

*In memory of Dr. Paul Bunjes
(1914-1998)*

The Wittenberg Psalter

Sola Dei Gloria

About The Wittenberg Psalter

The Wittenberg Psalter is a collection of unison psalm settings for congregation, choir, and/or soloist that uses the abridged texts of the psalms as found in *Christian Worship*. Many of the Chorale-Tones, the musical portion of this psalter, are based upon historic melodies that were composed or adapted for use at the time of the reformation of the church or shortly thereafter. Several are by Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546). In contrast to the psalms in *Christian Worship*, these psalm settings are sung without a refrain.

The starting point for this project was the monumental work of the sainted Dr. Paul Bunjes. Dr. Bunjes made a scholarly study of the characteristics of the English language in order to develop a musical form that was specifically designed to carry an English text. After the publication of *The Service Propers Noted* in 1960, Dr. Bunjes published an explanatory monograph, *The Formulary Tones Annotated* in 1965. The book offers the reader a detailed explanation of the principles employed in setting English texts to Formulary Tones. This book provided invaluable insight and guidance in the development of these new tones and in the setting of the sacred texts of the psalms to these melodies.

One of Dr. Bunjes' four objectives was the catalyst of The Wittenberg Psalter: "To incorporate into the Tones, as occasion might permit, musical elements from the existing culture of the church, not only ancient and medieval, but modern as well." Dr. Bunjes discreetly incorporated musical phrases from various chorales in some of his twelve Formulary Tones. Rather than incorporating only an occasional musical phrase, the tones in the Wittenberg Psalter make use of as much melodic material as possible from these cherished melodies. The idea was to celebrate our Lutheran musical heritage by using portions of these chorale melodies in a transparent manner utilizing a different musical form.

The Musical Form

Chorale-Tones are formulaic, flexible melodies consisting of three main musical components (intonation, reciting tone, and cadence), and two occasional elements (the pivot-note and the added-note.)

The **Intonation** is a two or three note phrase that establishes the key and pace of the psalm. It also serves as a springboard, leading the singer to the initial, strong beat on the first word on the reciting tone. Dr. Bunjes employed an intonation only at the beginning of the tone. Chorale-Tones have at least two intonations, at the beginning and in the middle. One Chorale-Tone has four intonations with an intonation preceding the reciting tone in each phrase.

Some Chorale-Tones include a **Pivot-Note**. Pivot-notes are to be found between the reciting tone and the cadence. The pivot-note is a musical extension of the reciting tone and serves as a bridge between these two elements. Its purpose is to allow even more of the original tune to be employed in the chant tone.

Intonation Reciting Tone Medial Cadence

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,

The **Reciting Tone** gives these melodies the flexibility to accommodate psalm verses of varying lengths. In some cases when the verse of a psalm is rather short, the text is notated completely. (See example below.)

Cadences vary in length but always begin on an accented syllable. Some cadences have more than one accent. These accents are indicated in the score. Generally the terminal cadences are longer and more elaborate than the medial cadences.

Breath Mark

Terminal Cadence

I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, / my God in whom I trust."

Added-Note (+)

You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day.

Some Chorale-Tones employ an **Added-Note**. These are indicated in the score with a (+) sign. Added-notes are included occasionally to resolve textual issues.

Singing the Wittenberg Psalmody

Although these settings use standard notation (eighth notes, quarter notes, whole notes, etc.) these musical conventions should not be interpreted literally. This is especially true of the reciting tones, which are notated with whole notes. Natural speech rhythm should be the guiding principle that governs the singing of the psalms. Care should be taken to avoid galloping through the text on the reciting tone. An unnatural slowing or hesitation at the cadence should also be avoided. It is a rather lame analogy, but chant should be the opposite of road racing. On the track drivers accelerate on the straight portions and brake when they get to the turns. In chant, care needs to be taken that the words on the straight (the words on the reciting tone) are sung rather deliberately without speeding up, and that the words at the turn (the cadence) increase their pace slightly.

Breath marks are indicated with a (/). These may not be the only places where a breath is desirable. There may be other places where the meaning of the text and its length suggest an extra breath.

A brief full stop between the end of the Gloria and the beginning of the Amen is desirable. This is indicated in the scores.

Printing the Wittenberg Psalter

A full score for the organist and two forms of the vocal score are included for each psalm setting.

