

## **Report of the Synodical Psalm & Hymn Selection Committee**

Dear brothers in Christ,

### **Mandate**

Synod 2002 appointed a Study Committee to prepare our (RCNZ) "*own selection of psalms and hymns for worship in our churches.*" (Art.83), the mandate being more closely specified as follows (Art.93):

1. *Select Psalm versions that are as faithful as possible in content and form of expression to Scripture, granting proper room for poetical necessity.*
2. *Psalm and Bible song selections are to be evaluated for the soundness of their paraphrasing against the relevant sections in the synodically approved Bible versions (NIV and NASB).*
3. *Provide a reasonably large selection of hymns and songs to take into account the various preferences in our churches, namely, those resulting from our cultural mix, age differences, etc. In this regard, the committee should note the following:*
  - a. *Where Genevan tunes are presented, the committee is to consider providing a non-Genevan alternative.*
  - b. *The committee is to solicit contributions from a wide cross-section of our membership. (This is to help the committee in its selection task and to gain a better feel for the preferences of our members. However, while all contributions will receive due consideration, the committee is not bound by the act of contribution.)*
  - c. *In respect of updating language, the committee is to leave well alone by and large and change only when necessary for meaning.*
  - d. *The committee will not attempt any writing of its own.*
  - e. *As far as possible, Psalm, hymn and song selections are to be taken from our present approved and provisionally approved sources.*

*The committee has power to co-opt other personnel for specific tasks.*

### **Personnel**

The committee appointed by Synod was as follows: Rev. J. Rogers (c); Mrs. L. Brooks; Mrs. A. Benfell; Rev. W. Wiersma. We very soon added Bro. Berwyn Hoyt to the committee, at first as adjunct in a secretarial capacity. However, he quickly became fully involved in all the work of the committee. When the Rev. Bill Wiersma left Hamilton for Australia in the latter half of 2004 we co-opted the Rev. John Haverland, who had providentially recently accepted the call to Pukekohe, to replace him, which he kindly agreed to do until we had completed the section on the Psalms. As convener/reporter, I would like to acknowledge the enormous work that my fellow committee members have done on this task. We can be thankful to them for their commitment. The committee has worked very well together.

### **Our Work**

Considering it good to begin at the beginning, we began working our way through the Psalms first. We are seeking to follow our mandate by looking for good, understandable,

faithful-to-Scripture versifications set to singable tunes from our presently approved/provisionally approved books first, before looking elsewhere. That has got us so far – but, of course, only so far, else we would not be undertaking this project at all. We have drawn on a number of other sources, but have found a very rich vein to mine in the brand new Psalter of the Free Church of Scotland. This became available in printed form only in 2004 but the Scottish brothers made it available to us in electronic form in 2003 and a good proportion of the material we will recommend 'from elsewhere' will come from this work. They have done excellent work with very faithful versification and good poetry with straightforward diction. Present indications are that their approach to questions of copyright will also be generous. We have not always used their tunes. Some of their suggestions are a little unusual to our ears, so at times we have substituted tunes that are already well known to us or we believe to be familiar to many of us. We also suggest some new and, we hope you will agree, very nice tunes too! (So far about 75% of the tunes should be familiar.)

The Committee's aim (and mandate) was not to seek to be original. We need to be humble, especially in a small denomination, about both our resources and our talents. Furthermore, we ought to show the communion of the saints by, as far as possible, singing in union with them. However, from time to time we have not found what we have been looking for, so we have called on the talents of the Rev. John Goris who has made helpful contributions particularly where we have a well-loved version in our present book but which is incomplete. A couple of members of the committee have made similar contributions also and Mrs Coby Cressy of Hamilton has been doing some writing and composing. Whenever these have been considered, they have all been subjected to the fine-tuning of the committee. We appreciate these contributions.

With the concurrence of the SIC and the Synodical Treasurer, we purchased two copies of the Sibelius musical score computer program (I am assured that is the correct spelling for a computer program) and co-opted the services of Dave Benfell and Bryan Hoyt to put our committee's finalized words and tunes together as each Psalm version would appear in a prospective book. We are thankful to these two brothers for their willingness to do this quite large and involved task. We have then been working to make these available to the Churches for familiarisation, comment, and further proofreading. We thank especially Mrs Lois Hoyt, who has given us some very careful and detailed comments. We want to note also, with appreciation, the contributions various congregational members have submitted. They are all given proper consideration and some found especially helpful.

