

# **How to encourage and inspire congregational singing**

David Chamberlin

*I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. (I Cor 14:15)*

Inspirational music is an essential part of our church meetings. The hymns (1) invite the Spirit of the Lord, (2) create a feeling of reverence, (3) unify us as members, and (4) provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord. (*Hymns*, preface)

I believe that the organ is the instrument of choice for congregational singing because of its superior ability to support the four functions listed above. Blessed is the organist that masters the instrument sufficiently to help fulfill those functions, and blessed is the congregation that has such an organist to encourage and inspire their singing!

What can the organist do to:

## **Invite the Spirit of the Lord?**

- \$ Be prayerful in approach.
- \$ Prepare thoughtfully and thoroughly.
- \$ Underscore the general mood and subtleties of the text with variations in registration and/or nuances in articulation.
- \$ Be sensitive to the spirit of the occasion, and be prepared to change plans (tempo and registration) at the last minute as the spirit dictates.

## **Create a feeling of reverence?**

- \$ Avoid extremes of sound level and tempo.
- \$ Always play your very best!
- \$ Simplify, as needed, to avoid disruption.

## **Unify the members of congregation?**

Temple Square organist Linda Margetts has pointed out that we organists are privileged to be able to offer a weekly "Zion experience" to our brothers and sisters, because hymn singing is one of the few times when we can actually practice being "of one heart and one mind."

- \$ Work together with - not against - the conductor.
- \$ Don't be afraid to take the lead.
- \$ Hymn introductions must clearly indicate what is expected of the congregation.
- \$ Maintain a steady tempo.
- \$ Phrase naturally, allow breathing, especially between verses.
- \$ Simplify, as needed, to avoid disruption.

## **Enable us to offer praises to the Lord?**

Austin Lovelace likens the chapel to a swimming pool: You need to fill it with enough sound that people won't be afraid to dive in! (You don't need to drown them either!) The following applies especially, but not exclusively, to the more spirited hymns.

- \$ Choose tempo and registration that will make the organ sing out, encouraging the congregation but not intimidating them.
- \$ Make judicious (not jarring) changes to registration to further encourage them (add a mixture or a reed on the last verse, for example).
- \$ Play joyfully! (Keep practicing until you can!)