

SINGING THE PSALMS AND CANTICLES

The Psalms and Canticles, from *Common Worship Daily Prayer* and from *The Daily Office SSF* are pointed here with congregations and small groups of worshippers, without the resources needed for Anglican chant, in mind.

The basic principle of chanting is that each section or half-verse of Psalm or Canticle is sung on a reciting note with an inflection, or change of note, on the last accented syllable, as in Ps. 23.1:

The Lord is my shépherd; * therefore can I lack nóthing.

Here the accent marks the last stressed syllable and the change of note.

Each verse can be sung to a chant of four notes Thus Ps. 23 might be sung as follows:



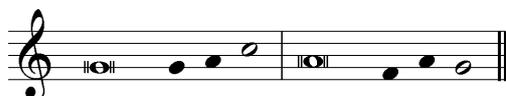
- 1 The Lord is my shépherd; *
therefore can I lack nóthing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pástures *
and leads me beside still wáters.
- 3 He shall refresh my sóul *
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his náme's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no évil; *
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they cómfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who tróuble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be fúll.
- 6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me all the days of my lífe, *
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for éver.

Or a tone of eight notes might be used, and the verses grouped in pairs: see Ps. 47. 1-6 as an example:



- 1 Clap your hands together, all you péoples; *
O sing to God with shouts of jóy.
- 2 For the Lord Most High is to b é féared; *
he is the great King over all the eárh.
- 3 He subdued the peoples únder us *
and the nations under our féet.
- 4 He has chosen our heritage for ús, *
the pride of Jacob, whom he lóves.
- 5 God has gone up with a merry nóise, *
the Lord with the sound of the trúmpet.
- 6 O sing praises to God, sing práises; *
sing praises to our King, sing práises.

This is a simple method. You can write your own tunes and they may well be enhanced by an organ accompaniment. Tones can be made more interesting by the addition of one or two notes between the reciting note and the final accent. For instance:



Most the tones suggested here are set out in four-note sections (repeating the reciting note if necessary). The texts are pointed here so that they can be sung to any of the tones.

Three kinds of note are used:



- i. is the reciting note;
- ii. black notes are passing notes (see note 1 below).
- iii. marks the final accent of each section;

The passing notes are sung to the two syllables immediately preceding the final accent. This is made clear by placing dots (corresponding to the black notes) over each of these syllables in the text. Thus

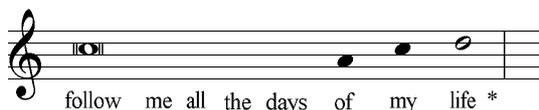
Clap your hands together, ãll yòu peóples; * O sing to God with shòuts òf jóy.

Notes:

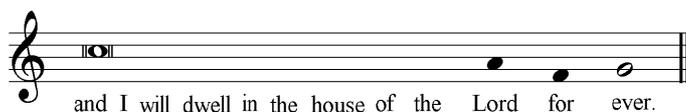
1. Psalms and canticles should neither be dragged nor rushed, but sung with meaning and with the emphasis of good, clear, reading. The music is designed to carry and express the words. It should never distort them, but allow them to have their proper emphasis.

2. Syllables which follow the final accent are sung lightly on the same note, e.g., shepherd, name's sake, comfort me, trouble me, heritage for us, Abraham.

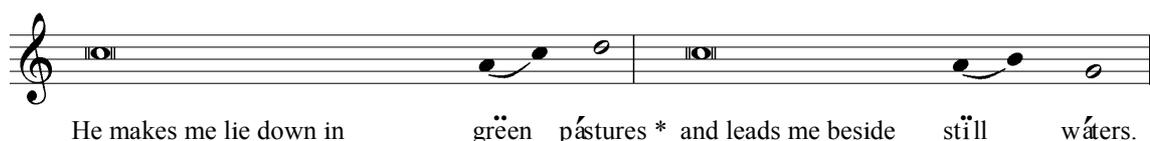
3. A change of note does not imply an accent. The first of the black notes should not be stressed unless it coincides with an accented syllable - thus:



