregational singing.

Singing our history in new ways

Third, this analysis allowed the committee to find new ways to sing pre-Reformation songs that could be more accessible and compelling for twenty-first-century Mennonites in the United States and Canada.

Much of this material was originally translated during the nineteenth century, and while there is a certain beauty to the Victorian poetry, there is also a significant inaccessibility in these translations for contemporary worshipers. There is no particular reason why pre-Reformation texts need to be in Victorian English, and it can often be beneficial to retranslate them into contemporary English. For example, the committee commissioned Carl Daw to retranslate Prudentius's fifth-century text, "Corde natus ex parentis," traditionally translated as "Of the Father's love begotten," which has now become "From the Parent's Heart, the Firstborn" (VT 418).

There is no particular reason why pre-Reformation texts need to be in Victorian English, and it can often be beneficial to retranslate them into contemporary English.

In addition to pursuing new translations, the committee also revised existing translations. For example, the committee wanted to include the "Gloria in excelsis," an early Christian song that is still very widely sung, but decided to address the excessively masculine language found in most English translations. The committee selected the "Gloria" from Marty Haugen's "Mass of Creation," one of the best-known musical settings of this early Christian text in North America, and revised the text with non-gendered language for God. Haugen was open to these text revisions and revised the melody of the verses to fit the new text: "Glory to God in the Highest" (VT 99).

Another way to make pre-Reformation material more accessible is to pair early Christian and medieval texts with new tunes that can make them more singable for congregations. For example, *Voices Together* includes two contemporary songs inspired by the Prayer of St. Patrick, "Christ, Be All Around Me" (VT 848) and "God, Be the Love (VT 43)." Other examples include Audrey Assad and Matt Maher's "Restless" (VT 741), based on the well-known quote from Augustine's *Confessions* (397 CE), and "Christ

is Risen" is based on the Paschal Troparion, a fifth- or sixth-century text sung at Easter in Eastern Christian traditions (VT 349).

Worshiping together across history

In addition to songs, the worship resources committee intentionally included prayers and readings from the first 1500 years of the Christian tradition. An essay in the *Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition* explores "Connecting with Past Christians in Worship":

> *Connecting with the past in worship today is a way to remember God's faithfulness to all generations. It joins our local communities with a vibrant church that has followed Jesus in many cultures and circumstances. It helps us keep the struggles of the present in perspective. Recognizing God's faithfulness throughout a history marked by constant change can free us from fearing change and fearing the future.*[7]

We encourage you to pay attention to the ascription lines at the bottom of each page, which include information about the historical and geographic context of each song and resource. Pre-Reformation songs and worship resources are also indexed under "Heritage: Before 1500" and are listed below by century. We hope you will occasionally highlight the historical context of familiar songs and resources when using them in worship and explore "new" material from this period to join in worship with the church that transcends time and space.

List of songs and worship resources from the first 1500 years of the Christian tradition

Not all the attributions below are certain, and the dates for many of these items are approximate.

2nd Century

- Didache (one of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament)
    - 477 Seed, Scattered and Sown

3rd Century

- Gloria Patri ("Glory be to the Father")

7 Sarah Kathleen Johnson, ed., *Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020), 202.

        - 429 Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me
        - 430 Sing with Joy to the Author / Glory Be to the Father
    - Phos hilaron (early Christian evening hymn)
        - 504 Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory

4th Century

- Ambrose of Milan
    - 214 Savior of the Nations, Come!
    - 500 O Splendor of God's Glory Bright
- Anthony of Egypt
    - 1030 Grow us slowly
- Aurelius Clemens Prudentius
    - 418 From the Parent's Heart, the Firstborn (Corde natus ex parentis)
- Gloria in excelsis ("Glory to God in the highest")
    - 99 Glory to God in the Highest
- Kyrie eleison ("Lord, have mercy")
    - 147 Kyrie eleison
    - 282 Come and See
    - 614 Lord, Have Mercy
    - 615 Christ, Have Mercy (ASL)
    - 620 Oré poriajú verekó (Kyrie eleison)
    - 651 Lord, Have Mercy
    - 678 Kyrie eleison
    - 686 Let Us Pray
    - 692 Kyrie eleison
    - 693 Khudaya, rahem kar (Have Mercy on Us, Lord)
    - 742 Way way way
    - 795 Kyrie eleison
    - 796 Kyrie eleison, Have Mercy
- Te Deum ("We praise you, O God")
    - 126 Holy God, We Praise Thy Name
- Creeds
    - 433 I Believe in God Almighty
    - 923 Apostles' Creed
    - 924 Nicene Creed

