AGO Certification Exams Psalm Preparation Resource for the Service Playing Certificate

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Companion to the Examination Hymn Booklet 2023

Prepared by the Committee on Professional Certification

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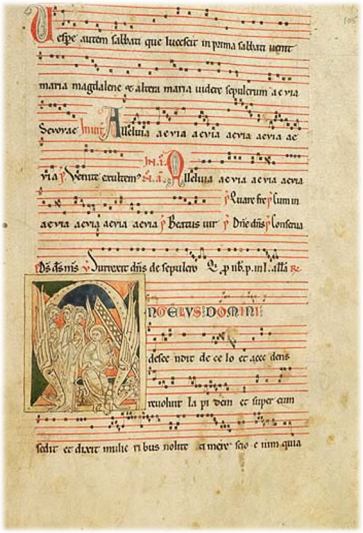
PREPARING THE PSALM QUESTION

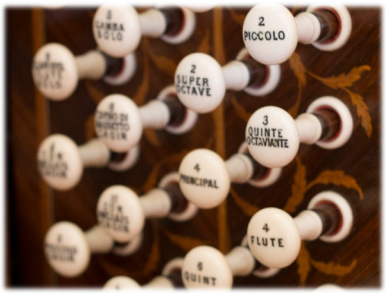
INTRODUCTION



There is a long and rich history of singing the Psalms in a variety of religious traditions. The earliest Psalm tones were passed down through an oral tradition before musical notation was developed. Gregorian chants and plainsong melodies advanced with a rudimentary notation system. Metrical psalters, Anglican chant psalters, simplified Anglican chants, composed psalm tones, and responsorial psalms are part of a healthy practice of psalm singing in modern times. Psalms singing is made more accessible to congregations and choirs when accompanied by the organ.

Preparing for the Service Playing Exam gives candidates an opportunity to expand their Psalm accompanying and chanting skills. Regardless of denomination, the information published in the following pages will help you come to a better understanding of the various aspects of the sung Psalm.

Service Playing Exam candidates are **required** to use a singer for the Psalm question and the Vocal solo on the exams. The Committee on Professional Certification is eager to help all candidates achieve their best effort on this part of the exam. The articles in this document obtained from the various sources of the Psalms included in the **2023 Examination Hymn Booklet.** The committee wants to encourage a deeper understanding in the accompaniment of Psalms.



Preparation

Take time to *rehearse with your singer* for both the Solo and the Psalm. If your singer is inexperienced in singing Psalms, you may need to guide them. Even experienced singers benefit from helpful feedback enabling them to do their best with the process. When the singer brings competent preparation combined with prior rehearsal to the SPC exam, everyone feels the benefits.

First, *Psalms are poetry*. The singer and the candidate should prepare by saying the text aloud, recognizing the inherent rhythms and syllabic emphases of the text. The AGO Committee on Professional Certification is aware of the various methods of chanting, but ***for the purpose of unity in grading, the use of speech rhythm or sprung rhythm is expected*** in performance of the Psalm question. Next, chanting the text on a single tone will allow the pacing and rhythmic cadence of the Psalm to be practiced without having to be concerned with notes and melodies.

Then the *tones should be memorized*. With Simplified Anglican, St. Martin's Psalter, and the two Lutheran chants in the **2023 Examination Hymn Booklet**, the tones of the chants are in symmetrical lengths. After learning them with *solfeggio,* or whatever method is easiest for you, a very effective way to memorize them, to become familiar with the chant, is to number the tones and sing them in two halves, numbering forward and then backward. For example, the Simplified Anglican Chant is eight tones in length; sing: 1-2, 3-4, 4-3, 2-1. These are not beats, they are simply the tones in order. Using this forward/backwards pattern helps the brain remember each pitch in its proper order and knowing location within the chant when putting different numbers of syllables and syllabic emphases of text with the tones.

Sing the text with the tones to practice putting each syllable where it belongs in the same pacing used when chanting on a single tone. (Except for the antiphons of Gelineau and Guimont settings, there is no written rhythmic value.) Open notes (printed as half or whole, or stemless half notes) *are meant to be reciting tones to facilitate two or more syllables*, and closed notes (stemless filled notes, quarters, or eights) are to be divided among remaining syllables in the phrase using either speech rhythm of free chant or what Robert Batastini, in his instructive preface to *Arise, Come to Your God* by Joseph Gelineau, calls "sprung rhythm." Next, *identify key words* that are either rhythmically or interpretively important that deserve special emphasis. Emphasis can be achieved not only through accent, but by dynamic level (louder or softer than surrounding words), length of syllable(s), or spacing from words before or after the key word.

