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Symposium on Worship Archive

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### Hymn Text and Tune Writing

Calvin Symposium on Worship: Word, Music, Vision, Action

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*Calvin College*

Greg Scheer  
*Church of the Servant*

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If we are to “sing a new song to the Lord,” we must first compose them! This workshop will begin by outlining the traits of great congregational songs throughout the ages, and then move into a discussion of participants’ songs. Bring one or two completed (or nearly completed) congregational songs of any style that you would like to present and discuss with the class. Of course, those who aren’t yet ready to share their songs are also invited to attend the session.

## **C16: Hymn Text and Tune Writing**

**Bert Polman and Greg Scheer**

### **Singability/Simplicity**

Range and Tessitura – comfortable congregational range spans from Bb to D, this range can be stretched momentarily if prepared well. Tessitura is the range in which the bulk of the notes lie; it can be fatiguing to sing in even a medium high range for too long.

Rhythm - syncopation should be used carefully, with an understanding of the intended audience. Difficult rhythms are made easier when placed in repeated patterns.

Form – simple forms that are often used in group singing:  
call-and-response  
strophes (verses)  
verse-chorus

### **Lyric Quality**

Solid Theology – one song can’t express the whole truth, but each should express some aspect of the truth

Artistry of Expression – embrace the collective voice, avoid colloquialism, find the lyrical balance between poetic and everyday language

### **Musicality**

Hook – the musical “fingerprint” of the song.

Thematic Coherence – the whole song should feel like it grows from the same seed.

Scalability - Harmonies, echoes, and descants are all ways of adding more complex musical layers for the musically advanced.