

Making it more than a hymn sandwich.....

According to the composer John Tavener, the purpose of sacred music is “to lead us to threshold of prayer or to a true encounter with the living God”, which gives a challenge to those of us who prepare and lead worship to move a long way beyond any idea that music in worship is simply there to give us a break from listening to the spoken voice of a preacher or worship leader.

Wind a chant or short chorus before, during and after the readings and the sermon. This can create as a place for reflection prayer and connects the spoken words together. Using the same chant or chorus after the sermon and before a time a silence deepens the connection.

Work with the musicians so that the chant or chorus can start without introduction (once you have explained what will happen the first time).

Iona, Taize and lots of other hymn books contain things suitable for using in this way – just choose something that isn't more than 3 or 4 lines.

Sing your prayers. A familiar saying, attributed to Augustine of Hippo, says “whoever sings prayers twice” and reminds us that when we vocalise our prayers and set them to music we add something unique to them. What does it do? It creates a stillness in our busyness and stops us getting bogged down with worthy words. It reminds us that when we pray we are more in need of being changed than the mind of God. It also connects us with something deep within us and helps us linger on words that can often flash by very fast.

Work with the musicians to explore how you might do this, perhaps with a chant or even with a whole hymn such as “we cannot measure how you heal” from the Iona Community.

The hymn book “Hymns of Hope and Healing” (Stainer & Bell 2017) has a section dedicated to singing our prayers.

Listen! Create a time a reflection around the readings, sermon or prayers by listening to music. This can be done live if there are musicians who can help, or a recording can be played (check out what's OK at uk.ccli.com).

You could also add images on a screen to go along with the music.

Balance the length, pace and style of the hymns you choose. Reflect how the hymns you choose can help people move along, and wait a while, in the gathering, praising, listening and responding journey of worship.

Don't forget silence: the spaces between make the sound even more powerful!