Rehearsal

After both candidate and singer are proficient with intoning the Psalm on its chant tones, it's time to rehearse together. Agree on how to start. There are varying practices as to whether the organ is used as a direct accompaniment instrument or as a background sound. In either method, it is easiest for the organist to play a chord for the beginning of the verses with the singer coming purposely *afterward* when ready. Organ tone may be either continued or stopped when the singer breathes, and the organist can either break at ends of verses or go directly to the first chord to repeat the chant tune. Make these decisions in consultation with the singer and be consistent! *Remember that text is paramount in all decisions*, especially registration. It is effective to *vary the registration with mood and subject matter* of the text, but not to distraction from the text or in any way that would be overpowering or less than supportive of the singer.

Eric Birk, FAGO (April, 2024)

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Performing the Gelineau Psalms

Sprung Rhythm

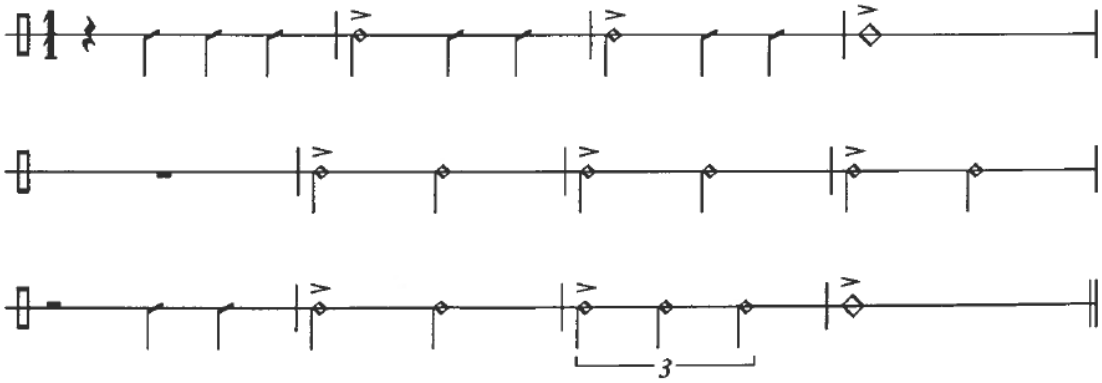
In order to realize the full beauty and potential of this system of chanting the psalms, one must remain faithful to the established performance practices. This, among other things, requires an understanding of the principle of sprung rhythm. Gelineau defined this approach as falling somewhere between free chant (in which all rhythm is determined by the flow of the text) and metrical psalmody (in which, like a hymn, the rhythm of every syllable is fixed by the melody).

Sprung rhythm implies a regular pattern of stresses (accented syllables) in each line of text making up the strophe (stanza). Examples would include the common pattern of four lines of three stresses each (e.g., Ps. 47), or alternating lines of threes and twos (Ps. 42). Some psalms include stanzas of varied lengths (e.g., assorted stanzas of four, five, and six lines—but with each line maintaining a consistent stress pattern). Phrases of the psalm tone are sometimes repeated to accommodate the extra lines. In other instances, the tone itself may have six phrases, and there are indications of which to omit if all are not needed in a particular stanza. Regardless of the structure of a stanza, these stresses can be likened to the downbeats of measures in 4/4 time, with the intervening syllables falling into any rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and half notes that could fill out such measures. Two important notes: (1) Each line begins with a "soft" measure of either varied pickup notes or rest, so that a line of three stresses will encompass four measures, with the first measure always being a lead-in to the stress at the beginning of measure two. (2) The syllables that fall between the stresses are sung in the rhythm of natural speech.