- Early Communion Prayers
    - 314 Holy Lord
    - 438 Christ Has Died, Christ Is Risen
    - 460 From North and South, from East and West
    - 944 Communion Prayer—Inspired by Early Christian Practice

5th Century

- Augustine of Hippo
    - 741 Restless
    - 858 Come, Holy One
    - 998 Everlasting God, in whom we live and move
- Brigid of Kildare
    - 958 House Blessing
- Patrick of Ireland
    - 43 God, Be the Love
    - 848 Christ, Be All around Me
- Liturgy of St. James (early Christian liturgical text from Jerusalem)
    - 65 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
- Trisagion ("Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us")
    - 709 Agios o Theos (Holy, Holy, Holy God)

6th Century

- Gregory the Great
    - 305 The Glory of These Forty Days
- Romanos the Melodist
    - 907 Christ–the Joy
- Venantius Fortunatus
    - 331 Sing, My Tongue, the Song of Triumph / PANGE LINGUA
- Byzantine Greek
    - 349 Christ Is Risen
    - 875 Alleluia! Christ is risen!
- Medieval Latin
    - 360 Who Are These

7th Century

- Agnus Dei ("Lamb of God...")
  - 151 Lamb of God / Cordero de Dios
  - 321 Ya hamala Allah (O Lamb of God)
  - 707 Dona nobis pacem
  - 892 Jesus, Lamb of God
- Medieval Latin
  - 4 Christ Is Our Cornerstone

8th Century

- Alcuin
  - 554 Eternal Light, Shine in My Heart
  - 860 Almighty God, to you all hearts are open
  - 983 Eternal Strength, hold us
- John of Damascus
  - 348 Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain
- Venerable Bede
  - 363 Sing We Triumphant Hymns
- O Antiphons (Advent antiphons for the days leading up to Christmas)
  - 210 O Come, O Come, Immanuel
- Ubi caritas ("Where charity and love are, God is there")
  - 392 The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound
  - 492 Ubi caritas (Where True Love) / UBI CARITAS
  - 773 Ubi caritas et amor
- Medieval Irish
  - 549 Be Thou My Vision

9th Century

- Kassia
  - 142 God, Grant Us Mercy / O PHARISEOS
- Rabanus Maurus
  - 53 O Holy Spirit, by Whose Breath / VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS
- Theodulph of Orleans
  - 315 All Glory, Laud, and Honor
- Medieval Latin
  - 138 Christ, We Do All Adore Thee
  - 236 Creator of the Stars of Night / CONDI-

TOR ALME SIDERUM
- 905 May almighty God have mercy on us

10th Century
- In paradisum (from the Requiem)
  - 671 The Hand of God Shall Hold You
- Medieval Latin
  - 54 Kindle in Us Your Love
  - 58 Holy Spirit, Come to Us
- Medieval Chant
  - 418 DIVINUM MYSTERIUM

11th Century
- Sarum Primer
  - 999 God be in my head
- Victimae paschali (Easter sequence)
  - 358 Christ Is Arisen / CHRIST IST ERSTANDEN
  - 463 Christ Jesus Lay

12th Century
- Hildegard of Bingen
  - 55 O Fiery Spirit
  - 376 O Holy Spirit, Root of Life
  - 663 I Am That Great and Fiery Force / DE SPIRITU SANCTO
  - 900 Most loving, most strong God
- Isaac of Stella
  - 1057 May the Son of God
- Yigdal (Jewish doxology)
  - 204 Praise to the Living God

