
Focussed 40 Songlist

- Helping your congregation to sing!

Having a focussed list of just 40 songs (and hymns, and choruses) for use in all of your church gatherings has a number of benefits;

- Repetition helps congregation get to grips with songs more quickly - singing with greater confidence
- Familiarity with songs makes it easier for musicians to engage with Worship - focussing less on their playing
- Intentionally tracking which songs are used makes it easier to review your song choices - adding and removing songs periodically to keep things fresh.

The following method is tried and tested, and will work in churches of any style or tradition, size of congregation and size of team. Getting your initial list of 40 songs takes a bit of time, but is well worth the effort, for the returns you will see!



Creating your focussed 40

Create a 'short-list'

- Not too many, or it will be too difficult to shorten! (80-90max). Include a broad range of people; those who will be planning times of worship and those who will be playing/leading the songs (5-7 people max). You can create a system for these people to vote for a limited number of the songs that they most want to keep (3* rated, 2* rated etc.)

Create your list

A smaller group (ideally max 3) will refine the shortlist down to 40. When doing this, it is important to consider not just whether you like a song, but also how it will be used, and how easy it is to join in with;

it's probably best to leave Handel's 'Messiah' off the list for a regular Sunday morning congregation... Equally, modern songs with a huge vocal range and need for a large band are best avoided. Go for simpler songs which can be played well; this will build everyone's confidence and increase engagement.

A varied worship experience is also very important. Use the following four categories to ensure your list remains well rounded;

Song categories

Declaration of Theology/reminder of truth songs - to teach us and remind us who we worship, and why. There are some classic Hymns that fit well here. (Approx. 15 of your final 40)





Songs of Praise and Adoration - usually simpler and more repetitive. Imagine the saints around the throne in Revelation endlessly singing "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God almighty..." Gospel songs and choruses fit well here. (Approx. 15 of your final 40)

Lament - Questioning the pain we feel as human beings is an important part of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. As a body of believers, it's important that we don't ignore our, or each other's pain. Things of the Psalmist crying out "How long Oh Lord" (There are less of this type of song available to choose from, but it's good to have 2-3 in the list).

Holy Spirit/ Presence of God - "Holy Spirit, you are welcome here" is a simple and powerful prayer, that the church has been praying for centuries. Having 3-6 of this type of song is useful as they are a good accompaniment to; communion, times of intercession, prayer ministry, times of reflection etc.

How to use it

For any time of gathered worship when you are using songs, the person choosing the songs should refer to the list; Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, small groups, prayer meetings, all age or intergenerational worship and any other time you find yourselves singing! However, The list should not be a burden. Decide, as a team, how you will apply the list before you start (and review it a few months in).

There may be occasions when you wish to go outside the list, but as the idea is consistency, avoid too many exceptions. If you have two very different services, with very different emphases, or groups of people, you may want a list for each.

You may also wish to have a separate list for your kids or young people's groups - drawing from all lists for intergenerational or all-age worship.



When not to use it

If there is a time of response or reflection after a sermon or talk, or a particular theme for intercession, and a song is used as part of that time, then there should be freedom to use whatever song or piece of instrumental music is most appropriate. Whilst it is not particularly helpful to have every song in a service fit with the 'theme' there are occasions when it is appropriate to have one that does.

If there is a particular event, like a festival or occasional office, then the songs that are appropriate are the songs that should be used.

Things to remember -

Try to keep the process simple.
Try to make the process collaborative and enjoyable.
Try to represent the tastes and needs of as many of your team and congregation as you reasonably can.
Try to use the list as much as possible, to be consistent. But don't be afraid to go 'off-list' if appropriate.