Gelineau psalmody is therefore performed with a steady pulse. And while a spelling out of a typical text as appears below might look like 4/4 time, it really amounts to 1/1. One can easily fail to notice that there is a time signature at the beginning of each psalm tone, and it most often is simply a "1." In other words, instead of thinking along the line of four beats to the bar, with the quarter note receiving the beat, think of one broad beat to the bar, with the whole note receiving the beat. This way of thinking helps to allow the intervening syllables to be sung according to natural speech patterns without being rigidly forced into fixed rhythms. A cantor, of course, will be most free to allow the intervening syllables to follow natural rhythms, while a choir, of necessity, will sing in more rhythmically fixed patterns.

That said, here is a rather fixed representation of the rhythm of Psalm 100 (page 82). It serves to spell out the general approach to interpretation of this psalm, and it should clarify, by example, all that has been said about sprung rhythm in the preceding paragraphs. As an exercise, at a tempo of approximately 𝅗𝅥 = 50, I suggest that one taps the foot on the downbeats while tapping out this pattern on the tabletop. This, in a general way, illustrates the rhythmic structure of these tones.

1.



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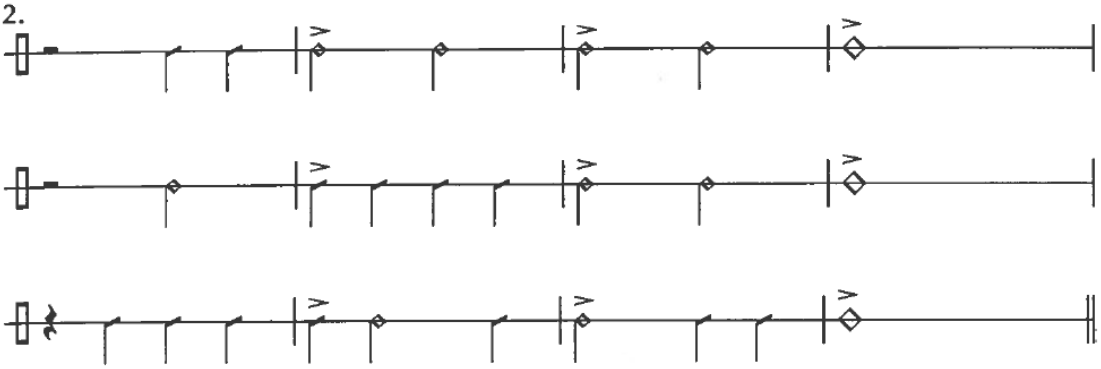

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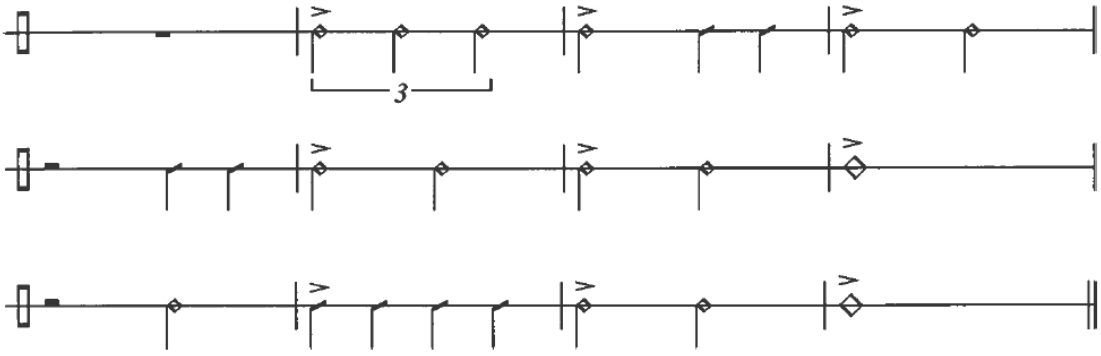

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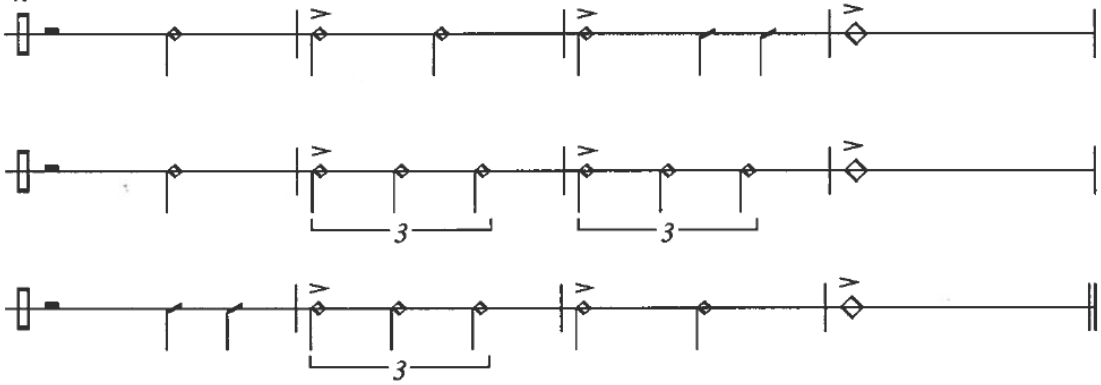