13th Century
- Clare of Assisi
  - 1062 Live without fear
- Francis of Assisi
  - 81 All Creatures, Worship God Most High
  - 713 Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace
  - 991 God, make me an instrument of your peace
- Thomas Aquinas

        - 459 Let the Hungry Come to Me / ADORO TE DEVOTE
    - Stabat Mater (song of Mary's sorrows at the crucifixion)
        - 328 Mary, Woman Weeping
    - Medieval Latin
        - 325 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
        - 370 Veni Sancte Spiritus
    - Medieval Chant
        - 500 SPLENDOR PATERNAE
    - Medieval Spanish
        - 579 COMO PODEN PER SAS CULPAS

14th Century

- Julian of Norwich
    - 426 Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth
    - 586 All Will Be Well
    - 676 On Silken, Soft Wings
- Medieval German
    - 260 PERSONENT HODIE
    - 261 Good Christian Friends, Rejoice / IN DULCI JUBILO

15th Century

- Jean Tisserand
    - 342 That Easter Morn, at Break of Day / O FILII ET FILIAE
- Thomas à Kempis
    - 303 O Love, How Deep, How Broad
- Medieval Chant
    - 210 VENI EMMANUEL
- Medieval English
    - 303 & 363 DEO GRACIAS
- Medieval French
    - 287 & 353 NOËL NOUVELET
- Medieval German
    - 216 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming / ES IST EIN ROS'
    - 427 PUER NOBIS NASCITUR

About the authors

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Sarah Kathleen Johnson is a visiting assistant professor of theology and worship and Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow at Vancouver School of Theology and St. Mark's College at the University of British Columbia. She was the worship resources editor for *Voices Together* and is the chair of the TogetherInWorship.net leadership team. Sarah holds a PhD in Theology from the University of Notre Dame and master's degrees with a focus on worship from Yale Divinity School and Conrad Grebel University College. She is originally from Waterloo, Ontario.

Voices together

The work of including resources related to Indigenous communities

Katie Graber

When *Hymnal: A Worship Book* was published in 1992,[1] it contained both familiar and new songs.[2] The new worship and song collection, *Voices Together*, also includes songs from past and present, and from around the world in a variety of languages and musical styles.[3] One of many streams of content the committee cared for is Indigenous languages and voices. We incorporated worship resources such as prayers emerging from Indigenous Christian contexts and readings that address the history of colonialism and movement toward reconciliation, such as a territorial acknowledgment.[4] *Voices Together* also includes Indigenous song: tunes, texts, and translations. These worship elements are an important aspect of recognizing the diversity of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, and of acknowledging our Christian and colonial history in North America.

In the late 1800s, scholars in the United States and Canada began to "collect" and "preserve" songs and traditions of Indigenous groups. While there were some noble reasons for these projects, they were also very much tied up with power and control. For example, the US government funded research on songs, linguistics, and kinship systems at the same time they were prohibiting rituals, disallowing Indigenous languages

1 A previous version of this article appeared on the Menno Snapshots blog as part of a series on *Voices Together*. It is reprinted here with permission. See https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/voices-together-the-work-of-including-indigenous-voices-perspectives-and-ways-of-worship-in-the-new-mennonite-worship-and-song-collection/.

2 *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992).

3 *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020).

4 For examples in *Voices Together*, see the Topics and Uses in Worship Index under the entry "Indigenous Communities: Resources Related to." For examples beyond *Voices Together*, see the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition's worship resources at https://dofdmenno.org/land-acknowledgement/, and resources from KAIROS, an ecumenical group in Canada, at https://www.kairoscanada.org/territorial-acknowledgment.

