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# Congregational Singing: An Attitudinal Survey of Two Southern Protestant Churches

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Music  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Music Education

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by  
Randall G. Bennett, Jr.

May 2002

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Dr. Mary Dave Blackman, Chair

Dr. David Champouillon

Dr. Maryann Kyle

Keywords: Congregational, Singing, Survey

## ABSTRACT

Congregational Singing: An Attitudinal Survey of Two Southern Protestant Churches

by

Randall G. Bennett, Jr.

When public schools began teaching music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church took a secondary role in the education of the church parishioner. The purpose of this study was to examine congregational attitudes about singing before and after an experimental treatment.

Two different Churches participated in “hymn of the month” programs, but different approaches were used at each church. The congregation of Erwin Presbyterian Church learned a new hymn through repetition, while the congregation of First Baptist Church learned a new hymn through congregational practice. Surveys using a Likert-type scale were administered at each church prior to and at the end of the month-long project, which took place in February 2002. The results showed that while both congregations appeared to have better attitudes toward congregational singing following the project, there was a more dramatic change at Erwin Presbyterian Church.

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## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this manuscript to several people. The first people I would like to thank are all the teachers of music I have had throughout my life. This manuscript would have not been possible without you. Secondly, I would like to thank all of the church musicians who have been a part of my life, you too made this manuscript possible. I would also like to thank my Grandmother, Billie Bennett, whose constant strength and reliance in God helped me to see how important congregational singing was. I would also like to thank my parents, Randall and Susan Bennett, who taught me an importance and a love for music from the time I was born. They nurtured my musical development for all of my life, supported all my dreams, and provided me with first-class role-models for musicians - themselves. Lastly I would like to thank my wife, my best friend, who has been my constant aid and biggest supporter throughout this whole process. Aime, you are my soul-mate and I love you! I dedicate this to you and to everyone mentioned on this page, and to almighty God, thank-you all!

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I would like to thank the members of my advisory committee Dr. David Champouillon and Dr. MaryAnn Kyle for all of their help in this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Dave Blackman, the chair of my advisory committee, for not only tolerating my constant barrage of questions on a daily basis for 12 months, but for being so very knowledgeable on how to prepare this manuscript. I would also like to thank the congregations of Erwin Presbyterian Church in Erwin Tennessee and First Baptist Church in Baileyton, Tennessee, for agreeing to be a part of this project. I would also like to thank the Reverend Scott Foshie of First Baptist Church for his willingness to not only be a part of this project but to administer it as well. I would especially like to thank my wife for her statistical abilities, for without those abilities the task of analyzing data would have been much more difficult.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The formal role of music education in the United States began with the arrival of European colonists in the 17th century. These colonists, many of whom were Puritan or Lutheran in origin, came to America with a strong sense of the importance of congregational singing, due in part to the Protestant Reformation that took place a century earlier in Europe (Eskew & McElrath, 1995, p. 100). Martin Luther placed a great deal of importance on the involvement of parishioners in congregational singing.

Luther was not only a theologian but also a musician, and he believed music to be of utmost importance in worship. As a part of Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, he advocated full involvement of the people and restored congregational singing (1995, p. 98).

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the Protestant Reformation was the involvement of the congregation in the singing of spiritual songs. Because singing had not been an aspect of worship with which people prior to the Reformation had to concern themselves, there was a definite need to educate the public. This need led to the singing school movement of the 18th century

In the singing school movement, music teachers or singing masters held classes to teach the public how to read music and sing. These classes were often presented in churches. "Harvard-educated ministers sought to improve what they regarded as poor congregational singing by teaching their people to read music instead of singing by ear" (1995, p. 178). This was vital to many communities as it was considered to be of great importance that church congregations could sing. The singing school movement began to fade as public school music education became the primary means for the musical training of the public. Lowell Mason, who is considered by many to be the father of public school music education in the United States, instituted the first public school music program in Boston, Massachusetts in 1838 (Mark & Gary, 1999, p. 41). Since that time, public school music education has become the primary means by which the public receives music training, with the church playing a secondary role.

It is in the church's secondary role as music educator that this research has been undertaken. Once public school has ended, few people have further opportunity to refine their musical skills or even to maintain the knowledge they already have (Clark, 1994, p. 31). The only opportunity for most people to do this regularly is at their worship services. This means that the responsibility for the continued music education of its parishioners must come from the individual church congregation. More specifically, the minister and church music staff must take responsibility for the further musical development of their parishioners.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is through congregational singing that all parishioners can best achieve further musical learning, while also promoting a sense of togetherness. Furthermore, it is through the introduction of new hymns into the church hymn repertoire that people have the best opportunity for new musical experiences. The problem, however, is that many parishioners are uncomfortable singing new hymns because their musical skills are somewhat less refined than when they were in public school. Therefore this study was created to examine congregational attitudes toward the singing of new hymns.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to exploring congregational attitudes toward singing in a general sense. The subjects of this study were both southern Protestant congregations in relatively small cities. No attempt was made to scientifically examine the actual participation of parishioners in congregational singing. The methodologies used for the two participating churches were similar but used a slightly different approach. The congregation at Erwin Presbyterian Church learned the new hymn by hearing it repeatedly over the period of the project, while First Baptist Church learned the new hymn by practicing it before the worship service.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine congregational attitudes toward the singing of new hymns. Secondary goals of this study include improving the implementation of new hymns

in each congregation, improving awareness of the importance of congregational singing in each church, providing each congregation with a list of their current hymn repertoire, and suggesting a treatment by which new hymns can be added to that repertoire.

### Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides the opportunity for individual church congregations to share their attitudes toward their continuing music education. In addition, it provides parishioners with a “hands-on” approach to improving their musical skills through congregational singing. It examines the importance of congregational singing, as well as possible treatments for improving a church’s congregational singing experience. This study is important because it addresses the continuing musical education of our society. Furthermore, there has been little research done that actually provides any data pertaining to how a congregation can improve its congregational singing.