Next, try reciting Psalm 100 according to this rhythm, while still maintaining the pulse with your foot tap. Remember, each line begins with a downbeat, followed by either the syllables before the first stress or a complete measure of rest.

Psalm 100

1 Cry out with jóy to the LÓRD, all the éarth.
2 Sérve the LÓRD with gládness.
Come befóre him, sínging for jóy.

3 Know that hé, the LÓRD, is Gód.
He máde us; we belóng to hím.
We are his péople, the shéep of his flóck.

4 Énter his gátes with thanksgíving
and his cóurts with sóngs of práise.
Give thánks to him, and bléss his náme.

5 Indéed, how góod is the LÓRD,
etérnal his mérciful lóve.
He is fáithful from áge to áge.

All of the psalms can be rhythmically realized in this manner. It is especially helpful to develop a sense of this sprung rhythm using the *The Revised Grail Psalms—Singing Version* (GIA edition G-7984) in which all of the psalms are printed as shown above, with accent marks indicating the stresses. Some practice, even group practice, reciting the psalms in rhythm, is extremely worthwhile.

Singing the Verses

Although a rigid rhythmic notation of the text as given above tends to put the text into more of a straitjacket than desired, it still serves to give us the sense that therhythm goes where the words want to take it. One could sing most of these psalms with an endless 𝅗𝅥 ♩♩ pattern, but that is to be avoided, because that indeed locks the text into an unwanted rhythmic rigidity. Here are a few guidelines for rendering pickup measures and intervening syllables. If there is a one-syllable pickup, it is usually rendered as:

If, however the pickup note carries less weight, it could be sung as:

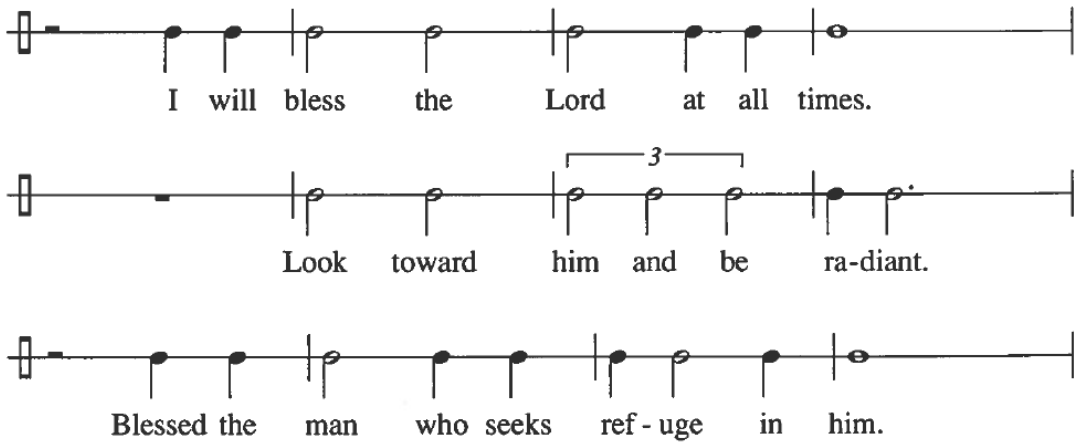
The Lord is my

"All" at the opening of Psalm 47 carries more weight than "The" at the beginning of Psalm 23.

A stress followed by one intervening syllable is almost always sung as two half notes. If, however, punctuation is involved, it may be sung as:

For they, like win - nowed chaff,

A stress followed by two weak syllables can be realized in one of several ways, all depending upon the weight of the individual syllables; choose the one that your ear tells you to be most true to the text. Various interpretations can be seen in these three excerpts from Psalm 34.