in schools, and allotting land to intentionally break up tribal units. These goals and outcomes cannot be disentangled from one another. Today, there are initiatives to return ritual objects and human remains to their rightful locations and communities, but in the midst of these efforts, sacred songs cannot simply be taken home. There are histories of elders being reluctant, or even refusing, to teach songs to ethnomusicologists because they understood this reality. Digitized recordings from the 1890s and beyond attest both to this collecting and to the gaps where songs were not given.[5] In Canada, a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2008 to document the impacts of Indian Residential Schools funded by the federal government and operated by churches for the purpose of stripping Indigenous children of their language and culture, an act of "cultural genocide." Many church bodies, including Anabaptist Church Leaders, have formally apologized for their involvement.[6] The 2015 final report includes ninety-four calls to action, including calls specifically for churches.[7] This is one small step in an ongoing and multifaceted journey between Indigenous peoples and Settlers in Canada. As central practices in the faith and life of Mennonite communities, worship and music must be considered in relation to this history and the work of reconciliation.

The *Voices Together* committee sought to be intentional and respectful about including songs from Indigenous communities.

In light of this context, the *Voices Together* committee sought to be intentional and respectful about including songs from Indigenous communities. We worked to engage Indigenous Mennonite people and congregations to learn more about their worship practices and how they would like their music to be represented in a denominational publication. For example, a Vital Worship Grant allowed several committee members to travel

5 See, for example, the Library of Congress collection Omaha Indian Music at https://www.loc.gov/collections/omaha-indian-music/articles-and-essays/omaha-indian-music-album-booklet/omaha-indian-music/.

6 See, for example, the March 2014 statement of Anabaptist church leaders from Edmonton, Alberta, at https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/ontario/documents/statement_of_anabaptist_church_leaders_to_the_trc_march_30_2014.pdf.

7 *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (public domain, 2015), 139–317; https://web.archive.org/web/20200430162813/http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf.

to White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church to hear about their history and participate in worship.[8] We also consulted Cheyenne and Navajo songbooks used by Mennonite congregations, as well as ecumenical worship resources. Additionally, we had personal, phone, or video meetings with Steve Heinrichs from MC Canada Indigenous-Settler Relations,[9] Mennonite pastors who have Indigenous constituents, and representatives of other denominations (including the United Church of Canada and Anglican Church of Canada) who have engaged similar questions of how Settlers should or shouldn't sing and worship with Indigenous communities.

In addition to important questions about ethics and representation, the committee also considered whether a tune and text is accessible to non-Indigenous singers. If a song's rhythms appear difficult, or if the range is wide, some congregations may be reticent to try it. We hope that singers have the grace to try new songs with open minds, knowing that each song is meaningful to someone else and has the potential to be meaningful to them as well. Our goal was to create a worship and song collection that allows people to raise their voices together and meet one another as creations of God—and therefore to be bound to work for peace and justice with and for one another. In this way, perhaps, we can experience a divine presence that is larger than any of our individual and group identities.

About the author

Katie Graber is an ethnomusicologist who studies race and ethnicity in a variety of contexts, including Mennonite music, American music, and European opera. She teaches classes on Western music history and world music at the Ohio State University and leads singing at her church in Columbus, Ohio. Katie co-directs the Anabaptist Worship Network and chaired the intercultural worship committee for the *Voices Together* project.

8 For a video from White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym3lj4k8umI. See also Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone's contribution to the article "The gifts of global music in Mennonite Church USA," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 45–50, https://press.palni.org/ojs/index.php/vision/article/view/73/41.

9 See https://mennonitechurch.ca/indigenous.

Call and response

A sermon on 2 Kings 22–23

Jonathan Dueck

Retelling Josiah's story

Josiah, son of Amon, was eight years old and only just recently king.[1] All around him were ghosts of the end of Amon, hallways where the people of the land had surprised and killed the servants, the large and sunny front room in their family house where the servants beforehand, in their turn, had surprised and killed Amon. Josiah didn't know why. He just stood there, eight years old, in the middle of it all, as the new servants and other people moved around him like a wheel around its hub. He just stood there watching.

As ten years pass, Josiah thinks on the meaning of all of this, as he changes from boy to young man. What accounts for this violence? What are those who made this happen seeking? What is his own purpose here?

The law sounds like fire, like a bell, like a seed breaking its hull.