There is one other task we have set our minds to which was not specified in our mandate and in which we hope we have not transgressed beyond your forgiveness. It seemed a logical corollary of this project. In 1998 Synod adopted, provisionally, a Statement of Principle to guide the singing of our Churches. We have looked at this again, revised it somewhat, and present the appended statement and an explanation. We have added a comment on the inclusion of a section of Bible songs and hymns which was omitted by the previous report.

At the writing of this report, it is hard to say how far we will get before Synod meets. We are up to Ps.120 (with the exception of 119). Twenty-odd were sent out to the Churches some months ago and at this writing it is hoped that another forty will be distributed in a few weeks with another twenty in time for them to be considered by you before Synod. We have worked hard and are sorry we have not made better progress. But we trust we have done enough for you to judge the quality of our selections so as to be able to make a decision whether to authorize us to complete the Psalms and then publish these as a provisional Psalter. That ought to be possible within the year and would enable the Churches already to begin using their new Psalter and be getting familiar with it, evaluate it and interact with us on it in the next inter-synodical period while we complete our hymn selections for that half of the book, Lord willing.

Costings, including copyright costs, are as follows: for a run of 2500 Provisional Psalters, estimated 304 pp, case bound with end papers and head and tail bands (meaning: pages are sewn and have tail bands in the spine to give spine extra strength and protection) - \$12.50 (incl. GST). Note: this binding is of the same quality as the present blue or grey CRCNA Psalter Hymnals and the price we are quoting includes copyright payment and a 10% safety margin over the quoted price. To give you an idea of the cost of the final product (if printed today): a run of 2500, estimated 888pp (the size of the grey PH), same binding - \$21.70 (incl. GST). By the time we get to that stage, we would definitely want to print a greater quantity and that would lower the unit cost. (We thank Bro. Leen van Vliet for obtaining these costings for us.)

Apart from discussing the actual recommendations below, we imagine there could be numerous questions that might arise in delegates' minds as they and, we trust, others in their congregations able to evaluate this project, consider our work, some quite detailed or relating to particular Psalms versions. May we make a suggestion? As individuals and sessions consider this material, would they note questions they have and submit them to this committee. We will then seek to answer them or, if they seem more common or of greater and wider importance, perhaps we ought to go into a committee of the whole for a period of time to address these questions as far as possible.

### **Recommendations**

1. Synod charges the Psalm & Hymn Selection Committee to continue its work as mandated by Synod 2002.
2. Synod authorizes the Committee to publish a 'Provisional Psalter' as soon as the Psalm selection has been completed, providing final costings are under \$15.00 per unit (\$12,50 estimated) for a run of 2500.
3. Synod finance this by synodical quota.

Grounds:

- a) a provisional book will enable the Churches to begin using the book immediately; and
- b) a provisional book will facilitate critiquing of the work by any and all interested persons who may feel free to interact with the Committee; this could be a great help to us and hence, we trust, enhance the quality and acceptability of the work.

4. Synod adopt the appended Statement of Principle for inclusion in the proposed new psalter-hymnal.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs A. Benfell

Mrs L. Brooks

Rev. J. Haverland

Mr B. Hoyt

Rev. J. Rogers (reporter).

## Appendix

### Statement of Principle

The music of the church should be appropriate for worship - that is, it should be liturgical and have aesthetic integrity. The music of worship should serve the dialogue between God and his people. It must be true to the full message of the Scriptures and reflective of biblical Christian experience. Along with the biblical motif, the music of worship should give expression to the other motifs of liturgy: the catholic, the confessional, and the pastoral. The music of worship should satisfy the aesthetic laws that are conditions of good art, such as imaginative craftsmanship and seriousness of expression. It should reflect the church at worship today and throughout the ages in ways that are relevant, enduring, festive, and dignified