A stress and three intervening syllables are almost always sung as four even notes. Rarely, a line can begin with four pickup notes, which begin on the downbeat of the pickup measure, but which should be sung as pickup notes, leading to the downbeat of the second measure.

Accompanying

The question frequently arises as to whether or not the accompanist plays the notes in parentheses. The answer is an unequivocal yes! Below is the accompaniment to a common Gelineau tone. It comprises sixteen measures with one strong pulse (whole note) per measure. It should be played, once again, at approximately 𝅝 = 50. In the measures with a combination of

notes in parentheses and black notes, the keyboard plays the notes in parentheses and the voices sing the black notes. The singers enter after the first downbeat is sounded by the organ or piano. Parentheses, therefore, are used to indicate notes that are not sung.

. . . .

Remember, these are accompaniments. They should be gentle and just sufficient enough to support the singer. One does not "drive" psalmody from the organ the way one drives hymn singing (though the organist should exercise good leader ship on the antiphons). One would generally not lift at the ends of phrases, but rather, maintain a connected legato throughout the stanza. The tempo of the antiphon must always match that of the verses, but the note value receiving the pulse will vary. The beat (or pulse) of the antiphon is determined from examining the time signature. In 3/4 time, the beat can be either a quarter note (♩) or a dotted half note (𝅗𝅥.); in 4/4, a quarter note (♩) or a half note (𝅗𝅥); in 6/8, it is most often a dotted quarter note (♩.) Whatever we determine the beat to be, it matches the whole note of the Gelineau tone one for one. Any of the following are possible:

𝅝 = 𝅝
𝅗𝅥. = 𝅝
𝅗𝅥 = 𝅝
♩. = 𝅝
♩ = 𝅝

Performers must determine the ideal relationship between antiphon and verses, which is generally obvious and natural. The important concern is that a rhythmic relationship between antiphon and verses be maintained throughout the performance. This is especially necessary to enable the singer(s) to sense the downbeat of each verse in order to make a proper entrance.

The question of whether or not to add a pulse between the verse and antiphon, or between the antiphon and verse, depends entirely on the musical event. The antiphons begin with rests, so they should follow the verses in strict time, with the half note of the refrain equaling the whole note of the verse.

Robert J. Batastini
Vice President / Senior Editor (ret)
February 14, 2014

excerpt from:
Arise, Come to Your God
by Joseph Gelineau, SJ

Performing the Guimont Psalms

[Please refer to the guidance for performing psalm settings by Joseph Gelineau. The principles of Gelineau Psalms also apply to psalm settings by Michel Guimont.]

Performing Anglican Chant

Anglican Chant Psalter – Performance Notes

Singing the Chant

Good chanting is good singing. Chant is a musical medium for the clear and expressive singing of liturgical texts. Word accents create the rhythm in chant, and the lines and verses of the text determine the shape of the chant's musical phrase. Single-line melodic chant should be sung as song, whether lyrical or declamatory, as the words require. Harmonized chant is best sung with the same care one would give to the singing of harmonized folk or art song, with constant attention to the rhythm and phrasing of the text.

In singing all chant, special attention must be paid to the words sung to the reciting note or chord. The recitation must not be rushed and should be governed by the rhythm and flow of the words. Mediant cadences (the musical change at mid-point) and final endings or cadences should never slow down or speed up, creating a false metrical effect. The established and recurring tempo of the recitation remains the same throughout the chant, including the intonation, reciting notes, and the mediant and final cadences. On the other hand, the text is not to be sung with a mechanical, unbending pulse. Certain words will be gently moved along; others will be prolonged. Care is to be taken, however, not to sing the text with unnatural dotted rhythms.

Unaccented words or syllables at the beginning of lines should be treated as anacrustic, moving directly to the first primary accent. In general, accents should be created by lengthening the word or syllable (agogic accent) rather than by a sudden dynamic stress. Tempo and dynamics are to be determined by the meaning of the text, the number of singers, and the size and resonance of the space where they are singing.