When Josiah is eighteen comes the magic, transforming moment. Josiah sends payment to those who have rebuilt the temple with his secretary, Shaphan, one who possesses the (at this time) esoteric ability to read, to decipher. When Shaphan gets to the temple, the high priest hands him a book. "I have found the book of the law here in the temple," the priest says (2 Kings 22:8). Surely some carpenter or stonemason found it and handed it to the high priest. But here it is, the great speech of Moses, from before there were kings.

Shaphan returns and reads the book, its words transforming Shaphan's voice, echoing around the room. The law sounds like fire, like a bell, like a seed breaking its hull.

1 This sermon, originally titled "Call and response: A living tradition is a bending tradition," was written for and preached at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

As Josiah hears it, he knows its truth. He understands that the people have not followed its commandments, that his father did not honor this covenant. He stands up from his chair as he listens, and then he tears his clothes. The secretary and the priest travel to meet Huldah, a prophetess somewhere in the retinue of the king. And she confirms Josiah's understanding: the covenant with YHWH God has been broken, and disaster is coming—but not yet, and peace can be made meantime because Josiah has heard and understood in his heart the words of the law as a call, a story that writes him.

Josiah calls the priests and the people together to the temple, and the book of the law is read—its words rolling across time and calling king and people to covenant. Listen to the words: "The King stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to *perform* the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant" (2 Kings 23:3).

This story is powerful because of the way the book of the law appears as a kind of actor, as a numinous and living presence that, when sounded, tells us who we are.

This story is the one I remember from childhood. This is the 2 Kings account. This is a powerful story for me, first of all, because it's just such a good story, one like many children's stories, in which the parents early disappear so that the children can become the main characters, and in which they turn out to have a destiny. But second, it's powerful because of the way the book of the law appears as a kind of actor, as a numinous and living presence that, when sounded, tells us who we are, who we have been all these years, and it can do that *because* it tells us who God is. The sounding of it is not inconsequential here either.

For me as a child—and I think for many Mennonites here in Winnipeg and Manitoba—the story encapsulates the magical way in which words live when sounded, in which words on a page are always also the performance of those words, and those are sometimes also the moment of numinous and revealing encounter in which we find ourselves in a story, where it comes from, where we come from, where we are going. Text, tradition, and trajectory.

Following this moment in the Kings account, though, comes a text that I do not remember from childhood: the destruction of the cult and people of Baal. Some of this is of totems, signs, and places. Here are sacred poles; Josiah pulls them down. Here are heavy golden images of animals and people, the bones of offerings in front of them. Light fire to the building and watch as the gold melts and runs down the steps. But some of this destruction is, eventually, of people. The priests of these images are in hiding. When they are found, they are killed in spectacular and symbolic fashion, and their ghosts are added to the chorus of revenants in the city.

I feel a sharp tension between the beautiful and numinous first part of Josiah's story and the violent exscription—the writing-out of people from history—of the second part.

In the Chronicles version of this account, these things happen before the discovery of the book of the law; they appear as a necessary precursor to the restoration and repair of the temple of YHWH, where the priest finds the book of the law.

There is something contemporary in this second part of the account. An origin story authorizes violence that is ethnocentric or even genocidal. This turn in the story reminds me of the larger critique that Palestinian theologian Naim Ateek offers of the Old Testament narrative—that its claims to land authorize a genocidal relationship to the people already inhabiting that land.

As a Mennonite Christian person at this moment in history, I feel a sharp tension between the beautiful and numinous first part of Josiah's story and the violent exscription—the writing-out of people from history—of the second part. The larger political landscape in this moment, in Canada and abroad, is part of this tension for me. *We need to know who we are and where we come from. Our relationships with each other and with the land depend on that understanding.*

But people are casting and deploying stories of where we come from in such rigid and damaging ways; I think of walls in Israel-Palestine, or of anti-Semitic violence in US cities, or of the former US president's fantasy of a wall to keep out poor Catholic migrants, or of Quebec where "old stock" Quebecers are being counterposed to Muslim newcomers (mirroring similar dynamics in France), or of the Doctrine of Discovery in Cana-

da and the United States, which we are only now addressing in a tenuous moment of reconciliation.

