



Project #2

DETERMINE THE BEST KEYS FOR CONGREGATIONAL SONGS

OBJECTIVE: To analyze the vocal range of five selected worship songs and determine the optimal key(s) for maximizing congregational participation in worship, ensuring the songs are “singable” for the average person.

Read pages 132-134 in *The Worship Ministry Guidebook*. Check out the resources at WorshipMinistryGuidebook.com in the group study section, including an eBook with examples in determining the best keys.

Background:

- » Leading songs in keys that are **too high for the average singer** is identified as one of the most significant “transgressions” of worship leaders, often leading congregants to become **spectators rather than participative worshippers**.
- » Many people stop singing if the songs are too high.
- » A worship leader’s calling is **not to sound like the original recording but to help congregants voice their worship and praise**. This may require sacrificing our ideal sound to facilitate a better environment for worship.
- » The sweet range of the average voice is the **octave C to C**.
- » For songs that cannot be entirely contained within that C to C octave, the book recommends selecting keys where the **lowest melody note the congregation will sing is an A**, and **the highest note should be a D (or an occasional Eb)**. It is emphasized that the “Eb” should occur only rarely and not be sustained, as the average person will struggle with E and above.
- » If parts of a song remain at the high end of this range (D/Eb) for an extended period, it can quickly tire voices, suggesting the need for lower-key considerations if the lowest note is acceptable.
- » Students should **not assume a song’s “original key” is a good key** for maximum congregational participation.
- » If a song has a narrow range and could work in several keys, and its original key is higher, pitching it in one of the higher *acceptable* congregational keys can help “retain the energy of the original music.”
- » The fundamental responsibility is to “enable the congregation to sing their praises, not to showcase our great platform voices by pitching songs in our power ranges.”

Project Steps:

1. **Select Five Worship Songs:**
 - Choose five different worship songs that are currently popular or commonly used in church settings.
2. **Determine the Original Key and Melody Range for Each Song:**
 - For each of the five selected songs, identify its **original key** (the key in which it’s typically recorded or published).
 - Carefully analyze the melody for the congregational singing part of each song. Identify the **lowest melody note** and the **highest melody note** that the average congregant would be expected to sing. You may need to find sheet music that shows the melody line. You can check SongSelect.com, LifewayWorship.com, or PraiseCharts.com for digital lead sheets.
3. **Evaluate Against Congregational Singing Guidelines:**
 - For each song in its original key, compare its identified melody range against the guidelines provided in the book:

- Does the melody primarily fall within the **C to C octave** (the “sweet range”)?
- If not, is the lowest melody note at or above an **A**?
- Is the highest melody note at or below a **D (or an occasional Eb)**.
- Does the song stay at the high end of the range for too long, potentially tiring voices?
- Is the range of melody wider than an octave and a fourth? If so, the song range is beyond the average singing voice and should not be used without modification.

4. Propose Optimal Congregationally-Friendly Key(s):

- Based on your evaluation, propose one or more **congregationally-friendly keys** for each song that would best facilitate congregational participation.
- If the original key meets the guidelines, state that it is a good congregational key.
- If the original key is problematic (e.g., too high), propose a lower key that would make it more accessible for the average singer.
- Consider if a song with a narrow range could be pitched higher within the acceptable congregational limits to maintain energy.

5. Justify Your Key Choices:

- For each of the five songs, write a brief justification (1-2 paragraphs) explaining **why you chose the proposed key(s)**.
- Your justification should directly reference the principles of congregational vocal range and participation discussed in the book (e.g., the C-C octave, the A-D/Eb range, the importance of enabling congregational singing over perfect replication of recordings).
- Explain how your chosen key(s) would enable the congregation to “sing it well” and foster participation rather than creating spectators.

6. Conclusion/Reflection:

- Briefly reflect on the importance of key selection in worship planning for effective congregational engagement, emphasizing that the goal is to help people voice their worship and praise.