### Definitions

A parishioner is an individual who is a member of a church parish or congregation. Hymnology is defined as the practical study of and about hymns (Eskew & McElrath, 1995, p. 279). Congregational singing is defined as the participation of the church congregation during the singing of hymns and liturgical responses.

### Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter serves as an introductory chapter and includes a statement of the problem, limitations of the study, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and definitions. The second chapter encompasses the related literature concerning this topic. It focuses on four areas: 1) the purpose of congregational singing; 2) poor congregational singing; 3) successful congregational singing; 4) and methods for improving congregational singing. Chapter 3 describes the implementation of the project and includes a

prior research study, the population surveyed, the project administrators, survey of repertoire, survey instruments, procedures, development of the survey instruments, hymn selection, and treatment. Chapter 4 presents the results of the project, and chapter 5 offers a discussion of these results with suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### RELATED LITERATURE

Church musicians and pastors have long sought to improve the participation of church congregations during the singing of hymns. Improving congregational singing has been the subject of several books and journal articles, which have both specifically and in a general sense addressed this issue in hymnody. This chapter reviews both broad-based and specific materials that address any areas related to congregational singing, not just methods for the improvement of the introduction of new hymns. The reviewed literature found in this chapter generally focuses on five areas:

1. The importance of congregational singing.
2. The purpose of congregational singing.
3. Poor congregational singing.
4. Successful congregational singing.
5. Methods of improving congregational singing.

#### The Importance of Congregational Singing

Congregational singing as a means of incorporating parishioners in a “hands-on” approach to worshipping God originated with the posting of Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenburg, Germany in 1517 (Mark & Gray, 1999, p. 28). Perhaps the most important theme of the Protestant Reformation was the philosophy of the priesthood of all believers. This philosophy suggests that all followers of Christ are equal and all carry the same responsibilities, which can be assumed by no one else. Of these responsibilities one of the most important is congregational hymn singing. Lovelace and Rice state that “The primary congregational responsibility is hymn singing,” and that hymn singing is not simply a responsibility, “but a privilege” (1976, p.153). Delamont also says that “Worship should inspire, sustain, encourage, motivate, strengthen, and support the worshiper. It doesn’t matter if people have great voices, what matters is their sincerity” ( 1980, p. 159).

The hymn was written for the people; in it they express their prayer and praise, their

adoration and consecration. The hymn is people's expression of Christianity. Good hymn singing is their obligation and privilege toward the development of effective public worship (Whitlesay, 1952, p.160).

It is through music that the congregation shares an interactive worship experience. It enables each individual of God's community to join as one through the act of singing. "The music creates the most economical bridge into the experience of redemption when it forces us to move from self into communality, the communality that shares the new life" (Snydor, 1980, p. 153). The singing of hymns reminds all Christians of their obligations to themselves, their congregation, and to the new life that they share as believers of Christ.

### Purpose of Congregational Singing

The purpose of congregational singing, from a religious standpoint, is to enable all parishioners to share in a community worship experience. This experience fosters not only spiritual growth but also intellectual growth as it enables parishioners to become more familiar with biblical texts and texts of inspiration.

...hymn singing is meant always to involve the congregation actively. Sometimes when worshipers lack words to express their feelings, they find them expressed meaningfully in the words of a hymn...Hymns have value in providing instruction in Christian living. The teaching of hymns is an avenue for passing on the heritage of the church. Much of the musical heritage of the church is encountered in hymnology (Eskew & McElrath, 1995, p. 277, 279).

From a music education standpoint, the purpose of congregational singing is simple. It allows groups of people from all walks of life the opportunity to exercise their knowledge and understanding of music, while re-enforcing that which they likely learned in a public school setting. Because many parishioners have little or no formal music training, the responsibility of the church to musically educate their parishioners is becoming increasingly important. "Music programs in private and public schools are being cut back or eliminated altogether because of budget restraints. How one nourishes the singing voice of the congregation has widespread importance not only for the worship life of each congregation, but for the arts in the wider

society” (Clark, 1994, p. 34). This creates an extra burden for both pastor and church musician in that they must make up for the deficit of musical training in the public schools if they want their congregational singing to be a success. Likewise, if the church does not have trained music staff, or is without a church musician altogether, success may depend solely on a pastor who may not have the appropriate musical training to deal with such a situation.

### Poor Congregational Singing

According to Hustad, the typical individual in a church congregation usually does not exhibit good musical reading skills. That, coupled with the fact that some people attend church sporadically, makes it increasingly difficult for many to successfully sing a hymn. When people do sing hymns they often want to sing those that are most familiar, those that are referred to as “the good old hymns.” “No doubt there should be room in total church life for the congregation’s sentimental favorites. But, if worship, fellowship and outreach are to achieve their highest goals, they must be primarily served by music chosen for more strong reasons” (Hustad, 1980, p. 232).

Lovelace and Rice (1976) suggest the following reasons for poor congregational singing:

1. Hymns are often used indiscriminately for fellowship or fun singing, which often invites a thoughtless approach.
2. The “good old hymns” are dangerous because they allow an escape from reality.
3. The congregation is the only musical group of serious purpose regularly attempting performance without rehearsing.
4. It is nearly impossible for a congregation to do two things at once – read the words and listen for the tune.
5. Hymn singing depends upon interest, which must be aroused by some means.
6. New hymns must be related to familiar hymns, scripture, or ideas – moving from the

known to the unknown. Obviously what is required is education and a pleasant learning experience, and the worship service is hardly the place for informal teaching (p. 159).

While there is a place in worship for the most familiar hymns to be sung, it would be an injustice, both spiritually and from an educational standpoint, not to expose a congregation to new hymns. However, such an endeavor is easier said than done. “ The introduction of new hymns is vital to good congregational singing and appreciation of hymns. Once the congregation accepts the importance of adding new hymns to their repertoire, the task of teaching becomes easier” (Martin, 1983, p. 9). Joyner, in his study to help musically untrained pastors develop better congregational singing, found that:

The narrow range of most congregational repertoire is due to both established patterns, which reflect important memories and emotional ties, and to the limited musical ability of the average congregation...The indications were quite similar: ‘sang familiar, well-liked hymns...but expressed resistance to too many new hymns (1981, p. 136, 123).