Telling Harold's story

I want to place a story next to Josiah's story that, for me, resonates with the numinous discovery of where we come from and that also helps to open up the story of where we are going and who we are becoming. I'm not trying to offer an exegesis of the Josiah story here to find out what it meant at the time. Instead I'm trying to pull it together with the story of another person in whom I've encountered God, to see where we end up.

The story is of my friend Harold Anderson. Imagine the sound of him playing bass: sitting with his huge string bass in front of him, eyes closed, head back, plucking the strings and sliding his hands up and down the neck of the instrument, the long slow delay of the sound making us realize the space we are sharing together.

Harold was a composer, an ethnomusicologist, my doctoral advisee and also my own teacher in many ways, a fellow bike rider and walker, and a grandparent-like presence for my children Anna and Ben in our town of Greenbelt. He recently died of cancer, and to me it is a magical and hopeful thing to remember his bass playing here, becoming present to me, to us, like words spoken from a page found dusty, long unopened, and now living in the moving air.

Harold was a composer, an ethnomusicologist, my doctoral advisee and also my own teacher in many ways, a fellow bike rider and walker, and a grandparent-like presence for my children.

Harold was African American. He grew up in Cleveland. His family was Catholic. He attended St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, a great books school where each professor must be able to speak Latin and to teach mathematics and music and rhetoric. Two of my doctoral students at the University of Maryland, both African American men who were jazz and experimental music performers and scholars, had done their undergraduate work at St. John's College.

Harold played jazz and blues in the eastern United States. He was a virtuoso bassist and a composer and was known by many prominent jazz players—people like Chick Corea.

Harold was a traveler. He lived in New Zealand for many years, where he held the position of Mozart Fellow in composition at the University

of Otago. Otago and New Zealand are interesting to me. On the Canadian passport you can see the symbols of the French and English flanking a central heraldic device. On the New Zealand passport you can see the symbols of the English and Maori, the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand, flanking a central heraldic device. Otago is a place where Maoritanga, the knowledge of Maori traditions, language, and things, is important.

One of the kinds of Maori performance is called *whakapapa,* and it is like the genealogies in the Bible: it tells the story of where the singer comes from.

Harold became friends with a number of Maori musicians and began to study their music and traditions seriously. There was mutual learning about identities, where Harold's Maori friends learned in a particular way what African American people might be like, beyond what is present in media, and where Harold began to learn what Maori people were like. This happened as much through musical performance and the making of new music together as anything else, and this was a connection that would continue all Harold's life.

Harold returned to the United States later and became an ethnographic fieldworker, working with many communities but especially with African American communities in the East. His work was featured in the Smithsonian Folklife festival. And through proximity—and because I was young and ready to learn from my students—he became my doctoral advisee at the University of Maryland.

Harold wrote about what he learned from Maori people in his doctoral work with me and composed music about it. Harold wanted to understand how *traditions* related to *people*. Maori people retell their stories through music, and they bring people into and out of the "known," the "related-to-our community," through music.

One of the kinds of Maori performance is called *whakapapa*, and it is like the genealogies in the Bible: it tells the story of where the singer comes from, mapping out a network of ancestors whose stories are also where the singer comes from.

Harold later put together a project called "Songs stories tell" that drew together Maori and African American music. That title, *Songs stories tell,* reminds me of whakapapa. In whakapapa, the singer is already emplaced in a story. The story calls out a song in the singer. The singer must embody the story. It's like the first part of the story of Josiah, where

the words exist before Josiah, and when found, they must be embodied in sound. They must ring out, traveling through our bodies physically, emplacing us.

Harold also taught me about another genre of Maori music, a chant called a *haka*, usually performed by men who make a set of aggressive ritual gestures and whirl and stab with a wooden spear called a *taiaha*. Most likely you have seen pictures of this kind of performance; it's the most well-known, even iconic, kind of Maori performance, and has been popularized by the All Blacks rugby team.

