

STEPS FOR PREPARING A HYMN

Carol Dean - Utah Valley AGO Chapter Workshop - 11/07/02

1. Since the text (message) is the most important part of each hymn, read the text out loud with meaning to determine where to breathe the text to most clearly express the message. Most congregational members will breathe where their bodies demand air. However, those members in tune with the spirit of worshiping through hymn singing will be sensitive to the organist's efforts to convey the meaning of the text. Mark complete breaks, partial breaks, and "carry overs" in the text itself.
2. Very slowly (at 25 to 33 percent of the normal speed) play the three upper parts - tenor, alto, soprano to ascertain where it would be the most logical to redistribute some of the alto notes to the left hand. Successive intervals of a 6th between soprano and alto voices will almost always need some redistribution to ensure a good legato. Also, lower alto notes - Middle C and lower - are many times more logically played in the upper fingers of the left hand. Mark all necessary redistributions
3. Mark fingerings which need to be consistent to insure that the basic rules of "organ technique" and "independence of line" are kept:
 - a. think all voice parts horizontally - from left to right
 - b. within each voice, if a note repeats, pick it up and put it back down (unless common tones or tying rules are in effect)
 - c. within each voice, if a note changes, connect the notes in a legato fashion (no fracturing and no overlapping of sound)
 - d. lift repeated notes on the "and" of the count (or the "and of the and" if the notes are eighth notes rather than quarter notes)
 - e. text breaks take precedence over legato rules
4. Mark ties and common tones according to "rule sheet."
5. **Slowly** practice three upper parts keeping all the rules of hymn playing. Gradually increase speed as your ability to do so **correctly** increases. **Do not double the bass in your left hand.** The bass should be played with your feet.
6. Mark the pedal line to be played in a legato fashion between both feet. Practice **slowly and perfectly.** Gradually increase speed.
7. Practice left hand and pedal together remembering to include all redistributed notes. This is the hardest step as our ears are so used to hearing the soprano voice included. **Do not skip this step!**

8. Once TAS, LH + Pedal, and Pedal Alone can be played perfectly keeping all the rules, then **very slowly** try putting all four voices together. Each time you practice this step, pick a different verse to follow so you can practice the "carry overs" and "breaks" (each verse should be slightly different).
9. Plan to make subtle registration changes after some (or all) of the verses in the hymn. Practice grabbing the last chord of the hymn into one hand (play it the normal way initially), so that you can reach up and make **one** registration change between verses.
10. Practice the "introduction" of the hymn. Once you get a hymn up to the normal speed, "hum along" or "sing along" to see how much time your lungs need to refill at the textual breaks. Never "rush" through breaks.
11. Be aware of accented beats. On the organ, accent is achieved with silence, delay, or a combination of both. Never rush into accented beats.
12. Always rehearse with your music director before you play for a service. If you have a difference of opinion as to tempo, **compromise!**