

INTERPRETING HYMNS

As a music director, you need to interpret the mood of each hymn and convey that mood through your gestures. When singing hymns, the congregation is worshipping the Lord. Through your conducting style, you can make this worship an ordinary experience or a meaningful one.

To help make hymn singing a meaningful experience for the congregation, you must prepare yourself. Study the hymns before the meeting and decide how you will direct them. Some suggestions about how to do this are listed below.

First, determine what the general feeling or spirit of the hymn is. Each hymn has a mood marking, such as *prayerfully* or *joyfully*, located above the first line of notes. It suggests the tempo or speed of the hymn and how loudly or softly to sing it. Read the following mood markings and try to describe how a hymn marked with each description might be sung.

<i>reverently</i>	<i>with exultation</i>
<i>energetically</i>	<i>solemnly</i>
<i>cheerfully</i>	<i>majestically</i>
<i>peacefully</i>	<i>with conviction</i>

After reading a hymn's mood marking, read its text and decide what the message is. Is the hymn a prayer, a statement of praise, or some other message of worship? As you read, try to feel what the author felt while writing the words. Read the scriptures referenced below the hymn to help you determine the hymn's message.

The **metronome** markings that follow the mood markings also tell you how fast to sing the hymn. (A metronome is an instrument that can mark a steady beat at different tempos.) The metronome marking has a small note, which shows the basic beat of the hymn, and numbers that suggest how many beats to have in one minute. The marking ♩=66-88 shows that the tempo should allow between 66 and 88 quarter notes in one minute. Since a minute has 60 seconds, a marking of 66 tells you that quarter notes should be a little faster than one per second. Fitting 88 quarter notes into 60 seconds makes the beat even faster.

When you've decided on a mood and tempo, practice conducting the hymn a few times. Set the tempo and reflect the mood of the hymn with your preparatory beat and then keep the same tempo and mood throughout the hymn. Practice with the accompanist so he or she knows what to expect.

As you conduct, show the spirit of the music through facial expressions and arm movements. Be conservative in your expressions. Keep your conducting style simple so that nothing in your manner is distracting. Most important, seek the Spirit as you fulfill your calling. Let it fill you with the joy of true worship so you can communicate that joy to the congregation.