

## HYMNS ARE FOR EVERYONE

It is truly inspiring and exciting to me to be part of a congregation that appreciates the Spiritual Practice of Congregational Singing and the importance of ALL the music to the experiences of worship and our Relationship with God. Each congregation has its own song(s) expressive of their life of faith, and congregations may share among the wider Christian Community as we join in singing each other's hymns of faith. The Church's Song, both the songs and the singing, has graced our lives, often in special ways, and is more influential in our faith than we may realize. We tend to sing what we believe, and we believe what we sing.

Music and singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs have been at the heart of Christian worship for at least 2,000 years. As individuals as well as in groups or congregations, we are inspired, encouraged, challenged, and motivated by the texts and tunes that we sing. Singing is such a natural thing to do, and singing with others builds community as it gives more value to the song. Just as the Scriptures, rituals and spiritual practices are our heritage in the Christian faith, our hymn texts and tunes belong to us—*all* of them, from the ones sung at camp meetings and revivals to the many hymns being written in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Of course, we do not have or know *all* of those texts and tunes, but they are part of our faith history in theology as well as in music.

Hymn texts and tunes come to us out of the historical context or situation of the time in which they were written, and we sing them in our contexts and situations in life—at times they may connect with us more clearly than at other times. It is helpful to me to notice the dates of the text and tune on the page of the hymn book for each hymn in order to have an idea of its historical setting. There are also many wonderful stories to be shared about authors and composers of hymns that provide more insight for us as we sing or read hymns. Most hymn books contain a great deal of helpful information in their indices and companion documents. What do you know about the date and/or the writing of your favorite hymns?

The more we know about hymns, the more carefully and intentionally they may be chosen for each service or worship experience and the more truly they may nurture us in relationship with God and with one another.

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