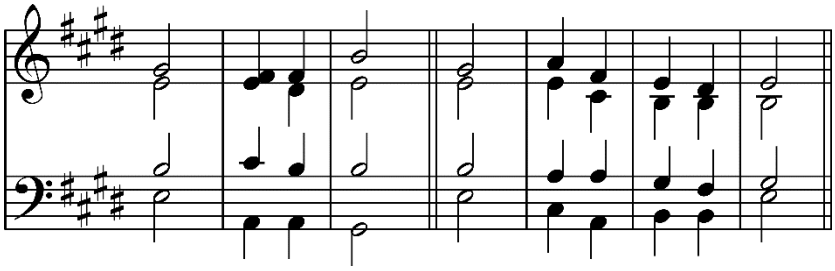
If singers read the text in an expressive but not exaggerated manner, and then sing the words to the chant with the same rhythmic flow, they will discover how chant can unify the Christian community's singing of liturgical texts.

Harmonized (Anglican) Chant

The chant known as anglican chant developed from harmonized plainsong psalm tones (faux-bourdon) and from festal psalm settings by late sixteenth and early seventeenth century English composers. During the following centuries the daily singing of Prayer Book psalms to Anglican chant became normal practice in English cathedrals, collegiate churches and chapels, and in many parish churches. Anglican chant psalm singing is still widely practiced throughout the Anglican Communion. The singing of the invitatory psalm and canticles to anglican chant became a widespread practice in the Episcopal Church and remains popular in many parishes.

A single chant is usually composed of ten chords—a reciting chord followed by a mediant cadence of three chords, and a second reciting chord followed by five chords which make up the final cadence or ending. The chant thus reflects the usual parallel construction of the canticles or psalms. The first half of each verse is sung to the first part of the chant. The second reciting chord and final cadence carry the remainder of the text following the asterisk. A double chant is twice as long, and two verses of a canticle or psalm are sung to double chants. The Anglican Chant Psalter also includes some triple chants.

Because of its fixed design, anglican chant requires the text to be marked ("pointed"), so that certain syllables may be sung to particular notes of the music. The pointing used in *The Anglican Chant Psalter* matches primary verbal stresses with musical ones. Musical stress is assumed to occur on the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth chords of the chant:



Syllable of primary stress have been, in most cases, assigned to these chords. This results in end ings of varying lengths. Such endings add diversity to the chanting experience They also invite fuller participation by congregations and choirs who will find their singing more consistent with their speaking.

Five marks indicate the pointing:

| always occurs before a stressed syllable to be sung to the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth chords of the chant. Thus its placement corresponds to the bar lines in the chant.

⌜‾‾‾‾⌝ connects two syllables (occasionally three) to be sung to one chord.

¨ identifies one syllable to be sung to two chords.

— indicates that the reciting chord is to be omitted.

† indicates that the second half of a double chant is to be sung to this verse. When occurring during the use of a triple chant, indicates the use of the third section.

The musical notation is purely conventional and defines pitch but not duration. The notes have no rhythmic value in themselves and the text alone determines the rhythm. In the past the usual notation was in whole and half notes, with passing notes, when included, notated in quarter notes. *The Anglican Chant Psalter* uses half and quarter notes (with passing notes as eighth notes), providing greater ease in reading.

Breath is always taken at the end of a line and after a colon or semi-colon in the middle of a line. A comma is always observed only as required in good reading and not by a complete break.

When singing anglican chant settings of canticles and psalms, particular care should be taken to make sure that the rhythm, sense, and mood of the words govern the tempo, dynamics, and style of the singing. At no time should the harmonic rhythm of the mediant cadence and ending be superimposed on the natural flow of the text. Care must be taken to guard against rushing words sung to reciting chords and slowing down to a measured rhythm at the mediant cadence and at the ending. Even though anglican chant developed as a medium for the four part choral singing of the psalms, many congregations have found that the singing of canticles and psalms to anglican chant is practical and gratifying. While the usual practice is for the congregation to sing the melody of the chant in unison, part singing is strongly encouraged. The choir, organ, or other instruments lead by singing and playing all four parts with an occasional verse in unison. Some contemporary chants are written to be sung in unison supported by the instrumental accompaniment.