Another problem generally associated with congregational singing is the struggle between those who choose the hymns for worship and those who have to sing them. Often, the pastor and church musician try to pick hymns that are tailored for the specific liturgical needs of the service. Some of these hymns may not be widely known by the congregation but might fit the theme of the service very well. This often leads to a congregation singing a hymn in a mediocre manner because of this unfamiliarity.

Badly stated, the argument between the two sides is this: those in a position to choose hymns for worship pick out those that follow principles of good worship design; congregations want to sing hymns they are familiar with. Behind the apparent disagreement lies a similar value: coherence. For their part, clergy and musicians work to knit together the parts of the service and the lessons for theological reasons and to bring shape to the time spent on Sunday morning (Clark, 1994, p. 30).

From this problem grows the added complication of teaching the congregation a new hymn.

Part of a varied worship service could include teaching the congregation a new hymn. This is often a tense time for both the song leader and the congregation. All too often he ends up singing a virtual solo while the people who are supposed to be worshiping are standing there gritting their teeth, hating every minute of it (Delamont, 1980, p. 151). How then is it possible for a congregation to achieve its full musical potential? Furthermore, to whom does the responsibility belong? According to the authors cited here, the responsibility does not belong entirely to the church staff. The responsibility belongs to everyone in the congregation, with strong leadership by both pastor and church musician alike.

“In churches where there is good congregational singing, it is never an accident. Someone has sown a seed which is now blooming in expressive, wholehearted song” (Whitlesay, 1952, p. 159). Whether the pastor or choir director does it alone or there is a committee assisting them, nothing is more crucial to the growth of congregational singing than strong leadership. “Ministerial leadership – in liturgy, in hymnody – is to enable the worshiping community to be open to God and make its best offering to God. Because this is in truth the responsibility of the full community, the minister’s uniqueness is in his or her representative role, not in some distinctive mark or quality” (Joyner, 1981, p. 18).

#### Successful Congregational Singing

If the majority of the congregation is actively participating during the singing of the hymns, then the congregation is successfully singing. “ We can say that great congregational singing is being achieved when the entire congregation sings a sizable number of good hymns and responds with spiritual perception and musical artistry” (Snydor, 1980, p. 20).

The best congregational singing of hymns involves all of the congregation. It sings with attention to singing well. The hymn selection represents a variety of good hymns. Singing is done with spiritual perception. There are national, denominational, community, and local congregation influences helping to shape this strong congregational body (Joyner, 1981, p. 24).

According to Snydor, good congregational singing is active congregational singing. It allows people the benefit of self-expression, spirituality, and communality.

1. Through hymn singing, people can express their feelings and ideas.
2. Through hymn singing, people tell their faith and display their spirit to others.
3. Through hymn singing, people are bound in closer fellowship.
4. Through hymn singing, believers are taught the truths of faith.
5. Through hymn singing, Christians are sustained and enriched in daily life (1980, p. 204).

### Methods of Improving Congregational Singing

The majority of the authors cited in this chapter have made recommendations as to how to improve congregational singing. Only one, however, has actually tested his recommendations. Joyner developed a list of resources to aid the musically untrained pastor in strengthening congregational hymnody. This work includes a study guide, a cassette tape, and a resource kit. The study guide provides step-by-step guidance to aid the pastor in presenting three hymnody sessions. The tape could be used in lieu of an accompanist or as a means of personal practice. The resource kit contains 15 articles on the use of hymns in worship. Joyner found that “Musically untrained pastors are both willing and able to strengthen the congregational singing of hymns” (1981, p. 26).

The rest of the authors merely make suggestions on how to improve congregational singing. Ramsey states that “Our congregations, with rare exception, will learn new tunes by rote. Planning for frequent repetition of tune will be the most useful method of engaging worshipers in singing” (1983, p. 150). Martin offers these guidelines for improving congregational singing:

1. Do not take congregational singing for granted.
2. Practice hymns during choir rehearsal.
3. Sing the complete hymn.
4. Leaders should present a positive attitude.
5. Keep a spirited tempo.
6. Provide variety.
7. Introduce new hymns.

8. Present the history of hymns.
9. Plan a Sunday hymn festival.
10. Introduce a hymn of the month.
11. The congregation should stand to sing.
12. Keep a record of the date each hymn is sung.
13. List hymn tunes with titles in bulletin.
14. Choose hymns in a logical, systematic fashion. (1983, p. 10)

Snydor makes these suggestions, many of which are similar to those presented by Martin:

1. Establish a hymn of the month program.
2. Print hymn information in the bulletin and newsletter.
3. Offer a hymn playing class.
4. Organize hymn festivals.
5. Prepare hymns for the aging and shut-ins.
6. Create a lending library of hymn recordings.
7. Order hymn textbooks for the church library.
8. Encourage hymnals in the home.
9. Dramatize hymns.
10. Employ sound film strips on hymns.
11. Integrate hymns into the church school curriculum.
12. Encourage informal hymn singing.
13. Conduct congregational rehearsals.
14. Institute a hymn cassette program.
15. Promote hymn writing contests.
16. Have choirs sing hymn anthems.
17. Promote hymn memorization contests.
18. Conduct a hymn familiarity survey.
19. Use variety in hymn singing.
20. Present sermons based on hymns (1980, p. 88).

Lovelace and Rice suggest these methods:

1. Once the group is gathered, begin with a familiar hymn, which the congregation either does not sing well, or sings carelessly.
2. Then introduce a new hymn, first the tune, then with the text.
3. Approach the text seriously.
4. Approach the music seriously.
5. Create a hymn of the month program. On the first Sunday print the hymn text in the bulletin and use it for family devotions. On the second Sunday, the choir should sing the hymn at an appropriate time in the service. On the third Sunday, the choir should sing the first stanza, with the congregation joining on the remaining stanzas. The hymn should be repeated throughout the year in order to keep it fresh in the minds of the congregation (1976, p. 160).