### Interpretation

*The four liturgical motifs listed in the Statement of Principle - the biblical, the catholic, the confessional, and the pastoral - are present in all worship and ought to complement one another. They may not be equally obvious in every service, but they should all be appropriately represented in the flow of worship services throughout the year.*

**The music of the church should be biblical.** *Text and tunes must serve worship in ways true to biblical patterns for liturgy and must be faithful to the full range of the revelation of God in Scripture. Psalms and Bible songs must be faithful to the original meaning and context of the Scripture passage. Hymn texts are to be true to the teachings of Scripture.*

*Furthermore, our music should be “reflective of biblical Christian experience”. It will manifest, therefore, a spirituality that centres upon God and His works. Our experience of Him is secondary to this, even as it is in the Psalms. This statement deals with a perceived weakness of our age, albeit by negation; our hymnody must avoid the fads and the spirit of our age. Nevertheless, our hymnody must reflect (in its turns of phrase at least) our particular time in history.*

*Our Church Order requires the singing of Psalms in worship. We have been blessed with a love for them and wish to foster that tradition. The book of Psalms is God’s gift of song to the Church. Although most of today’s poets would probably write fewer laments and*

*more songs of praise than the Psalmist did, every Psalm has meaning for Christians in some time or place. For the sake of those suffering persecution for Christ; and on behalf of those being led astray by false shepherds, even in the present day, we will continue to sing the imprecatory Psalms: weeping with those who weep; praying even as we sing them, not only that Christ's confirmed enemies be punished, strongholds be broken down, and God's Kingdom come, but also that we might be spared the conditions that provoke such anguished prayer.*

*The Bible-song section expands the singing of Scripture to include other Bible songs and other sections of Scripture that are appropriate for song.*

*In choosing the hymns, we have sought to maintain the same balance of the biblical Christian experience that we find in the Psalms, and the reflections and expressions of New Testament believers on the majesty and goodness of God and his grace in Christ. The music of the church should be catholic. Our music should express not only the unity of a single denomination or congregation but also the unity of the Church throughout the world and from all ages. We rejoice in the communion of the saints when we sing ancient prayers and songs from a variety of Christian communities, cultures and traditions that make up the body of Christ. In addition, because we worship together as families, the music of the church ought to include some songs that our little ones can sing and understand. To meet these many different needs, our hymnody should contain a variety of styles and contributions from various cultures and eras, bearing in mind, however, that singing with cultural integrity is also part of worshipping "in truth".*

**The music of the church should be confessional.** *While we recognise that the Lord has His people in many places, nevertheless we humbly confess that the system of understanding Christianity known as the Reformed faith is simply the faith of the Bible. To worship in truth, therefore, our music must reflect our confessional and doctrinal understanding of Scripture, with its emphasis on the communal rather than on the individualistic. Hence our songs deal with topics like the covenant and baptism, God's sovereignty and election and providence. That does not mean that every aspect of a given teaching must be present in every song on that subject. A song is a song, not a systematic theology. A text is not to be judged by what it fails to say, unless in its failure a false impression is conveyed.*

**The music of the church should be pastoral.** *Each part of the body of Christ worships in a particular time and place and has a unique set of needs. Each church needs to identify with an already familiar body of songs and singing this collection of songs contributes to the unity of the churches. The words of these songs must be written in language that is understandable to the congregation and set to singable melodies. In this way we can fulfil the exhortation of the apostle Paul who wrote; "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col. 3:16).*

**The music of the Church should be beautiful.** *Its poetry should have aesthetic integrity in itself, not relying on the music to carry it; its music likewise having aesthetic integrity*

*in itself, not relying on the poetry to carry it. And the two should complement each other, the resultant whole satisfying the laws of balance, unity, variety, harmony, design, rhythm, restraint and fitness.*

*In all these ways the music of the church serves the dialogue between God and His people, containing God's Word to us and our response to Him. The Church's music also provides a way for us to address others. Since God's people are His ambassadors to the whole world, the Church's songs must witness to God's wondrous acts of saving love and must call all people and nations to honour and obey the King of kings and Lord of lords. So shall we all, in the Spirit, in truth, in holiness and in beauty, join the eternal song:*

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honour and glory and power  
for ever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13).