The organ is the normal instrument for the accompaniment of anglican chant, but other keyboard instruments may be used. It is possible to add an occasional instrumental or choral descant to some chants. All parts are to be played. **The accompanist should memorize the chant so that complete attention can be given to the words.** Organ registrations should be firm, but not overwhelming. The organ should provide adequate support for congregational singing without obscuring the articulation of the text. Reeds and other color stops may add dramatic emphasis in certain verses. The pedal is used, especially for congregational singing, but may be omitted in some verses, all four parts being played on the manuals only. When congregation and choir are singing securely and confidently, it is refreshing to have appropriate verses sung unaccompanied.

Instructions for Psalm settings from

St. Martin's Psalter

by Thomas Pavlechko

The Antiphons may be introduced first by the organ or piano, then sung by a cantor or a small group in the choir, then sung by all. They may be sung in unison, or, in most cases, the choir may lead in harmony. The antiphons are repeated as indicated in the texts. The antiphons are based on the hymn tunes.

The Descants are simple, with medium-high vocal ranges, making them singable by most choirs. Descants should not be sung when the aniphons are being introduced at the beginning, but reserved for later repetitions.

The Psalms may certainly be chanted straight through without inserting the antiphons. In this case, the bold-face type verses may need to be adjusted.

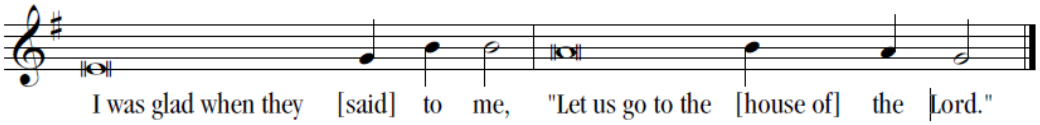
The Tones are based on the hymn tune as well and may be sung by a cantor, or in unison or harmony by the choir and/or the entire congregation. Generally, Picardy 3rds, indicated in parenthesis ( ), are reserved for the final repetition.

Unison Melody Lines of the antiphons for congregational use are provided as graphic files in the EXTRAS (ZIP) file. Simply insert these into your bulletin.

The Pointing has been designed to be as simple, and as clean to the eye as possible. A cantor or the choir may sing the first verse, then the choir or the congregation may join on the verses in bold-faced type.

The words at the beginning of a verse are chanted on the reciting tone, a whole note breve. The word or words in the [square brackets] are then chanted on the first quarter note, and the words beyond the [brackets] fall naturally on the second quarter note and final half note.

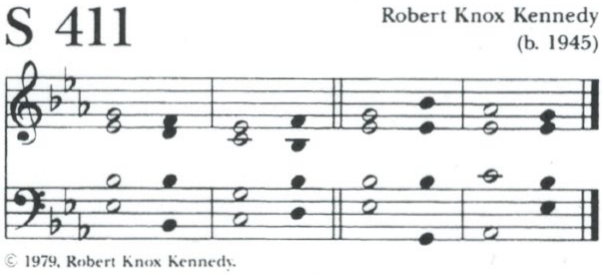
EXAMPLE



www.sjmp.com
St. James Music Press

Directions for Performance of Simplified Anglican Chant

This chant is intended for unison performance by a congregation. Each half verse of the Psalm or Canticle is sung on the reciting note up to the last accented syllable. The accompaniment can be played on a keyboard instrument or sung by a choir.



Singing the Psalms

[from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Accompaniments-Liturgies*]

Roots of Assembly Song

The song of the Christian assembly has its roots in the psalms of the Hebrew people, our forebears in faith. Jesus' own prayer relied on the psalms. The apostle Paul encouraged the. faithful to sing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Col. 3:16). Christians through the centuries have sung them daily.

Martin Luther considered the psalms the summary of all scripture, speaking to many situ ations and allowing the expression of a wide range of human response, such as adoration, praise, thanksgiving, lament, confession, intercession, and teaching. The psalms proclaim hope and faith, yet make room also for deep distress and questioning.

The 150 psalms presented here use a version intended for common sung prayer and proc lamation, rather than a translation for study. Other singing versions of the psalms, includ ing metrical paraphrases, are included among th.e service musiCand hymns in this volume. Translations of the psalms, such as the New Revised Standard Version, are readily available.