#### Summary

Chapter 2 has focused on several aspects of congregational singing, including its importance, its purpose, what constitutes good and poor congregational singing, and treatment for improving congregational singing. This chapter used a broad-based review of the literature because there has been so little written on the subject. Approaching the literature in this manner allowed several aspects of congregational singing to be examined.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

#### Prior Research Study

A prior research study was conducted in the spring semester of 2001 at Erwin Presbyterian Church. A Sunday school class of 12 people answered questions regarding the overall improvement of congregational singing in that church. The results of that survey suggested that while the congregation was comfortable singing familiar hymns, most were uncomfortable singing unfamiliar or new hymns.

#### Procedures

The first step in this project was to gain permission from each church to perform this project during the month of February. The second was to gain permission from East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board for exemption status under the guidelines for human research. That exemption was granted on January 29, 2002. The third was to prepare the hymn repertoire list (found in Appendix B) prior to selecting a hymn that appeared to be unfamiliar to both congregations. The next step was to conduct Survey #1 at both churches on February 3, 2002. During the next three weeks the treatment was administered at both churches. Survey #2 was completed at the end of the services on February 24, 2002.

#### Survey of Repertoire

Prior to selecting a hymn for use in this project, a survey of the hymn repertoire used by each church was conducted. Church bulletins for the period October 2000 to March 2001 were reviewed to determine the hymnals used and the hymns sung at each church. The hymnals used by First Baptist Church were The New Broadman Hymnal and The Celebration Hymnal, Songs And Hymns For Worship. Erwin Presbyterian Church used The Hymnbook. The repertoire list for each church appears in Appendix B.

#### Hymn Selection

The hymn selected for this project was chosen from the hymnbook, Renew! Songs & Hymns for Blended Worship. Neither congregation used this source so that it was less likely that

either congregation had any experience with this particular hymn. The hymn “*The Gathering*” was chosen because neither congregation’s hymn repertoire (Appendix B) showed any record of this song’s having been sung.

#### Population Surveyed

The population for this study included the congregations of Erwin Presbyterian Church, 105 N. Elm Street, Erwin, Tennessee, and First Baptist Church, 1208 Main Street, Baileyton, Tennessee. Erwin Presbyterian Church has 150 members, First Baptist Church has 300 members. The selection of these two churches for this study was based upon two criteria: willingness to participate in this study and the denomination of the church. Both churches were willing to participate in this study. They were of different denominations, which may represent different perspectives on congregational singing. At Erwin Presbyterian Church, 47 people completed Survey #1, and 46 people completed Survey #2. At First Baptist Church, 102 people completed Survey #1, and 78 people completed Survey #2.

#### Project Administrators

This project was administered at two different churches using two different people to administer the project. The project administrator for First Baptist Church was the Reverend Scott Foshie, Minister of Music. Reverend Foshie will graduate from East Tennessee State University with a Bachelor of Music Education degree in December 2002. The other project administrator for this project was Randall G. Bennett, Jr., Choir Director at Erwin Presbyterian Church. Mr. Bennett, who in addition to being the author of this study, graduated with his Bachelor of Music degree in music performance with a minor in philosophy in May 2000. He will graduate with his degree of Master of Music Education in May 2002.

#### Survey Instruments

The survey instruments are found in Appendix A. Survey #1 was the pre-treatment survey, while Survey #2 served as the post-treatment survey. Both used a Likert-type scale for answering each question, with “1” indicating the strongest possible agreement with each statement and “5” indicating the strongest disagreement. A Likert-type scale was used because of the ease and accuracy of tabulating data. A Likert-type or Summated Rating Scales system is a

system of responses that describe varying degrees of intensity. For example, a subject may be given a statement such as, “I always sing along when I know the hymn.” The subject then selects a level of intensity about that statement: 1. Agree Strongly 2. Agree 3. Undecided 4. Disagree 5. Disagree Strongly.

### Treatments Used

Two treatments to introduce the new hymns were used. Both were based on the “Hymn of the month” program, which was mentioned by several authors cited in chapter 2.

#### Treatment #1

Treatment #1 was introduced at Erwin Presbyterian Church on Sunday, February 3, 2001. The new hymn was introduced without mention of its historical significance, if any, and without mention of any other information that may have been of interest to the congregation. The congregation received no instruction but heard the hymn repeatedly over a period of four Sundays, as follows:

- Sunday #1 (February 3, 2002): Survey #1 was administered during worship and was collected immediately following the service. The choir sang two verses of the hymn as an introit. There was also an announcement made about the commencement of the hymn of the month program.
- Sunday #2 (February 10, 2002): The choir director sang the first verse of the hymn as an introit, with the choir joining on the second verse, and the congregation joining on the remaining verse.
- Sunday #3 (February 17, 2002): The hymn was the opening hymn of the worship service. The choir sang the first verse and the congregation joined in on the remaining verses.
- Sunday #4 (February 24, 2002): The hymn was the opening hymn, with the congregation singing all verses. Survey #2 was also administered during worship and was collected immediately following the worship service.

## Treatment #2

Treatment #2 was introduced at First Baptist Church on February 3, 2002. This treatment also took place over four Sundays. It differed from the first treatment in that it used the hymn as a devotional tool, as well as introducing any other information that may have been of importance. It also placed emphasis on the congregation's being taught the hymn prior to the service opening.

- Sunday #1 (February 3, 2001): Survey #1 was administered during worship and was collected immediately following the service. The hymn text was printed in the bulletin for use in family devotionals. The choir director announced the hymn of the month program and the new hymn, including historical and other pertinent information about the hymn.
- Sunday #2 (February 10, 2002): The choir sang the first two verses of the hymn as an introit.
- Sunday #3 (February 17, 2002): Ten minutes prior to worship, the choir director led a congregational rehearsal for the new hymn, which was the opening hymn for the worship service. The choir sang the first verse and the congregation sang the remaining verses.
- Sunday #4 (February 24, 2002): The hymn was the opening hymn for worship, with the congregation singing all of the verses. Survey #2 was administered during worship and was collected immediately following the service.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Survey Results

The data from this research were collected by the Project Administrators and studied by the author alone. Mean ratings for each item on both surveys were calculated for each church. The researcher did a preliminary, non-statistical review of these ratings to see if there were any apparent differences between the churches. This general impression is described below.

