II. Choice of Hymn

☐ Know your congregation: it is your most important choir.

☐ Know your clergy.

☐ Know your instrument, acoustics and hymnal(s). Most hymnals have a companion volume to help you learn about historical and musical ideas behind the great hymns. Knowing the stories behind some of the hymns can add meaning and understanding for you, your choir, and your congregation.

☐ Know yourself and your purpose as a leader of song (you are not an accompanist). Use all of your skills—musical, scriptural, and theological.

III. Choice of Key

☐ Church is perhaps the last place where group singing still happens. How can we help the experience be the “peak of the week” for the people?

☐ Know your instrument, acoustics and hymnal(s). Range: the top and bottom notes. Try not to top a soprano or solo combination for soprano, LH: contrasting stops for the alto and tenor combined, and Pedal to balance the LH. The ears of the singers hear the 4' pitch.

☐ Add piano to the organ with some of the late 19th-century gospel hymns and similar pieces. Try with "Praise, my soul, the King of heaven (Praise My Soul), last stanza.

☐ You must sing along with the hymn yourself. If you can sing the phrases in one breath while seated and playing, then the people have a good chance of singing well. After all, they are standing and don’t have to play at the same time!

☐ The tempo of the introduction must match the tempo of the stanzas.

☐ Live acoustics need slower tempos while dry acoustics will allow a faster pace. Use what you have to advantage.

☐ In general, save ritards for the end of the last stanza only or at least keep them minimal. Keep the music moving.

☐ A broadening of tempo on the last stanza of “big, grand hymns” can be very effective. Try with Rejoice, the Lord is King (Darwall’s 148th).

IV. Choice of Tempo

☐ You must sing along with the hymn yourself. If you can sing the phrases in one breath while seated and playing, then the people have a good chance of singing well. After all, they are standing and don’t have to play at the same time!

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☐ A broadening of tempo on the last stanza of “big, grand hymns” can be very effective. Try with Rejoice, the Lord is King (Darwall’s 148th).

V. Choice of Registration

☐ Clarity is essential. 8', 4', and 2' principals on one manual are the basic choice. Note: As with choral accompanying, 4' stops are most critical. Voices sound at 8' pitch. The ears of the singers hear the 4' pitch.

☐ Volume should be in proportion to the type of hymn. It may change at each stanza as suggested by the text. (See Section II.)

☐ Soloing out the melody: an essential technique. RH: reed or solo combination for soprano, LH: contrasting stops for the alto and tenor combined, and Pedal to balance the LH. Try with any four-part hymn.

☐ Special dramatic effects: e.g., adding Swell reeds and opening the swell box can be effective in some places, but use sparingly. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven (Praise My Soul), last stanza.

☐ The pedal can drop out on a stanza.

☐ The organ can drop out on a stanza. (See Section I.)

☐ Include people who play band instruments from time to time, if feasible. Make arrangements yourself or use pre-composed ones.

☐ Add piano to the organ with some of the late 19th-century gospel hymns and similar pieces. Try with What a friend we have in Jesus (Converse).

VI. Phrasing, Articulation and Style

☐ Know the background of the hymn: musical/historical period, poet, composer, other related music of the time. (See Section I.)

☐ Style example: Comfort, comfort ye my people (Psalm 42), is a lively, Renaissance dance tune. It falls flat if played too slowly and legato.

☐ Know what the primary musical function is in a particular hymn:

Melody: Be thou my vision (Slane).

Harmony: Now the day is over (Merrill).

Rhythm: My hope is built (Solid Rock).

Counterpoint: Sleepers, wake (Wachet auf).

☐ Find the middle ground between tying and breaking repeated notes in the three lower parts. You may create an inner rhythmic energy. Experiment with Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing (Sicilian Mariners).

☐ Pedal (bass) notes may want to hold over between phrases in drier acoustics rather than break with the other parts.
VII. Introductions

- The full-stanza play-through: still the best introduction.
- Be consistent from introduction through Amen!

- The correct length and release of the last chord in the last measure of the introduction or stanza lets the congregation know when to breathe and begin singing. This is also true between phrases. Mark your hymnal in detail! Some choices for accomplishing this are:
  - Add time to the last measure: Jesus Christ is risen today, (Llanfair).
  - Calculate the length of the last measure and the release in tunes beginning with an upbeat ("pickup"): O God, our help (St. Anne).

- A case study in chord length and rhythms changing with each stanza: God is working his purpose out (Purpose).
- Be consistent from introduction through Amen!

X. Amens

- When to do them? Options:
  - Every hymn? Last hymn only? Not at all? “If it’s printed, play it?”
  - Cancel out an unwanted Amen by holding the final chord until the congregation runs out of breath.

- Generally speaking, Amens belong on the last stanza of a hymn ending with a Doxology: “Praise to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” or the like.

- Holding over the common tone from the final chord to the Amen is still the most effective signal to the congregation to sing the Amen. An affirmation, “Amen” means “So be it!” Generally, it should be played and registered as such. (Exception: quiet prayer hymns.) Let the hymn, Jesus shall reign where’er the sun (Duke Street), be your guide as suggested by the last line of the text!

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Grinnell, Kenneth, "It don't mean a thing if you can't make 'em sing: Leading hymn singing from the organ--A practical checklist", *The American organist* 40/4 (New York, NY: April 2006), 52,54.

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