The full score is in PDF form and was formatted to be printed on U.S. Letter paper (8.5" x 11") The margin notes (**L**) for leader and (**C**) for congregation become relevant when the psalm is sung in alternation. These designations match the directions on Form B of the vocal score. These margin notes should be ignored when the entire psalm is sung by the congregation or some other vocal group.

The vocal scores are in PDF form. Form A is the full vocal score without designations. Form B is intended for antiphonal singing of the psalm. Vocal Scores A and B are formatted to be printed on half-legal paper (8.5" x 7"). Vocal Scores C and D are exactly the same as Forms A and B, but have formatted to be printed U.S. Letter paper (8.5" x 11").

Introducing these Settings to the Congregation

The Wittenberg Psalter settings may be sung by a soloist or a choir. However, from the outset, it was intended that these settings be sung by the congregation. These psalm settings are more elaborate than their *Christian Worship* counterparts, but their tunefulness and layout (words and music closely linked) makes them reasonably accessible.

Introducing a new musical form to a congregation requires thoughtful planning in order to help ensure success and avoid distaste and disgruntlement.

Guiding Principles

1. Although most people will be quick to say, “I don’t read music,” the truth is that most people do read music. They may not be able to identify intervals or triads, but they can tell whether the melody is rising or falling,, whether the notes are high or low, and whether the notes are going stepwise or skipping about. They also are able to tell whether a word is sung on one note or two or three. It is essential that the congregation be supplied with the vocal score. Supplying text without music will invite failure.
2. Lengthy explanations (like this document) are not particularly useful when introducing new music to a congregation. Having a well-prepared individual or individuals model the singing of the settings is preferred over verbal explanations. There is truth in the old maxim, “Chant is caught, not taught.” Having the psalm beautifully sung by a choir or soloist is the best way to insure success. Congregations instinctively imitate what they hear. Thus, imitation is the best way to teach the settings to people.

A Plan of Implementation

Until the practice of singing these settings is well established, it is probably best to think in terms of a Psalm of the Season or part of a season rather than a Psalm of the Day.

Step One A choir or soloist sings the psalm with the congregation invited to join the choir/soloist for the singing of the Gloria at the conclusion of the psalm. If you have the sense that the congregation was ill at ease, repeat this step next week instead of proceeding to the next part of the plan. Use Form A or C for this step.

Step Two The psalm is sung in alternation using Form B or D of the vocal score. Doing this step for at least two weeks is recommended. Again, if the response is muted, add another week or two to this step.

Step Three Invite the congregation to sing the entire psalm using Form A or C.

After repeating the implementation plan for a couple of settings, perhaps the plan can be abbreviated since the basic musical form of the Wittenberg settings will now be familiar to the congregation. When in doubt, proceed slowly and patiently.

Playing the Wittenberg Psalter Psalms

These settings have been prepared with the organ in mind. The organ is ideally suited for this type of music. However, they can be played on a piano or electronic keyboard as well.

A small plenum without mixtures (8' and 4' principals with perhaps a 2' flute) with pedal to balance is a good starting point for accompanying the congregation. Flutes (8' and 4') might be used for the soloist and/ or choir. If the choir is fairly large, a small 4' principal might be used instead of the 4' flute. Every situation and virtually every organ are different, so these registrational ideas may not fit every circumstance. They are offered only as suggestions.

When playing in alternation between the choir/soloist and the congregation it works best to play the choir's portion on the Swell manual and use the Great with Pedal for the congregational part. However, some of the settings may require pedal to smoothly play the four-part texture. One solution is to have the Pedal balance with the Swell registration and add the Great to Pedal when moving to the Great manual. Another possibility is to use just one manual with two different registrations and simply change registration when required.

When preparing these psalm settings it is really important for the organist to sing as well as play. However, when they accompany the congregation in the service, the organist should only mouth the words and listen to the singing of the congregation.

When accompanying a choir or soloist, a brief introduction might be used beginning with the first intonation and concluding on the first reciting tone. That should be enough to establish key and pace. When accompanying the congregation, it is recommended to play through the entire Chorale-Tone initiating the timing as it would be played for the first verse of the psalm.

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In Conclusion

There are many ways of singing the psalms. These settings are simply another resource which for use in some situations. They may not be appropriate for every congregation. However, it is hoped that the Wittenberg Psalter might enliven the congregation's singing of the psalms and lay the Word of God close to the hearts of God's people. Filled with the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit may the people, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the LORD, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. 5: 19-20)

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