Next, the SPSS statistical program was used to calculate a series of *t*-scores. For each church, ratings for Survey #1 were compared to the ratings for Survey #2. Then the ratings for Survey #1 at each church were compared. Finally, the ratings for Survey #2 at each church were compared. The results for these analysis are presented below.

#### General Impression

Mean ratings for each statement were calculated. A congregation was considered to be “comfortable” or in agreement with a statement if the mean rating was less than or equal to 2.5. A congregation was considered to be “uncomfortable” or not in agreement with a statement if the mean rating was more than 2.5.

#### Erwin Presbyterian Church

At Erwin Presbyterian Church, Survey #1 (Table 1) indicated that the majority of the congregation considered themselves comfortable singing a familiar hymn ( $M = 1.39$ ) and were comfortable trying to sing an unfamiliar hymn ( $M = 1.96$ ). The survey also showed that the congregation was comfortable if they heard an unfamiliar hymn either sung through first ( $M = 2.30$ ) or played through first by the organist ( $M = 2.43$ ). The majority of the congregation indicated that they do not need to hear a hymn many times before they will sing along with it ( $M = 3.68$ ). The congregation also indicated agreement with the statements “It is good to learn new hymns” ( $M = 1.68$ ); and “I find it interesting to learn about the history, if any, of new hymns” ( $M = 2.11$ ).

The results of Survey #2 (Table 1) at Erwin Presbyterian Church confirmed that the

majority of the congregation were comfortable singing a familiar hymn ( $M = 1.22$ ) and were comfortable trying to sing an unfamiliar hymn ( $M = 1.85$ ). The mean ratings for the following statements, however, are higher on Survey #2 than on Survey #1: “I would sing a new hymn if I heard someone else sing it first;” and “I would sing a new hymn if the organist played the hymn through first.”

The mean rating for Statement 1 on Survey #1 was 2.30 and the mean rating for Statement 2 was 2.43. This indicates that the congregation was already comfortable with both of these statements. However, the mean rating for Statement 1 on Survey #2 was 1.85 and the mean rating for Statement 2 was 2.15. This would suggest that the congregation’s opinion about these statements was positively affected by the treatment they experienced. A similar positive effect was suggested because ratings went from 1.68 on Survey #1 to 1.43 on Survey #2 for the statement, “It is good for congregations to learn new hymns.” There were no clear changes seen for other statements.

The majority of the congregation appeared to feel more comfortable singing a new hymn after this experience ( $M = 2.02$ ). They also indicated that the hymn of the month program should continue ( $M = 1.82$ ) and that the congregation benefited from this experience ( $M = 2.05$ ). They also agreed that it was easier to sing a new hymn when it is introduced in this manner ( $M = 1.79$ ), and that it should be the church’s responsibility to teach the congregation new hymns on a regular basis ( $M = 2.09$ ).

*Table 1*

Surveys 1 and 2 Mean Ratings for Erwin Presbyterian Church

<b>Erwin Presbyterian Church Statement #</b>	<b>Survey 1 Mean Ratings</b>	<b>Survey 2 Mean Ratings</b>
1	1.39	1.22
2	1.96	1.85
3	2.30	1.85
4	2.43	2.15
5	3.68	3.57
6	1.68	1.43
7	2.11	2.09
8		2.02
9		1.82
10		2.05
11		1.79
12		2.09

### First Baptist Church

At First Baptist Church, Survey #1 (Table 2) indicated that the majority of the congregation considered themselves comfortable singing a familiar hymn ( $M = 1.84$ ) and were comfortable trying to sing an unfamiliar hymn ( $M = 2.12$ ). The survey also showed that the congregation was comfortable if they heard an unfamiliar hymn either sung through first ( $M = 1.82$ ) or played through first by the organist ( $M = 2.25$ ). The majority of the congregation indicated that they do need to hear a hymn many times before they will sing along with it ( $M = 2.44$ ), which is the only clear difference between Survey #1 at both churches. The congregation also indicated agreement with the statement “It is good to learn new hymns” ( $M = 1.97$ ); but that they didn’t agree with the statement “I find it interesting to learn about the history, if any, of new hymns” ( $M = 2.65$ ).

The results of First Baptist church on Survey #2 did indicate some minor changes from Survey #1. The first statement on both surveys was “I always sing along when I know the hymn,” and while the response on Survey #1 indicated a mean rating of 1.84 (which means the congregation was comfortable singing a familiar hymn), the response on the Survey #2 had a mean rating of 1.58. This indicated that the congregation felt more comfortable singing a familiar hymn after this project. The second statement varied only slightly from Survey #1 to Survey #2, which indicated that the congregation still felt comfortable trying to sing along on an unfamiliar hymn ( $M = 2.12, 2.26$ ). The congregation also felt comfortable singing the hymn if someone else sang it first ( $M = 2.06$ ), but felt a little less comfortable singing a new hymn with just the organist playing it through first ( $M = 2.49$ ). There was a fairly strong difference between Survey #1 and Survey #2 on the statement, “I need to hear an unfamiliar hymn many times before I will sing along.” Survey #1 indicated a mean rating of 2.44, which means the majority of people agreed with this statement. However, Survey #2 indicated a mean rating of 3.06, meaning that following the treatment the congregation was uncomfortable with this statement. Both surveys agreed that it was good for congregations to learn new hymns ( $M = 1.97, 1.81$ ), and both agreed that it was not necessarily interesting to learn about the history of hymns ( $M = 2.65, 2.73$ ).

