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*Optional Descant

Preface

Psalms are meant to be sung! *The Book of Psalms* in Scripture contains many of the songs of ancient Israel, songs that express the religious faith of the people of God. They are often referred to as "The Psalter."

The Hebrew Psalter also became the songbook of the Christian community. Perhaps no other dimension of Old Testament worship has so literally been carried over into New Testament worship as the singing of the psalms. There are New Testament references to the singing of psalms in worship (Eph. 5.19; Col. 3.16). Very early sources from the Christian Church show the continuation of this practice; in fact, there has never been a time when the singing of psalms has not been a part of the greater Christian Tradition.

As a result of the Reformation, psalm singing was thrust to a new level. It was one significant way in which corporate singing could be restored to the congregation. In addition to chanting the psalms, metered psalm texts became very popular. And so, new editions of psalters began quickly to appear. It wasn't long before tunes were added to the texts. Interestingly, the first book of any kind printed on American soil, *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640), was none other than a psalter!

With this great heritage of psalm singing, why do so many churches *read* the psalms instead of *sing* the psalms? One reason may be that the church of

recent decades lacked a resource that is both theologically and musically fitting. Some liturgical/traditional groups continue to chant the psalms. This is a beautiful, ancient tradition, yet the congregation often has difficulty executing a practice so foreign to them. Some free church groups sing praise choruses based on psalms, but there is very little of the actual psalm text used, and therefore one verse of a psalm becomes divorced from its context.

The Contemporary Psalter is a new way for congregations of every tradition to sing the psalms! The congregational responses in this collection are melodic, interesting, and easy to learn. However, they are more than tuneful melodies that express the text. They are designed to be sung in conjunction with the reading of significant portions of Scripture. *The Contemporary Psalter* blends the melodic beauty of a simple song with the profound significance of the ancient biblical texts. The combination is remarkable!

So you are invited to rediscover the wonder of singing the psalms as the people of God. I pray that the words and music of these psalms, which reflect a variety of moods, tempos, meters, and themes, will enrich your worship as you praise God in community.

Constance M. Cherry

Guide for Using The Contemporary Psalter

The following bullet points provide some helpful information for using the special features contained in *The Contemporary Psalter*.

- The congregational parts are bulletin ready! If you wish, simply photo copy the page with the melody and text, and insert it directly into your bulletin.
- You are free to reproduce this material as many times as you wish for use within your local church only, provided you include the credit and copyright notice.
- Several of the antiphons have optional instrumental descants and guitar chords, useful for embellishing congregational singing and encouraging greater participation. For ease of use, all descants are printed on the Optional Descants page.
- The Scripture texts are arranged in a variety of formats and can be used according to your congregation's resources and taste.
- The psalms appear in their numerical order. In addition, each psalm is indexed according to *The Revised Common Lectionary*, topic and theme, and order of service.
- The pages are arranged so that the congregational part faces the accompaniment. This way the accompanist can easily follow all of the movement without turning any pages.
- The Bible translation used throughout is the New Revised Standard Version except where noted otherwise. The passage of Scripture printed with each antiphon is allowable under the copyright permission granted by the Bible publisher.
- Don't forget to involve children and young people as readers and instrumentalists.
- You may wish to substitute an organ or keyboard for the piano as suitable for your congregation and a particular antiphon.