



Selecting Hymns and Music for Funeral Services and Thanksgivings

Although hymns are obviously not the only form of music used at funerals, they often cause the most worry and anxiety for the person planning the funeral. We will always do our best to accommodate requests for specific hymns at funerals and thanksgivings, within the limits of the hymn books available at each of the churches. These vary somewhat, but the majority of the most popular hymns are in the books at all six churches. Where a service leaflet is being prepared, whether by the church or by the funeral director, it may sometimes be possible to include other songs or hymns not in one of the standard books.

When choosing hymns there are a number of things to bear in mind:

1. **Whether the words are understandable and appropriate:** because the Christian faith is so closely linked to our eternal destiny, there are many appropriate hymns. However, some popular choices have words that people find difficult to grasp under normal circumstances, let alone at a time of distress, while others (such as Jerusalem) are simply not very appropriate on closer inspection.
2. **What proportion of the congregation are likely to know them:** it is worth bearing in mind the age range of the congregation and their experience of 'church'. Some of the younger generation may only know what could be called 'school hymns'. It is embarrassing for everyone if the minister is the only one singing.
3. **How easy the tune is to learn and sing:** there will always be some who don't know any hymn, so a good sing-able tune is essential – not too tricky and neither too high nor too low. For example, *I am the bread of life* has an irregular metre (i.e. there are extra notes in some verses) which catches people unawares and shakes their confidence.
4. **How long the hymn is:** some popular choices are quite long and repetitive. For example, *All things bright and beautiful* has five proper verses with a chorus in between each and a chorus at the beginning and the end. *For all the saints* is even longer with eight verses!
5. **The faith of the deceased and the likely congregation:** some popular hymns are only really appropriate at the funeral of a committed Christian, and perhaps even then only when a significant proportion of the congregation also have a strong faith. This is usually because the words express clear, firm beliefs which some people may find hard to affirm and sing with enthusiasm.
6. **Suitability for different points in the service:** there are normally no more than two opportunities to sing in a funeral service, including the psalm if the ceremony is taking place at the crematorium. There is less time pressure in church, but we would still normally recommend no more than two hymns plus a psalm as appropriate.
 - The first point where a hymn fits well is just after the welcome and opening prayer. A hymn of praise may be suitable. However, if we will not be saying a psalm later in the service this is the point where many people choose to sing a hymn that is a setting of Psalm 23.
 - The next good point is just after the address and before the prayers and the commendation. A fairly reflective song or one which is prayer-like is most suitable here.
 - The final point is right at the end of the service, after the committal but before the blessing, where a hymn of praise may sometimes be appropriate. However, this is a far less common point at which to sing. The exception is funerals in church where the deceased was a committed Christian and there is a desire to go out on a very positive note.

The list on the following pages is based on the Funeral Services book available at most crematoria and represents the most common choices of all, across the various church denominations. I have included a few notes for guidance when choosing, but please feel free to call or email me for further advice or if you would like to see the full words of a particular hymn or song before making a final decision. If you wish to include recorded music, we should also discuss that as soon as possible to give the best chance of meeting your needs. Please also let me know if there is anything else I can do to help you at what I know is a very difficult time.