The congregation indicated by a mean rating of 2.42 that they were more comfortable singing a new hymn after this experience, and also indicated with a mean rating of 1.95 that the hymn of the month program should continue. The congregation agreed that they benefited from this experience ( $M = 2.13$ ), and that it was easier to sing a new hymn when it was introduced in this manner ( $M = 1.88$ ). The congregation also agreed that it is the church's responsibility to teach it new hymns on a regular basis ( $M = 2.01$ ).

*Table 2*

Surveys 1 and 2 Mean Ratings for First Baptist Church

<b>First Baptist Church Statement #</b>	<b>Survey 1 Mean rating</b>	<b>Survey 2 Mean rating</b>
1	1.84	1.58
2	2.12	2.26
3	1.82	2.06
4	2.25	2.49
5	2.44	3.06
6	1.97	1.81
7	2.65	2.73
8		2.42
9		1.95
10		2.13
11		1.88
12		2.01

### Additional Results

The data for the last five statements from Survey #2 (Table 3) for both congregations can only be presented from the perspective of a general impression because those data alone were not suitable for statistical analysis. The mean ratings for all of the statements are mostly the same. The only statement which shows an apparent difference between the two congregations is Statement #8, "I am more comfortable singing a new hymn after this experience." Erwin Presbyterian Church had a mean of 2.02 while First Baptist Church had a mean of 2.42, indicating that Erwin Presbyterian Church's attitude was more comfortable following the project than that of First Baptist Church.

*Table 3*

Survey #2 Mean Ratings of Both Churches for Statements 8 Through 12

<b>Statement #</b>	<b>Erwin Presbyterian Church Mean Ratings</b>	<b>First Baptist Church Mean Ratings</b>
8.	2.02	2.42
9.	1.82	1.95
10.	2.05	2.13
11.	1.79	1.88
12.	2.09	2.01

### Results of Statistical Analysis

To determine the statistical significance of responses to each statement, two-tailed *t*-scores were calculated for Statements 1 through 7, which appeared on both surveys. Table 4 presents the results of the comparison between mean ratings on Survey #1 and Survey #2 for Erwin Presbyterian Church and Table 5 presents the results for First Baptist Church. Table 6 data

compare the ratings between the two churches on Survey #1, and Table 7 data compare the between-church ratings for Survey #2.

*Table 4*

Two-tailed *t*-scores for Erwin Presbyterian Church ( \* is  $p < .05$ )

Statement #	Survey 1 Mean	Survey 2 Mean	t-scores
1	1.39	1.22	1.242
2	1.96	1.85	.667
3	2.30	1.85	2.083*
4	2.43	2.15	1.114
5	3.68	3.57	.466
6	1.68	1.43	2.380*
7	2.11	2.09	.000

As can be seen in Table 4, strong differences ( $p < .05$ ) were noted between the ratings on Erwin Presbyterian Church Survey #1 and Survey #2 for Statement 3, “I would sing a new hymn if I heard someone else sing it first,” and Statement 6, “It is good for congregations to learn new hymns.” In both cases, the congregation felt more strongly in agreement with the statements following the experimental treatment. A strong difference ( $p < .05$ ) was also noted for First Baptist Church (Table 5) responses to Statement 3, “I would sing a new hymn if I heard someone else sing it first,” but with a lower level of agreement with the statement following the treatment. An even stronger difference was seen for Statement 5, “I need to hear an unfamiliar hymn many times before I will sing along.” Again, the change of direction was reversed: the congregation

felt *less* strongly about this statement following the treatment.

Table 5

Two-tailed *t*-scores for First Baptist Church (\* is  $p < .05$ )

Statement #	Survey #1 Mean	Survey #2 Mean	<i>t</i> -scores
1	1.84	1.58	1.204
2	2.12	2.26	.995
3	1.82	2.06	2.272*
4	2.25	2.49	1.806
5	2.44	3.06	2.953*
6	1.97	1.81	.992
7	2.65	2.73	.309

Table 6 presents the *t*-test data comparing the results of Survey #1 for the two churches. There were four statements on which strong differences at the level of  $p < .01$  were indicated. For Statement 1, “I always sing along when I know the hymn,” there was strongly stronger agreement with the statement by the congregation of Erwin Presbyterian Church ( $M = 1.38$ ) than by the congregation of First Baptist Church ( $M = 1.86$ ). Stronger agreement by Erwin Presbyterian Church ( $M = 2.11$ ) was also found for Statement 7, “I find it interesting to learn about the history of particular hymns,” with First Baptist Church having a mean rating of 2.67 for the item. The responses for Statements 3 and 5, however, indicated differences in the opposite direction: the responses were stronger at First Baptist Church than at Erwin Presbyterian Church. First Baptist Church rated Statement 3, “I would sing a new hymn if I heard someone else sing it first,” at 1.84, while Erwin Presbyterian Church had a mean rating of

2.3. On Statement 5, “I need to hear an unfamiliar hymn many times before I will sing along,” First Baptist Church’s response averaged 2.45, while Erwin Presbyterian Church’s average was 3.64. In both cases, the congregation at First Baptist Church indicated a higher level of agreement with the statement.

*Table 6*

Two-tailed *t*-scores for Survey #1 ( \* is  $p < .01$ )

<b>Statement #</b>	<b>Erwin Presbyterian Church Mean</b>	<b>First Baptist Church Mean</b>	<b><i>t</i>-scores</b>
1.	1.38	1.86	2.973*
2.	2.00	2.14	.724
3.	2.30	1.84	2.631*
4.	2.45	2.27	.860
5.	3.64	2.45	5.248*
6.	1.70	1.99	1.865
7.	2.11	2.67	2.758*

The final analysis compared the responses of the two churches for Survey #2 (Table 7).

Two items were found to show strong differences in those responses. Statement #8, “I feel more comfortable singing a new hymn after this experience,” was found to be strongly different at  $p < .05$ , with Erwin Presbyterian Church indicating higher levels of agreement with the statement. An even stronger level of difference was found for Statement 7, “I find it interesting to learn about the history of particular hymns,” with Erwin Presbyterian Church again indicating higher levels of agreement with the statement.

