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# CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



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### FROM THE MUSIC COORDINATOR



### How to Replace Singing in Our Hearts

Merry Phillips



You can “google” just anything these days and find more information than you possibly need (or want) to know. So, while I was thinking about what I could say to ease our minds and hearts about the temporary curtailment of congregational singing, I decided to “google” “how to replace singing in our hearts.” Because I do believe, that whether we physical sing out loud or not, our hearts can still sing.

And the results were pretty much as I expected – several articles on why people don’t sing in church and how to encourage congregational singing (obviously not written for the times when we are told we should not sing)! There are also many articles on the role of singing in the life of the church and the many purposes of singing, e.g., “singing is a vital form of praise.” I think it’s safe to say that with the lack of singing, we are all feeling like we are missing that form of praise.

But what caught my attention and seemed most relevant was a list of “10 ways to worship without singing” – taken from a blog whose writer claims that “they’re all good, biblical ways to worship that people have practiced over the centuries” ([matthewporter.blog](http://matthewporter.blog))

At our last music team meeting we talked about how to encourage the congregation to engage in physical ways with the hymns (clapping, toe tapping, etc.) and I began to create a

list. However, it was not nearly as complete or thoughtful as the list Matthew Porter (from The Belfry in York [England]).

Porter's blog post specifically addresses congregations that have been hit hard by not being able to sing when gathered for worship, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As we seen with other aspects of our worship during the pandemic, we have been forced to find new ways and opportunities to worship and express our praises to God – livestreaming, virtual choir, virtual coffee hours, etc. And while the loss of singing is bittersweet, it is not permanent, and we can wait patiently and look forward to its return. Kind of like a very long season of Advent.

So, without further ado, here is Matthew Porter's list, taken from his blog:

**1. Use your mind & heart.**

*Instead of singing the words, in your head register, read and hear the words. Then let them go from your head to your heart, so we end up doing what is advocated in Ephesians 5:19: 'make music in your heart to the Lord.'*

**2. Use your breath.**

*We can mouth the words, even whispering them very quietly under our breath in our masks. We can let our breath unite with the breath of God's Spirit and know his presence. If you're able to pray in a God-given prayer language (sometimes known as 'tongues') then quietly pray in this way too. In doing this, we're fulfilling the call of Psalm 150:6: 'let everything that has breath praise the Lord!'*

**3. Use your legs.**

*When someone we respect enters the room, most people do one of two things with their legs. One is to use them to stand. We stand to honour them, like God's people were urged to do in worship in Nehemiah 9:5. The other is to use them to kneel. We show humility by bowing the knee in reverence, like they did in 2 Chronicles 7:3. Of course there is a time and place to sit on our backsides, but most people in Scripture, unless they're old or infirm, get off their posterior to worship. To do so, we need to use our legs.*

**4. Use your hands.**

*After our mouths, the next most commonly used tool for communication is our hands. Just watch people talking in public, and you know this is true. That's why it often surprises me that many followers of Jesus fail to use their hands very much in worship. And yet the Bible encourages us to do just this, speaking of 'lifting hands' (Ps. 141:2; 1 Tim. 2:8), 'spreading out hands' (Ps. 143:6) and 'opening hands' (Deut. 15:8) to God. If you've never used your hands in worship in this way, now is surely the time to explore this, lifting the name of Jesus higher and higher.*

### **5. Use your feet.**

*Given that we're meant to keep distanced from people, we can't move around too much when we're gathered for worship at present. But we can keep our feet on the floor and sway. Jewish worshippers often do this, imaging themselves swaying to and fro like a candle flame in the breeze of God's Spirit, and we can do the same. And of course we can use our feet to dance. There is much in the Bible on dancing (e.g., Ps 149:3), although very few churches seem to practice it these days. For many years I have felt that the Lord is calling the church in the UK to become more of a dancing church. However, I often get embarrassed dancing, as I know many others do too! I suspect I just have to get over that and let my feet express praise that in the past I've left to my mouth. [and I would add, tap your toes or march in place as other ways to use your feet!]*

### **6. Use your fingers.**

*God gave us fingers to aid creativity: for making, building, writing, drawing and for all sorts of crafting. So why not use your fingers creatively in worship in these unusual days? That could mean bringing a notepad and pen, and drawing something, or writing something to express your praise. Or you could use your phone or iPad in a similar way. If you do this, to stay safe, don't pass your creative offerings to others, and make sure you take home what you create.*

### **7. Use your ears.**

*With less distractions from our own voices, and from others around us, we should be all the more aware of the sounds of worship which will mainly come from the front – from those leading. So, let's ensure we're using our ears well for listening: listening to the words, the prayers and the praises, and as we do so let's be attentive to the prophetic voice of the Holy Spirit who wants to 'strengthen, encourage and comfort' us (1 Cor. 14:3).*

### **8. Use your eyes.**

*As well as using your ears to listen, open your eyes to see. Look at the signs and symbols in the building and let them enhance your worship. Most are there for a purpose. So be aware of space and shadows, of colour and candles, of pictures and people. If you're in a building you know well, ask the Lord to help you look beyond the familiar and see things in a fresh way. Use what you see to cause you to be thankful and draw close to God.*

### **9. Use your smile.**

*As well as not singing, we're not meant to have much conversation inside church, and certainly not in groups of more than six. This doesn't mean we stop being church family, but it does mean we will all need to work harder to welcome people, to create community and to show kindness to each other. An obvious way to do this, is simply to smile. Even though you're*

*wearing a mask, make an effort to smile at those around you, and supplement it with a wave. Smile and show those around you that you're pleased they're there! I suspect our smiley greetings will be key worship tools in this season.*

#### **10. Use your finances.**

*Finally, as well as giving our thanks, our praise, our prayers and our love to the Lord, we're also called to give him our tithes and offerings (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 16:2). Giving financially – either by direct debit, or at a contactless giving station – is another important way of worshipping, even though we can't sing. God receives our finances as worship, when we give from a thankful and cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7). As we worship with our money, so we can expect the Lord will continue to look after us, so we can give again. Such is his overflowing love (Luke 6:38).*

I liked that Porter's list ends with a nod to stewardship, as that time of the year is upon us at Christ Church. It is a wonderful time and opportunity to show our thanks for all that God has given us.

I hope you find this list of suggestions helpful! There are all sorts of ways we can worship without singing, both "prayerful and playful." I believe that incorporating even two or three of these will not only make our current worship more meaningful but will lead to stronger and healthier worship post-pandemic.

So, for now, please don't sing, but do worship!

