

Who Has Gathered?

Call to Worship & Digital Gathering Song
(an Indeterminate Liturgy for Congregational Worship)

Words and Music

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quoting fragments of "HOLY MANNA"

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Notes on Who Has Gathered?

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Out of necessity, the pandemic of 2020 introduced to congregational worship a variety of “safe” musical worship expressions. It also resulted in an increased reliance upon technology for communal experiences. This liturgy was conceived out of these situations.

The Digital Gathering Song that responds to the Call to Worship is presented by a gathered community of worshipers making use of their mobile phones or other devices to simultaneously play a number of digital music files. These files can be provided on the church or other website and are accessed via Wi-Fi in the worship space. The site’s address and/or a printed QR code can provide easy connection to the digital files. A time of preparation before worship is helpful to assist the congregation in navigating the playing of the digital song. The digital song provides an opportunity for all to participate, especially those reluctant to sing or who cannot play an instrument. It should also be noted that the song is offered on behalf of those who do not have a phone or other device.

The five different music files that form the Digital Gathering Song tonally complement each other. Fragments of the pentatonic tune, “HOLY MANNA,” associated with the gathering text: “Brethren We Have Met to Worship,” are heard in a few of the files. As individual worshipers select specific files and play them simultaneously (pressing “play” at close yet random intervals), a unique musical composition is heard. 20th century composers called this type of music “indeterminate” because each performance is different, resulting from various choices and chance as well as the particular acoustic environment.

Indeterminacy also characterizes every service of worship as individuals from dissimilar life circumstances gather to form one congregation. The Call to Worship recognizes this reality and the Digital Gathering Song metaphorically and musically expresses it. As the digital song is played, individual worshipers hear how the music of others around them is either the same or different from their music, raising an important awareness that can provide an empathic and meaningful worship experience. They also experience the diverse sounds combining into one beautiful offering.

The following text may be printed in a worship guide:

Call to Worship: Who Has Gathered?

(All speak words in bold print.)

Who has gathered for worship today?

We have gathered for worship today!

Do you gather with joy?

Some of us gather with joy.

Do you gather with concern?

Some of us gather with concern.

Do you gather with a mixture of feelings, thoughts and experiences?

Many of us gather with a mixture of emotions, thoughts and experiences.

Then, let us combine all that we are into a meaningful expression of worship,
into one beautiful song, composed of all that we bring.

Digital Gathering Song

Worshippers with a mobile phone or other device create the song by simultaneously sounding one of several digital sound files, combining them into a unique expression of gathering and welcome. The song is offered on behalf of all and for those without a device at hand.

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