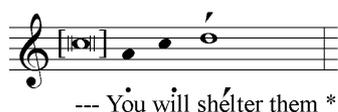
but



4. A strong syllable immediately in front of the final accent needs space and proper emphasis, and is therefore sung to the two black notes. For example, 'green' and 'still' (Ps. 23.2) are strong syllables adjacent to another accent. Two dots placed over them show that they are sung to two notes, thus:



5. Occasionally in short sections it is necessary to omit the reciting note. This is indicated by dashes - - - at the beginning of the line, as for example in Ps. 5.13:



6. It is an old tradition to sing psalms and canticles alternating the verses between different groups of voices, high and low, side to side, or cantor and congregation. This gives some variety in a simple form of chanting, and helps to keep attention!

7 *Gloria* should be sung by everybody. The pointing is given with the tones.

8 Shorter and longer (single and double) tones are given, with either two sections to cover a single verse or four sections to cover two verses. When a longer tone is used for a psalm or canticle with an odd number of verses the bracketed sections should be omitted in the odd verse.

9 While care should be taken in pronouncing every syllable, it is important that unaccented syllables should not be overstressed. It makes for smoother recitation if **heaven** is pronounced **heav'n**, and so it is printed in the text. Words like 'marvellous' and 'glorious' are better treated as almost two syllables, and 'sanctuary' as three, without undue stress on the lightest syllables ('marvellous', 'glorious' or 'sanctuary'), and the pointing always focuses the stress on the first syllable of such words. The apostrophe is only used in the word 'heav'n', but singers need to be sensitive and avoid the ungainly exaggeration of unstressed syllables, without going to the other extreme of reducing a word like 'family' to 'fam'ly'.

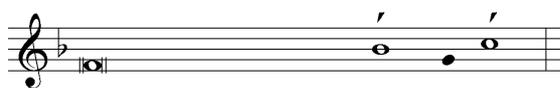
10 The music is suited to unaccompanied singing. It would, however, be enhanced by a light organ accompaniment to support the singers and help them to keep in tune.

11 There are many collections of simple tones of a similar pattern to those given in these files, e.g. in *Psalms for the Eucharist*, ed. S. Foster (3 vols. McCrimmon, 1984).

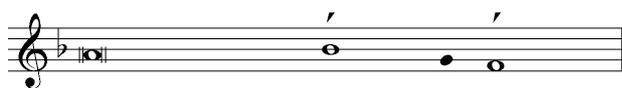
But please note: tones which rise after the reciting note are not suitable for use with the pointing given here. The higher note (when it is the second note of a four-note section) should fall on an accented syllable, and this accent (which may not be two back from the last accent) would need to be marked. For example, if Psalm 19.1 & 2 were sung to the following tone -



the accents would be falsified and the prepositions overstressed if the pointing suggested here were used. These verses would need to be sung in this way:



1. The heavens are telling the glóry of Gód *
2. One day pours out its sóng to a - nóther *



1. and the firmament pro - cláims his hándiwork.
2. and one night unfolds knowledge to a - nóther.

Tones of this kind have been avoided here, in the interests of simplicity. With this pointing any text can be sung to any of the given tones.

12 Canticles 1 – 16, 18, 53, 65 & 79 are treated like the Psalms. In the other Canticles the verses are grouped in twos, and it is suggested that they be sung to the double chants. Where there is an odd number of verses note 8 above applies, and square brackets in the text correspond with the omitted sections of the chant. The refrains also are divided into two sections, using the first and last sections of the chant. The refrain for *Magnificat* during the Easter Season, however, is divided into four sections, the whole chant being used. *Te Deum* (64) is pointed for the tone set, which follows the simple 8- note pattern described at the beginning of this introduction.

File 2 contains a selection of chants for Psalms & Canticles for both suggested schemes of pointing, with *Gloria* for either.

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(Revised April 2012)