

LUC MUSIC CURATION GUIDELINES



These guidelines have been developed to assist LUC in thinking through what worship songs are used as part of worship. The guidelines are reviewed and revised regularly. Other groups/congregations are welcome to use/adapt these guidelines with proper attribution. This is not intended to be a theological statement.

Worship is an integral component to the life of a church. It is therefore important to choose worship songs/hymns that reflect a congregation's theology and mission. Leichhardt Uniting Church (LUC) is LGBTIQA+ affirming, feminist and liturgical, and seeks to be anti-racist (leichhardtuniting.org.au/antiracism). We hope to be a safe place (leichhardtuniting.org.au/who-we-are), and our vision statement is: Keeping Faith, Doing Justice, Building Community.

It is much easier to be passive about the music we surround ourselves with, than to be intentional and careful. Music is constantly in our lives, so we often don't notice the full impact it has on us and our values. But if we're not careful, our passivity around maintaining the musical status quo might mean that our cherished worship songs could be infiltrating our psyches with supremacy culture, violent propaganda, and the mind-set of the colonizer rather than an alignment with the meek and the marginalized.

The following guidelines describe the process for evaluating whether a worship song is suited to the LUC worship catalogue (new or in the existing catalogue). The use of some songs may vary based on context and purpose, and so some case-by-case discretion may be required. The kinds of questions that we ask ourselves to guide whether a song is suitable for LUC worship include the following, noting that the relative weight of these questions can vary.

WHEN CONSIDERING A SONG FOR LUC REPERTOIRE WE ASK QUESTIONS INCLUDING:

MUSICALITY

- How **singable** is this song by a congregation?
 - How easy will it be to learn and follow for those who aren't musically trained, and will it sit comfortably within the average person's vocal range?
- Will we be able to effectively achieve a rendition of this song with the **instruments** that we usually have available?
 - *Some songs may be beautiful, but because of production style and instrumentation, are difficult to replicate or translate to our specific worship context, with our musicians and instruments.*

THEOLOGY

- Does this song have an **individual or community** focus?
 - Does it use 'I' language or 'we' language?
 - *Generally, for worship services, we prefer songs with a community focus that unify us. Sometimes, 'I' songs can work well in a reflective context.*
- Who is being **addressed** in this song/whose **perspective** is this song from?
 - Are we singing to God (e.g. 'the Earth is Yours'), or is it Jesus/God singing to us (e.g. 'Come As You Are')?
 - *Generally, we seek songs that are from our human perspective addressing God – we sing in worship. Less often, we sing songs as God/Jesus talking to someone.*
- What **language** does this song use for God and us?
 - Is it masculine (He/Him/His, mankind) or gender-neutral? *(It is sometimes possible to make small changes to this for our context without impacting the flow of the song)*
 - Does the song use the language of one gender to describe God, or multiple?
 - Does it use gendered language that implies power-over e.g. 'Lord', 'King', 'Judge'?
 - *Generally, we seek songs that refer to God as God (rather than a gendered pronoun, because God is beyond gender), and that describe us as being a myriad of gender expressions.*
- What is this song saying about the idea of **salvation**? What is it saying about Jesus and humans in this context?
 - Is it reflecting substitutionary atonement or similar theology?
 - Some of the language that this theology commonly uses refers to Jesus as "perfect" or "sinless" or "saviour" and humans as "sinners", "guilty" etc. Other penal substitutionary atonement words include "wrath", "blood", "satisfied" and "sacrifice."
 - That is, is there an unhelpful binary between perfect divinity and sinful humanity in this song?
 - *Generally, we seek songs that are rooted in the inherent beloved-ness of every person, and in non-violent atonement theology.*
- Does this song reflect our belief that **faith is to be lived out**?
 - Does it call us into the journey of discipleship beyond Sunday worship?
 - Does it call us to do justice as an act of love?
 - How does this song describe the realm/kingdom of God?
 - Does it value a global citizenry, and a humility that demonstrates that if we serve the will of God, we will be about peace and justice, not war and violence? Do the lyrics include the meek, invite the lonely, and resist the colonizing oppressor?
 - Does this song use nationalistic or militaristic language/imagery?

- e.g. warfare, victory, soldiers, battle, fortresses. It may feel great to be on the side of a victorious army, but it means there is a people who are conquered, rather than a world in which war and conquest are defeated. We must remember that Jesus generally did not identify with conquerors.
- *Generally, we seek songs that do not only draw us inward, but outward and forward as an expression of devotion and discipleship.*

OTHER

- **Who is this song by**, and what contexts might this song have been used in before?
 - *We need to be aware that songs can be trauma triggers for some people if they have been sung in harmful spaces (e.g., some in our congregation have had negative experiences with mega-churches). This doesn't necessarily dictate whether we use the song or not but is an important consideration.*
 - What identities are represented in our choice of songwriters overall? Is there a trend toward cis-het white men, or is it more representative of the wonderful diversity within our congregation? What contexts do these songwriters come from? What theologies have formed them?
- What is the **mood** of this song and how can we envisage it being used in worship?
 - Reflective/contemplative vs call to action vs celebration.
 - Does it correspond to a part of the liturgy, or liturgical year?
- What is the **memory/legacy** of this song?
 - Why is this song so well loved and cherished? Is there a story or tradition that makes this song extra special? Is it possible that this song is something of a 'sacred cow'?
- How might this song and its message be received by different sorts of **newcomers** to the congregation? Or people from diverse backgrounds?
 - If a song comes from a different context to our own, will it be led authentically, or might it be performed as cultural appropriation?

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