

Overture RSW 2021

The overture was presented by the Vernon CanRC to Classis Pacific East September 2020

It was then presented by CPE Sept. 2020 to Regional Synod West 2021

It is now being presented by RSW 2021 to General Synod 2022

We recommend that General Synod Guelph 2022 rescind the decision of General Synod Chatham 2004 that limits the number of hymns in the *Book of Praise* to 100.

Currently our churches are bound to the following regulations found in the Acts of General Synod Chatham 2004:

Acts of GS Chatham 2004, Article 115, Obs. 6.1, pp. 120,121 Hymn Section 6.1. Observations

Observation 6.1.1. *The SCBP intends to deal with submissions re: the hymn section in a manner that seeks to:*

- *Maintain the current structure of our hymn section;*
- *Identify and correct deficiencies and/or weaknesses in the existing hymn section and come with a proposal for change, addition or improvement;*
- *Select suitable hymns using the Guidelines and Principles agreed upon by the committee together with the Psalter Hymnal Committee of the URCNA;*
- *Set the limit at 100 hymns since Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches;*
- *Publish a revised hymn section proposed for testing by the churches. Acts of GS Chatham 2004 Article 115, Rec. 6.3*

Recommendation 6.3. *Synod decide to mandate the SCBP to deal with the submissions re: the hymn section as outlined in Observation 6.1.1. and to present a proposal to the next General Synod.*

Our recommendation is based on the following Observations and Considerations:

1. Observations:

- 1.1. The decision of General Synod Chatham 2004 was made on the basis of the guidelines provided by the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* to deal with the submissions from the churches for the hymn section of the *Book of Praise*.
- 1.2. The rationale provided by the SCBP for setting the limit at 100 hymns is that the Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches.
- 1.3. General Synod Edmonton 2019 noted the decision of GS Chatham 2004 in their considerations with re: adding the hymns of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. Stating that "...the decision of GS 2004 to cap the number of hymns to 100 on the ground that Psalms should have the predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches, at this time limits the churches from adding the abundance of hymns that the TPH [Trinity Psalter Hymnal] includes." (GS 2019, Art. 142, Cons. 3.3, p. 173.)
- 1.4. Though generally decisions made by a previous Synod are dealt with by way of appeal rather than an overture, GS 2019, noting the longevity and importance of a different decision decided that such matters should be dealt with in the form of an overture. They stated:
The fact that the decision of GS 1983 has served the churches for more than 30 years is also significant. During all that time, the 1983 decision was honoured as settling and binding. Also for this reason, the request of Hamilton-Blessings should come in the form of an overture that follows the ecclesiastical route..., seeking support. In this way, all the churches will have ample time and opportunity to interact with it through this filtering process. (GS 2019 art.

64 cons. 4.4, p. 51).

Since the decision of GS Chatham 2004 has been upheld by the churches for 15 years, this appeal is presented as an overture so that the churches may have abundant opportunity to interact with it.

2. Considerations:

- 2.1. The proposal to set a limit to the number of hymns in the *Book of Praise* did not originate from a matter brought forward by the churches and it was not included in the mandate of the SCBP. The mandate given to the SCBP by General Synod Neerlandia 2001 was as follows:
That this Committee receive submissions and proposals for additional hymns from the churches with the reasons for their suitability, evaluate them in accordance with the requirements set out by General Synod Edmonton, 1965, and submit a selection to the churches prior to subsequent General Synods. (GS 2001 art. 97, rec. 5.2, p. 111).
- 2.2. The proposal to set a limit to the number of hymns in the *Book of Praise* was introduced as a measure “to deal with the submissions re: the hymn section as outlined.” (Acts of GS Chatham 2004, Art. 115 p. 121) Since then, it has become a measure to deal with all submissions.
- 2.3. The rationale provided for this measure is that the “Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches.” However, the measure does not necessarily follow from the rationale. The cap of 100 hymns does not secure the predominant place of the Psalms in worship. One can sing hymns exclusively with far fewer hymns and maintain the predominance of the psalms in worship with a far greater number of hymns.
- 2.4. We currently have a clear regulation in place that allows the church to oversee and manage the hymn selection of the *Book of Praise* in Church Order Article 55. The Church Order ensures the cooperation of the churches with regards to the hymns sung in worship and prevents the singing of hymns in worship that have not been agreed to by the churches. This regulation will continue to function without the hymn cap.
- 2.5. Our current measure of limiting the number of hymns gives the perception to some that singing hymns is less desirable than singing psalms. However, it is clear from the Preface of the *Book of Praise* that the hymns are not less desirable.
- 2.6. The current measure of limiting the number of hymns has the unfortunate effect that we deprive ourselves of many good hymns. Instead of having the freedom and blessing to include all Biblical and edifying hymns to our *Book of Praise*, only a selection of the best can be used in our worship services. And as long as new hymns are being written that fill the current requirements for addition to the *Book of Praise*, we, as churches, will find ourselves wrestling with the difficulty of having to remove good hymns in order to make room for other excellent new hymns.
- 2.7. As New Testament believers we celebrate the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ every calendar year (Art 53 CO: “Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as his outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”). To celebrate these wondrous works of God, we sing “new songs” that highlight these specific events and complement our celebration of them. The importance of these hymns should also be reflected in our *Book of Praise*. However, with a limit of 100 hymns, there is likely to be less room for hymns that are traditionally sung during specific seasons of the Christian calendar, because the hymn cap forces us to choose between hymns that are more general and suitable for any worship service and those which might be occasional, primarily suitable for only a few Sundays each year.