Haka is often performed at the opening of events. When it is performed at the beginning of an All Blacks game, it sounds like an aggressive message to the other team: *Our tradition is power! This is our territory!*

But Harold told me what work the haka is doing, and it is surprising. We went together to the Festival of First Americans, a giant festival of world Indigenous peoples on the Washington Mall. African Americans from Louisiana walked by in long Plains Indigenous headdresses. A Cree rap group from Alberta called War Party performed, deep bass booming. We stopped at a stage of Maori men with a virtuosic performance of taiaha and haka—this all was at the beginning of the festival, on its first day.

The powhiri ceremony is performed when outsiders meet the Maori of the local place, and the work it does is to move those outsiders from a status of tapu (not known) to noa (known).

Harold told me that a haka is also part of a ceremony called a *powhiri*. In the powhiri, the dances, taiaha and haka, are indeed demarcating territory. They are, at first, separating what is known from what is not known. What is known is called *noa*, and what is not known is called *tapu*, which is where the English word *taboo* derives. The powhiri ceremony is performed when outsiders, people from another place, meet the Maori of the local place, and the work it does is to move those outsiders from a status of tapu (not known) to noa (known). The demarcation of difference is part of a ceremony that in the end invites the outsiders into a status that is known within a tradition.

Songs stories tell

I have been talking about Josiah's first moment of encountering the law as a "songs stories tell" moment—a moment of being called bodily into a tradition.

The way Harold read and understood Maori music reminds me of New Testament biblical narratives of calling into a tradition. It reminds me of the stories of the calling of the apostles. It reminds me the missionary journeys of Paul and the situation of the early church.

When Jesus calls the apostles—a call, a greeting, a sounded, full-bodied invitation—they join him, and together they form a new community that articulates a new moment in a long trajectory of tradition, a tradition in which covenant is extended.

Then Paul extends this call into covenant further into Hellenic, Greek-speaking Judaism and presses toward the outskirts of this community and past them. In so doing, the community itself is changed, and its narratives are changed.

The way we read and know the longer story of the People of God, including the Old Testament, comes also from these more recent Greek traditions, words, sounds, narrative and philosophical forms—all of which became part of the expanding trajectory of covenant in the New Testament.

A living body, a living voice, surprises us with its bending, with the sometimes shocking, sometimes beautiful forms it can take, yet remaining whole.

When a tradition changes, when it expands radically, we are left to ask these questions: Is it no longer a tradition? Are the origins of the tradition damaged, replaced, displaced? Does it risk meaninglessness? What happens when a covenant, through expanding, draws into itself ways of thinking that traverse back through the tradition to its origins, reimagining them? What happens when a tradition, like a dancing body or performing voice, bends with life?

Reflecting on my long conversations with Harold about Mennonites, Maori people, African American people, and music, I think that bending of this kind shows the presence of life and therefore, for me as a Christian, of God. A living reed bends, and when it pulls upright, its shape is forever changed a little, but it is still a reed. A living body, a living voice, surprises us with its bending, with the sometimes shocking, sometimes

beautiful forms it can take, yet remaining whole. A living covenant bends like a rainbow, like the hull of a boat, like the arc of a story or song.

We sing the songs that Scripture's stories tell.

Scripture reminds us where we come from and what our purpose is in ways that invite us to embody its narratives.

When our churches and communities join or are joined by people who seem distant, from a far religious or national or ethnic or gendered shore, we need not fear. Instead we need to invite, to respond to invitation, to become known, to bend.

Where do we come from and where are we going? From life to life, bending along the way.

About the author

Jonathan Dueck is vice president academic, academic dean, and associate professor of ethnomusicology at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He previously taught at George Washington University, Duke University, the University of Maryland, and the University of Alberta. He is a founding co-editor of *Prompt*, a journal of innovative writing-in-the-disciplines assignments and teaching reflections, coeditor of the *Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities* (2016), author of *Congregational Music, Conflict, and Community* (2017, Routledge) and *Performing Basketball* (Oxford, under contract), and has published articles in *Ethnomusicology*, the *Journal of American Folklore*, and *Popular Music and Society*.