Introduction

Hold my hope
Hold my trembling
Hold my heart
Teach me to be love

One of my big life questions is "How can we find and nurture God in ourselves so we can find and nurture God in one another?" In putting together this collection, I've attempted to share with you some of the short songs and chants I've worked with along The Way as icons (Greek *eikon*, meaning "likeness, image") of divine presence in absolutely everybody.

The songs range from straightforward to a bit harder to grasp, and they are intended to be prayed together to lift our hearts. They run the gamut of short songs: simple melodies, rounds, call-and-response tunes, echo songs, an almost triple canon in eight measures (with eight parts), zipper songs (fill-in-the-blank songs), and mashups. There are almost always parts for the assembly and multiple ways to include them. There's even a strophic hymn, included here because it's beautiful, only two stanzas, and often overlooked among longer hymns. Its text from contemporary Canadian hymn writer Sylvia G. Dunstan is also perfect for this collection because it assists in reminding us:

> How deep the silence of the soul that lives within your grace.
> How full the gratitude of heart in your abiding place.
> What rich serenity is found, what courage and release
> when wisdom teaches us to seek the gentle path to peace.
>
> Like unseen chimes on moving air, like warm and morning sun,
> like gladdening, greening, growing things, like trees with bloom begun;
> such is your presence in our lives—you touch without a trace,
> until we turn and find ourselves held fast in your embrace.[1]

When we make time to reflect on our lives as images of divine presence (because we are), we enlarge our capacity for love by encouraging ourselves and everyone we engage with to build the peace, love, and joy we all hope for together. Yet how often do we make the time to encourage ourselves, much less others?

Contemplative practice over thirty years has taught me that singing is the most direct route to prayer and building community, especially during hard times (inside and out). Lately, I've been heartened by people around the globe, joining together in peaceful protests and using beautiful and simple songs to show the world that, in the words of author and global activist Arundhati Roy:

> Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen carefully, I can hear her breathing.[2]

---

1 Sylvia G. Dunstan, *A Whisper in the Heart: The Hymns of Sylvia G. Dunstan* (GIA Publications, Inc., 2023), 98.

2 Arundhati Roy, *My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction* (Haymarket Books, 2019), 204.

Sample

A text by the English mystic Dame Julian of Norwich showed up one day as a wide-ranging melody not long after:

> All shall be well, and all shall be well,
> and all manner of thing shall be well.[3]

I began to record them as separate songs and realized they belonged together (Look at God!). Now they're often sung together, even though each tune is perfectly sweet on its own.

Short songs help me pray. I'm quite sure they'll help you pray as well. There are songs for each this and every that you can name, and songs for those you can't. There are songs that connect us to Spirit, songs that connect us to culture, songs that reinforce the goodness of God, and songs that reinforce our aspirations—there are short songs for everything, so go write one or grab one of these and play around with it.

In this small collection, I invite you to ponder the nature of each tune like a bespoke suit, one made for a specific use or community to help us connect with God, with ourselves, and with one another. Some of these tunes are clearly prayer practice to help us understand how to manage our internal weather so we can bring our truest selves to all our encounters. Some musicians will want a drum, shaker, or drone (I see you), so add what you hear. If you're singing with friends, ask what they hear. Be open to good things coming your way.

I've always loved the idea of praying unceasingly, and I hope you'll find more than one or two in this collection to aid you in your quest for a deeper conscious connection with God and everyone else. There are a few psalms here that are very "sticky." Sticky is good because when we sing a helpful song a few times, it tends to start singing inside us without external prompting. Most of the tunes here can be installed once and will stick forever.

Some of the more contemplative tunes can restore us by keeping our focus on God's words and intentions for us, perhaps made easier if we look over the shoulder of our chattering thoughts to hear God's will. Some hymn tunes like Adoro te devote and St. Columba will insist we listen more deeply, keeping an ear out for harmonies and countermelodies. Other tunes will make you dance and even whirl for the love of God and one another, to deepen our joy and rekindle our hope in community.

It is my firm belief (and I have few beyond love and perennials) that we can sing our way into becoming our sweetest selves. Even in the domain of singing, we separate people into readers and non-readers, people who blend well with others and those who don't, those who have "a good ear" and those who don't. I have worked with choirs who are so committed to doing things exactly "right" that they totally forget the main purpose of singing together is what we can accomplish for common unity.

I've been scolded by more than one person claiming it's unreasonable for me to expect people to learn songs without music, even though they've been singing since before they could read! The patterns we get stuck in can be good (brushing our teeth) or bad (add yours here).

My hope, friends, is that these songs will help you to practice loving your neighbor and listening to God. And if you think you first have to ask "Who is my neighbor?" let me save you a little time: Absolutely every body and every thing is your neighbor (even mosses and

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3 Julian of Norwich, *Showings*. Trans. and ed. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J. Classics of Western Spirituality Series (Paulist Press, 1978), 225.

Sample

lichens, coral reefs and icebergs). The systems of the world operate on a scarcity model, but God's model is one of awe-inspiring abundance, and there's plenty to be found when we open ourselves to spiritual play.

Many of these melodies are so simple to learn that they can travel with you, and that means you'll find more applications based on your context. For instance, "O Love That Casts Out Fear" is a traditional text written by Scottish hymnodist Horatius Bonar in the nineteenth century. I liked it a lot, but I heard something completely different in my head, so in 2026, the tune is different in both form and context. Many of the tunes here are equally flexible.