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A	<i>Abide with me, fast falls the eventide</i>	Very suitable before the prayers and commendation
	<i>All things bright and beautiful</i>	Very well known and popular with all generations. On the other hand it is quite lengthy, somewhat repetitive and the tune is rather high for male voices. Not generally recommended.
	<i>Alleluia, sing to Jesus!</i>	A good rousing hymn to end with at the funeral of a committed Christian, but the language is quite complex in places.
	<i>Amazing grace</i>	This is a good opening hymn in many ways. The words are highly appropriate, and the tune very well known. However, it goes quite high and can be hard to sing if emotional.
	<i>And did those feet in ancient time (Jerusalem)</i>	Not generally recommended. The words are poetic and moving but not especially helpful, and it is hard to sing.
B	<i>Be still my soul: the Lord is on your side</i>	Not well known.
	<i>Blest are the pure in heart</i>	Short and simple, although not well known to the younger generation. Good opening hymn for the funeral of a churchgoer.
D	<i>Dear Lord and Father of mankind</i>	Good, well-known hymn suitable for use at any point.
E	<i>Eternal Father, strong to save</i>	Only really appropriate for those with a maritime connection!
F	<i>For all the saints who from their labours rest</i>	Quite lengthy, and quite high to sing, but a fantastic opening or closing hymn for a committed Christian.
G	<i>Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father</i>	Good opening hymn that is fairly well known and easy to catch on to. May be particularly appropriate for those involved with the land in any way.
	<i>Guide me, O thou great Redeemer</i>	Good rousing closing hymn for a service in church with more than two hymns, but only if a good singing congregation is expected.
H	<i>How sweet the name of Jesus sounds</i>	Another good closing hymn, but again most appropriate if the deceased was a strong practising Christian.
I	<i>I am the Bread of Life</i>	Although the words are excellent, this is a hard hymn to sing because of the irregular rhythms and it is also quite long (five verses with choruses). Not generally recommended.
	<i>I heard the voice of Jesus say</i>	A good hymn either before the prayers or as a closing hymn if required, but the tune is not well known among non-churchgoers.
	<i>Immortal, invisible, God only wise</i>	A good, well-known hymn of praise suitable for opening a funeral or thanksgiving for a practising Christian when there is a strong note of celebration.
	<i>In heavenly love abiding</i>	Tricky rhythms and quite high, but lovely words. Only likely to be well known to older congregations.
J	<i>Jesus lives! Thy terrors now</i>	Not generally recommended. Difficult words and hard for congregations to sing well.
	<i>Jesu, lover of my soul</i>	A good Welsh tune and fantastic words, but best for congregations that are likely to sing well and enthusiastically.
	<i>Just as I am, without one plea</i>	Short verses that are very easy to catch on to if unknown. Good words that make it suitable for use after the address.
L	<i>Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us</i>	Prayerful hymn with good words that is excellent later in the service. Generally well known.
	<i>Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy</i>	Excellent after the address and before the prayers, and also quite well known to all generations.
	<i>Love divine, all loves excelling</i>	An unbeatable hymn with more than one fantastic well-known tune. Often used at weddings and can be quite emotional.
	<i>Love's redeeming work is done</i>	Quite an old-fashioned hymn that is not especially well-known except to older generations.
M	<i>Make me a channel of your peace</i>	Can be good after the address and before the prayers, and also pretty well known to all generations. However, the words may make it only appropriate in certain circumstances.
	<i>Morning has broken, like the first morning</i>	Frequently chosen as an opening hymn, partly because it so well known to all generations. However, it goes quite high and is not always sung well by small congregations.
N	<i>Now thank we all our God</i>	Very suitable among farming communities. Best used as an opening hymn.

O	<i>O God, our help in ages past</i>	Short verses, with an easy tune. Very appropriate words.
	<i>O Jesus, I have promised</i>	Best reserved for the funeral or thanksgiving for a committed Christian person where the family share that faith. A good opening hymn in those circumstances, but quite long.
	<i>O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder (How great thou art)</i>	A good, uplifting with clear words, and which people generally join in well with. Needs a good singing congregation.
	<i>O love that wilt not let me go</i>	A good older hymn, but generally best for the funeral of older churchgoing folk.
	<i>On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross</i>	Quite lengthy (four verses + choruses), but very popular. The tune is not nearly as well known as the words.
P	<i>Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin</i>	Not well known and rather brief.
	<i>Praise, my soul, the King of heaven</i>	If the deceased was a practising Christian, this is another first rate hymn suitable for starting or ending the service.
R	<i>Rock of ages, cleft for me</i>	Can be used at any point in the service. Lovely words and a tune that is fairly easy to catch on to even if not known.
T	<i>The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended</i>	A simple tune but uplifting tune and understandably popular words. Particularly appropriate before the prayers.
	<i>The King of love my shepherd is</i>	A good, slightly longer version of the 23 rd Psalm (compared to <i>The Lord's my shepherd</i>) that is also well known. Suitable in place of an opening hymn.
	<i>The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want</i>	The most popular funeral hymn of all, usually in place of the opening hymn.
	<i>The strife is o'er, the battle done</i>	Not a general purpose funeral hymn, but highly suitable for a thanksgiving or funeral for a life-long Christians.
	<i>There is a green hill far away</i>	Not generally recommended, even though it is well known.
	<i>There is a redeemer</i>	A good slightly more informal song that expresses confidence and thanks. Tune easy to catch if not known.
	<i>Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son</i>	A good rousing hymn to open or close the funeral or thanksgiving of a committed Christian if the congregation is likely to sing enthusiastically.
	<i>To God be the glory, great things he has done!</i>	Another rousing hymn to open or close the funeral or thanksgiving of a committed Christian, but once again only if the congregation is likely to sing enthusiastically.
W	<i>When I survey the wondrous cross</i>	An excellent hymn expressing real faith, with a good, easy tune. Suitable for any point in the service. Verse 4 is normally omitted.