Table 7

Two-tailed *t*-scores for Survey #2 ( \* is  $p < .05$ )

Statement #	Erwin Presbyterian Church Mean	First Baptist Church Mean	<i>t</i> -scores
1.	1.24	1.58	1.919
2.	1.85	2.24	1.705
3.	1.85	2.06	1.124
4.	2.20	2.49	1.296
5.	3.61	3.13	1.892
6.	1.48	1.78	1.844
7.	2.02	2.73	2.956*
8.	2.02	2.45	2.067*
9.	1.82	1.94	.622
10.	2.05	2.12	.381
11.	1.77	1.88	.649
12.	2.09	1.93	.712

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine attitudes toward congregational singing before and after an experimental approach to introducing a new hymn. The methodologies used for the two participating churches were similar but used a slightly different approach. The congregation at Erwin Presbyterian Church learned the new hymn by hearing it repeatedly over the period of the project, while First Baptist Church learned the new hymn by practicing it before the worship service. While the surveys indicated that both churches benefited from this experience, there were some noticeable differences between the two. Some of the differences might be attributed to the treatment. The first section of this chapter discusses the implications of what took place within each church congregation as well as between the two congregations. The second section provides a summary of the project and its results, and the third section offers recommendations for further research projects in this field of study.

The results suggest for both churches that the treatment may have contributed to a more positive attitude toward congregational singing. There appears to have been less strong change of attitude at First Baptist Church than at Erwin Presbyterian Church, however. This could be attributed to several factors. One factor might be that First Baptist Church had a bigger population for Survey #1 ( $n = 102$ ) than for Survey #2 ( $n = 78$ ), while Erwin Presbyterian had almost the same number for both surveys ( $n = 47, 46$ ). The smaller number of respondents to Survey #2 at the Baptist church could have had a negative effect. Another factor could be that there was no method for control. The people who completed Survey #1 may not be the same people who completed Survey #2 (i.e., visitors or people who do not attend regularly). There was also no control to be sure that all respondents actually attended all the Sundays of the treatment. Another factor could be the differences between the two Survey Administrators and how they presented the treatment. It is also possible that First Baptist Church just didn't like the hymn that was chosen for the project, and/or they resented the extra rehearsal prior to the service.

Learning a new song through repeated hearings is perhaps the easiest way to teach the

greatest number of people. Constant repetition of both melody and text over a sustained period of time (as in the case of Erwin Presbyterian Church) may be a more effective means of changing attitudes than congregational rehearsal. This may be because not all parishioners can actually read music. Because learning a new hymn by congregational rehearsal may add stress to the individual parishioner's worship experience, such as the pressure of having to arrive early or taking time away from what would normally be used for socializing, it might be surmised that the most comfortable method of learning lies in the repetition of the new hymn. This appeared to be the case with Erwin Presbyterian Church.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine congregational attitudes toward the singing of new hymns. Secondary goals of this study include improving the implementation of new hymns in each congregation, improving awareness of the importance of congregational singing in each church, providing each congregation with a list of its current hymn repertoire, and suggesting a treatment by which new hymns can be added to that repertoire.

Two churches, Erwin Presbyterian Church and First Baptist Church, agreed to participate in a research project to study the effects of a hymn of the month program. The two churches both participated in a hymn of the month program; the programs were structurally similar but approached the program differently. The congregation of Erwin Presbyterian Church learned a new hymn through repeated hearings. The congregation of First Baptist Church learned a new hymn through congregational rehearsal. Both hymn of the month programs lasted for four weeks following Survey #1. Both churches completed Survey #2 on the last week of the treatment, and both learned the same hymn over the course of the project.

Both congregations in this project achieved the desired result: they learned a new hymn. The survey results indicated that the congregation of Erwin Presbyterian Church had a more positive attitude about learning the hymn than did that of First Baptist. This would suggest that while rehearsing a new hymn prior to the Sunday morning worship service was effective (the treatment used for First Baptist Church), simply repeating the hymn in various manners (the

treatment used for Erwin Presbyterian Church) was perhaps the more effective treatment in terms of changing attitude. Both congregations agreed that a hymn of the month program should continue in their church and that the congregation as a whole benefited from this experience. Both churches agreed that it was easier to sing a new hymn when it was introduced in a hymn of the month program, and both agreed that it was the church's responsibility to teach the congregation new hymns on a regular basis.

This project had three positive results:

1. It has brought the importance of learning new hymns to the attention of each congregation.
2. It has provided each congregation in this study with a list of its current hymn repertoire.
3. It has provided each congregation with an example of how to learn a new hymn.

#### Recommendations

The future of congregational singing depends upon two factors - the willingness of the church leadership to teach new hymns and the willingness of the congregation to learn new hymns. Both churches studied in this project benefited from this experiment because the congregations were willing to learn and the musical leadership was willing to teach. There has been very little formal research done on this subject, which leaves the opportunity for new research completely open. The only real method that could be found that would concisely address the issue of teaching the congregation a new hymn was the hymn of the month program. Perhaps new research that would help to speed along this process, allowing the congregation to learn a new hymn in a faster more efficient manner, might be of strong value.

With reference to this particular project, more could be done to see if the hymn learned by both congregations is firmly in their grasp. Further study could include a testing of both churches six months after this experience to still see if they remember this hymn, or continuing this project over a six month period teaching the congregations six new hymns and gathering the results. It could include an additional survey to see if the congregations still felt the same way as they did at the end of this project. Additionally, efforts to control the samples in order to make

sure the people who completed surveys were the ones who participated in the treatment. Other recommendations include broadening the experiment by adding many more churches to the testing. In addition, it would be nice to be able to test both methodologies at the same church. Perhaps if there were more churches involved, and the project took place over a two month period with every church receiving both methodologies within the two months, the project could more accurately determine which hymn of the month program was the more successful. In this manner the cause of both music education and congregational singing could be advanced on a larger scale.