"Open My Heart" has singlehandedly made me less snarky and more compassionate. I've been singing it for twenty-one years, and it's different every time. The phrase is only three words long, and I always invite people to sing it in the language of their hearts. Many people have thanked me for encouraging them to sing in their native language. One man came up to me after a workshop and said, "I was able to sing in my language!" He was so excited the people in the room stopped. I asked, "What is your language?" "Mandarin!" A few people have complained that the vowel sounds don't work together when they sing in multiple languages at once. I gently remind them that uniformity of vowel sounds is not always the point. It's more about embracing those who show up and encouraging them to bring their whole selves to the song.

Children, as well as adults, love to sing many of these tunes. As American composer/arranger Alice Parker once told me, "Only 5 percent of the song is on the page." I love black dots on paper, but not everyone can read them. Try singing "Banquet of Love" (a table grace) or "God Will Watch Over." And if you think those songs are too simple for your adult choir, listen to the arrangements on my *Banquet of Love* album (volume 1 of the Big Chants Project) to see how carried away with spirit you can go when you loosen the reins (don't worry, everybody still needs to practice). Then go write an arrangement that befits your people. It will be different, beautiful, and fun.

One of our tasks as song leaders and liturgists is to sift through the tunes we might sing, to understand the effects they have on us—whether they open or close our hearts. Hopefully, the songs shared in this collection enable us to expand our conscious acts of love, from small insights to transformational ways, or simply help us quiet our minds to hear through the world's chatter and listen deeply to God's callings. May singing bring us to a place where we're able to listen generatively and ask questions to bring our companions out to play in ways that make us better together.

AH

Sample

All Shall Be Well

Another World



sample

Text: Julian of Norwich, c. 1342–c. 1413; Arundhati Roy, b. 1961
Music: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Text © 2019 Arundhati Roy. Used by permission of Haymarket Books.
Music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

These tunes may be used together or separately. When used together, layer in one tune at a time. I usually begin with "Another World," as it's easier to sing, then add "All Shall Be Well." There are many ways to use these two: Praying for those across the aisle is always good practice, as is surrounding those in need of healing and praying for them. It's also a lovely benediction/closing song. Let me know what ways you've found to use either or both tunes.

Hold My Hope, by Ana Hernández, ISBN 979-8-3419-0589-4
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Open My Heart



Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Music: Ana Hernández
Text and music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

This melody is adapted from a traditional Chinese compassion mantra. I teach it from the bottom up, beginning with the bass, adding the alto, and finishing with the beautiful melody on top. Since the bass part is twice the length of the upper parts, learning it first provides solid ground for the improvisation that almost always follows upon learning it. The dissonance in measure 2 is easier to navigate because teaching the melody last gives the lower parts a chance to hear one another and tune the E-G interval before they become a cluster when the F is added into the mix. Please improvise countermelodies and more harmonies. Invite people to sing in the language of their hearts, and above all, don't forget to pray. There's no greater work that we can do to bring about the realm of God than to open our hearts.

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Sample

Set It Right Again



Additional stanzas (flex rhythms to fit as needed):
Trouble's been brewing too many years. We're gonna set it right again.
People need healing all over the world. . .
We need clean water and healthy food. . .
We must have housing; we've a right to thrive. . .
Separating fam'lies has got to end. . . [could pair with next line]
Can't keep locking up people in pens. . .
Blest are the poor and those who mourn. . .
Keep building beloved community. . .
Each of our stories can change the world. . .

Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957, inspired by Sojourner Truth
Music: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Text and music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

A zipper song, "Set It Right Again" can be sung as many times as needed, depending on what's going on. The words for the call came about as I was rereading Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, and the responses showed up at a "Die In" in the War Room in the New York State Capitol in Albany. New calls are needed for all contexts, so please write what you need. I like to end by repeating the first verse.

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Sample

Be Still and Know

Meditation No. 9



Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957, based on Psalm 46:10
Music: Ana Hernández, incorporating Adoro te devote, Plainsong mode V, *Processionale*, Paris, 1697
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Be the Peace



Text: Ana Hernández, adapted from Gandhi, 1869–1948
Music: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
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Hold My Hope



**Rest is observed first time only.*

Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Music: Ana Hernández
Music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

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Let Us Prepare

Advent Refrain



Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Music: Ana Hernández
Music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

This ostinato refrain may provide a few moments of meditative gathering or reflection at any Advent service. Begin with the bass drone (close to a hum on the held notes of "come," but not on the initial "come"). Add the upper parts and, if you like, instrumental or vocal improvisation after a few times through. You may add a humming verse, over which a psalm or prayer might be spoken, and the parts may be swapped with trebles singing the drone and the tenors and basses sharing the other three lines. Play with it as you wish.

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O Love That Casts Out Fear

Great Love!



Text: Horatius Bonar, 1808–1889, alt.
Music: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

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The Steadfast Love of God



Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957, based on Lamentations 3:22-26
Music: Ana Hernández
Text and music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

An echo song, this requires no practice, just listening and repeating. This is one of my favorite reminders that God is on the job and that even when the world looks bleak, there is always hope.

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Where You Go, I Will Go



Text: Ruth 1:16-17
Music: Ana Hernández, b. 1957
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You Are Beloved



Text: Ana Hernández, b. 1957, based on 1 John 4:7-8
Music: St. Columba, Irish tune, arr. Ana Hernández, b. 1957
Text and music © 2026 Augsburg Fortress

This may be done many ways. Here's one:

- Verse 1: Solo voice
- Verses 2–4: SSATB
- Verses 5 and 6: Instrumental solos with chords (jazz chords are nice!); voices tacet
- Verse 7: Soprano II with soloists
- Verse 8: Melody tacet, with chords

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