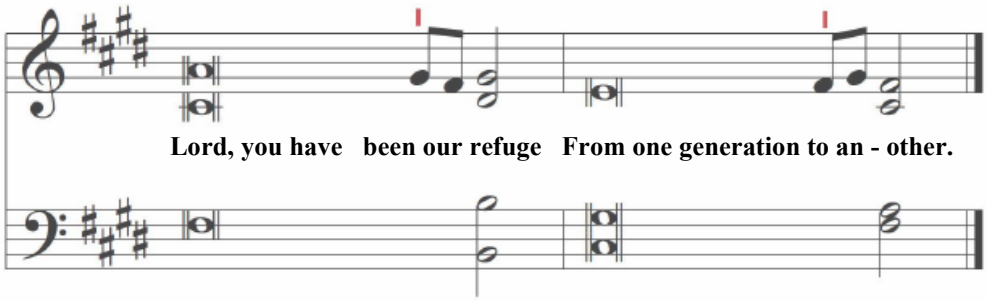
Singing the Psalms

The psalms are intended for singing, as their use in worship through the ages testifies. Their meaning can certainly be communicated when spoken or read silently; yet this ancient poetry is inherently musical. This psalm version is therefore pointed simply for singing by a cantor, choir, or assembly.

Each psalm verse is divided into two parts; the second half of the verse is indented. Each part has a point (|)within it. This point indicates when the singer moves from the reciting note (𝄐) and continues with the rest of the melody. For example, the text of Psalm 90 appears as follows:

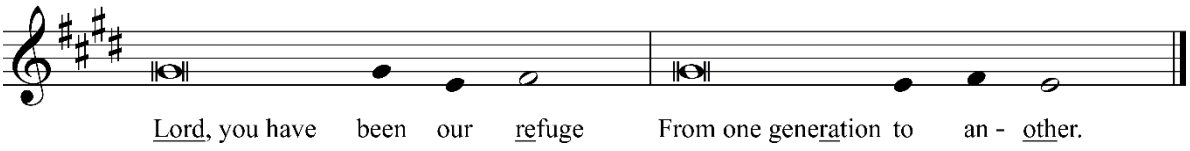
Lord, you have | been our refuge
From one generation | to another.

When using tone 5, this verse is sung as follows:



Whether sung by one person, a choir, or the assembly, it is important to remember that the melody is a vehicle for the natural expression of the words. The words should be sung with natural accents, as they would be if spoken. Rather than slowing down at the point (|), sing through to the end of the line.

The syllable just beyond the point is not necessarily a naturally accented syllable. In the first phrase of the example above, LORD naturally receives the accent instead of been. In the second phrase above, the natural accent falls on the second syllable of another and therefore does receive the musical accent, although without a pause, as the singer moves from the reciting note through the rest of the melody. The same example, with natural accents underlined, may be sung as follows:



Singers may feel the natural accents in different places. However they are placed, it is impor tant that the text is sung with a natural flow. A slight pause at a comma, and a slight break at a semicolon or period, will also assist in achieving this goal. The final note of each musical phrase will always correspond to the final accented syllable of the text; additional unaccented syllables that may follow are sung on the same note.

Occasionally a three-syllable word is sung to the two black notes by eliding the middle syllable. For example, *glo-ri-ous* becomes *glo-rious*, *of-fer-ing* becomes *of-f'ring*, *mar-vel-ous* becomes *mar-v'lous*. *Blessed* is sung *blest*.

Any psalm can be sung to any tone. Within a particular context, however, one tone may be a better match to the mood of the text than another. Tones 12—16 are double tones. That is, they have four phrases instead of two, so that two verses are sung to one tone. The system of singing described above is used. When using a double tone, be certain that there is an even number of verses in the psalm. Exceptions may be made if singers are prepared to use the last two phrases of the tone—or the first and last phrase—for the final, single verse.
The tones presented here are a core selection and are not meant to limit the possibilities for additional tones and musical forms the assembly may use in singing the psalms.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship
Accompaniment Edition: Liturgies

Published by Augsburg Fortress Publishers
Fourteenth printing, July 2021

The Psalm Tones

[from *Lutheran Service Book: Accompaniment for the Liturgy*]

The psalms are pointed for singing. Each psalm verse is divided into two parts, with an asterisk (*) indicating the point of division. Most of the text of each half verse is sung to a reciting tone (𝄆𝄇). At the point of the vertical line (|) the final two or three syllables are sung to the notes provided. Ordinarily there is one syllable of text for each note. When there are only two syllables, the first syllable is sung to two notes.