The most important recommendation that can be made from this project is that much more research needs to be done. There is simply not enough research to help solve the problem of introducing new hymns into the congregation's repertoire. Furthermore, there is not enough research in the field of congregational singing in general to firmly lay the groundwork for projects such as this one. Congregational singing is the music education that professional music educators have forgotten about. Only when a sincere interest by both the academic community and the church community is set into motion, will a positive sustained effect be encountered within the field of congregational singing.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
SURVEYS  
SURVEY #1

Using the numbers 1-5, one being the highest possible rating and 5 being the lowest possible rating please rate your responses to the following questions. 1 = agree strongly, 2 = agree, 3 = unsure, 4 = disagree, 5 = disagree strongly. Please answer using only 1-5.

1. I always sing along when I know the hymn.
2. When we sing an unfamiliar hymn at church, I usually try to sing along.
3. I would sing a new hymn if I heard someone else sing it first.
4. I would sing a new hymn if the organist played the hymn through first.
5. I need to hear an unfamiliar hymn many times before I will sing along.
6. It is good for congregations to learn new hymns.
7. I find it interesting to learn about the history of particular hymns.

## SURVEY #2

Using the numbers 1-5, one being the highest possible rating and 5 being the lowest possible rating please rate your responses to the following questions. 1 = agree strongly, 2 = agree, 3 = unsure, 4 = disagree, 5 = disagree strongly. Please answer using only 1-5.

1. I always sing along when I know the hymn.
2. When we sing an unfamiliar hymn at church, I usually try to sing along.
3. I would sing a new hymn if I heard someone else sing it first.
4. I would sing a new hymn if the organist played the hymn through first.
5. I need to hear an unfamiliar hymn many times before I will sing along.
6. It is good for congregations to learn new hymns.
7. I find it interesting to learn about the history of particular hymns.
8. I feel more comfortable singing a new hymn after this experience.
9. The hymn of the month program should continue.
10. The congregation as a whole benefited from the hymn of the month experience.
11. It is easier to sing a new hymn when it is introduced in this manner.
12. It is the church's responsibility to teach the congregation new hymns on a regular basis.

APPENDIX B

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN SAMPLE FROM OCTOBER 2000 TO MARCH 2001

First Baptist Church

Hymnals Used:

*The Celebration Hymnal*

*The New Broadman Hymnal*

“All Hail The Power Of Jesus Name”

“All The Way My Savior Leads Me”

“Amazing Grace”

“As The Deer

“At Calvary”

“At The Cross”

“Because He Lives”

“Bind Us Together”

“Christ Arose”

“Crown Him With Many Crowns”

“Glory To His Name”

“Heaven Came Down”

“He Leadeth Me”

“I Have Decided To Follow Jesus”

“I Live”

“I Love To Tell The Story”

“I Love You With The Love Of The Lord”

“I Sing Praises To Your Name”

“I Sing Promises”

“I Surrender All”

“I Will Sing The Wondrous Story”

“I’ll Fly Away”

“I’m So Glad, Jesus Lifted Me”

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

“In Moments Like These”

“In The Garden”

“In The Name Of The Lord”

“Jesus Is Tenderly Calling”

“Jesus Saves”

“Just As I Am”

“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

“Joy To The World”  
“Lead Me, Lord”  
“Lead Me To Calvary”  
“Let Jesus Come Into Your Heart”  
“Let There Be Glory And Honor And Praises”  
“Little Is Much When God Is In It”  
“Majesty”  
“My Faith Has Found A Resting Place”  
“No Other Name”  
“O Come, All Ye Faithful”  
“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”  
“O Magnify The Lord”  
“One Day”  
“Only Trust Him”  
“Onward Christian Soldiers”  
“Redeemed”  
“Revive Us Again”  
“Rock Of Ages”  
“Room At The Cross”  
“Sanctuary”  
“Savior, Like A Shepherd Lead Us”  
“Seek Ye First”  
“Silent Night”  
“Since Jesus Came Into My Heart”  
“Softly And Tenderly”  
“Soon And Very Soon”  
“Standing On The Promises”  
“Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus”  
“The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power”  
“The Bond Of Love”  
“The First Noel”  
“The Nail Scarred Hands”  
“The Old Rugged Cross”  
“The Solid Rock”  
“There’s Something About His Name”  
“Think About His Love”  
“Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus”  
“To God Be The Glory”  
“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”  
“Victory In Jesus”  
“We Came Into His House”  
“We Three Kings”  
“What A Friend We Have In Jesus”

“Whiter Than Snow”  
“Without Him”

Erwin Presbyterian Church

Hymnals Used:

*The Hymnbook*

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”  
“All Beautiful The March Of Days”  
“All Hail The Power Of Jesus Name”  
“All The Way My Savior Leads Me”  
“Angels From The Realms Of Glory”  
“Beneath The Cross Of Jesus”  
“Come Christians, Join To Sing”  
“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”  
“Eternal God, Whose Power Upholds”  
“Fairest Lord Jesus”  
“God Of Grace And God Of Glory”  
“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”  
“He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought”  
“Here, O My Lord I See Thee Face To Face”  
“Holy, Holy, Holy”  
“I Greet Thee”  
“I Love To Tell The Story”  
“In The Cross Of Christ I Glory”  
“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”  
“Joy To The World”  
“Let Us Break Bread Together”  
“Lift Up Your Heads”  
“Lord Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing”  
“Lord, Speak To Me That I May Speak”  
“Matchless Worth”  
“Mighty God, While Angels Bless Thee”  
“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”  
“O Could I Speak”  
“Of The Fathers Love Begotten”  
“O Lord, Our Lord”  
“O Love That Will Not Let Me Go”  
“On Our Way Rejoicing “  
“Praise Ye The Lord, The Almighty”

“Shine Jesus Shine”  
“Silent Night, Holy Night”  
“Sing Praise To God Who Reigns Above”  
“Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus”  
“Take My Life And Let It Be”  
“The Church’s One Foundation”  
“The Lord Will Come”  
“There’s A Song In The Air”  
“We Gather Together”

## VITA

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