

VIII. REPORT

OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PSALMODY

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), being wholeheartedly committed to the Regulative Principle in worship, and the consequent exclusive use of divinely-inspired materials as the praise element in worship, the Psalmody Committee have the responsibility for the encouragement of Psalm-singing and the provision of suitable printed and other material in relation to the singing of the Psalms.

To place the work of the Committee in perspective, some thirty years ago it seemed that the production of a split-leaf staff Psalter presented almost insuperable difficulties. For the much smaller denomination we became in 2000 the difficulties seemed even greater, yet we have succeeded in publishing a split-leaf Psalter under our own imprint in 2013, which rapidly sold out, as did a supplementary print run. A further reprint has been done of which there remain in stock some 200 copies. There are also in stock some 116 copies of the sol-fa version. While the immediate pent-up demand has been largely satisfied, the Committee are conscious that the long lead-time involved, particularly in the specialised split-leaf binding process, means that the stock situation must be monitored carefully and provision made for a further reprint before existing stocks are exhausted.

The teaching of beginners in the singing of the Psalms is a responsibility which the Committee has taken very seriously, with instruction material both on paper and on CD to take absolute beginners from the most elementary steps in learning to sing the Psalms, through gentle steps, to being able to participate in four-part harmony singing, sight-reading the music.

This is done by working through the annual Psalmody Test material. Each year, twelve tunes are covered (though beginners will do six tunes in the first year and nine in the second year). The twelve tunes for each year have been selected in such a way that they cover a variety of metres; each year there are some simple tunes and some more complicated ones, some well-known tunes and some less well-known ones. The tunes have also been carefully selected so that they are drawn from different geographical areas and different eras of church history.

The tunes are in a rotation which covers twelve years. By the time any student has worked through the whole Programme, he or she will have learned no less than sixty-three tunes and be well equipped to sing with a measure of competence. The programme is equally suited to young people and adults and the Committee actively encourage the participation of adults in the Psalmody Test programme.

Singing with musical competence is, of course, only the beginning, and it is vital that it be remembered that music is subservient to the words. Volumes 1 to 12 of the *Worthy to be Praised* CDs, published by the Committee, demonstrate clearly how the meaning of the divinely-inspired words should be brought out by the manner in which they are sung.

To many congregations, the project of introducing a Psalmody Class may seem a very daunting one. The quality of the instruction CDs is such, however, that it should be possible for almost all individuals and congregations to embark on a learning process which will enhance the singing of the Psalms in a way which is honouring to God. Surely in our worship we should give of our very best in the praise of the living God!

In some areas the Presbytery of the bounds may, at least initially, be the body best placed to act effectively as a facilitator in encouraging interest and the development of skills in Psalm-singing.

Inevitably, the selection of tunes for our printed materials means that tunes used in some congregations are omitted. It must be remembered that the number of tunes which can be included in a printed split-leaf Psalter is related, albeit loosely, to the number of pages taken up by the words. It is also important to remember that it is highly desirable that staff and sol-fa versions should have the same selection of tunes. It is good to hear, from time to time, congregations sing from suitable tunes composed in the past few decades, and also to hear young precentors discover the full expressiveness of tunes from several centuries past.

We should remember that the manner in which we praise God is also a witness to those who do not normally come within our walls but do appear at, for example, the time of a funeral. Singing which is obviously reverent and brings out the meaning of the words often leaves a lasting impression which leads to the visitor thinking more carefully about what he or she has heard.

JOHN MACLEOD, *Convener*
CALUM MACLEOD, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Special Committee on Psalmody and thank the Committee, and especially the Clerk;
2. The General Assembly note with gratitude the continued demand for the staff version of *The Scottish Psalmody* and note the need to make provision for a future reprint;
3. The General Assembly commend to Kirk Sessions the Psalmody Test programme;
4. The General Assembly commend to Presbyteries the promotion of skills in Psalm-singing within their bounds;
5. The General Assembly note the continued availability of the *Worthy to be Praised* instruction CDs and the *Praise the Lord* compilation CD and commend these to the Church;
6. The General Assembly note the Supplementary Report and congratulate all those who took part in the Psalmody Test and thank all who helped them as well as those who tested them.

APPENDIX

26 took part in the 2019 Psalmody Test (6 more than in 2018) and gained awards as shown:

Cross

Grade 1: Kenneth Iain MacLeod

Grade 4: Heidi MacLeod, Felicity MacLeod

Knock & Point

Grade 1: James MacLeod (duly performed), Norman A. MacLeod (duly performed)

Grade 4: Christina MacLeod

Grade 6: Alexander MacLeod

Stornoway

Grade 1: Marybeth MacDonald (duly performed), George Kenneth MacDonald, Joel Mackenzie

Grade 2: Peter MacDonald, Katie MacKenzie

Grade 3: John MacDonald

Grade 5: Lydia MacDonald

Grade 6: David Craig (adult, continuation), Emma Craig (continuation), Lily Craig (continuation), Sarah Craig, (continuation), Thomas Craig (continuation), Susanna MacDonald

Tarbat

Elementary Group 1: Ellie Joy Phiri

Grade 1: Duncan-John MacLeod, Eilidh MacLeod

Grade 3: Malcolm S. MacLeod (adult, continuation)

Grade 6: Veda Joy MacLeod (adult, continuation), Murdo MacLeod (adult, continuation)