

GUIDELINES FOR HYMN REGISTRATION IN CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

Don Cook

See the OrganTutor lesson, "Hymn Playing—Registration"

IN GENERAL

1. **Support** the congregation with confidence, but do not overpower.
2. The **principal chorus** (especially the 8' principal) should form the basis for registration in congregational singing.
3. In **meditative hymns**, stops from the flute chorus might be substituted in place of principal stops to minimize sharpness, especially at the 4' and 2' level.
4. **8' and 4' pitches** are minimum for the manual; 16' and 8' are minimum for the pedal.
5. The Great to Pedal and Swell to **Pedal couplers** provide homogeneity between all voices; avoid them if independence in the pedal line is desired.
6. For **clarity**, build upward with only one stop per pitch.
7. For **fullness**, build outward then upward in pyramid fashion.
8. Use **economy** of means; add a stop only if it contributes to the ensemble. Celestes, for example, are not effective for congregational accompaniment.
9. Use 8' (and possibly 4') **reeds** to add fire to a bright principal chorus, or 8' and light 16' reeds to add gravity to a more foundational principal chorus.
10. The normal **position for the expression pedal** ("swell pedal") is fully open. The normal position for the **crescendo pedal** is fully closed.
11. If the **crescendo pedal** and the **sforzando ("tutti") reversible** have been regulated properly, use them when appropriate. If not, either have them regulated until they are useful or avoid using them.

AVOID

12. Generally avoid **16' manual stops**, sub-couplers, and thick, heavy 8' stops.
13. Avoid overusing **full organ**.
14. Never use the **tremulant** for congregational accompaniment.

TO INSPIRE MORE SINGING

15. Note the message of the **hymn text** in general and the message of each verse. Let them guide the registrational plan for the hymn.
16. Use text-directed **changes of registration** primarily at ends of verses (or between a verse and chorus). However, a change is not necessary following every verse of every hymn. Occasionally it might even be appropriate to play the entire hymn very simply—with no registration change.
17. If the text fails to suggest a registrational direction, **build upward** gradually as the hymn progresses to encourage increased congregational singing. Using another effective approach, **diminish** the organ after the congregation gains strength, and then build the organ again for the final verse.
18. When using **solo lines** in congregational accompaniment, avoid softer solo stops; use large reed or principal stops or combinations to lead out. Be sure the accompanimental combination (as well as the solo combination) is supportive enough for the congregation.
19. Use **manual-only** playing as a contrast to constant deep pedal tone. When the second-to-last verse is played manual only, the impact of the pedal entrance on the last verse is increased.