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# REIMAGINING THE OFFERTORY

## *From Collection to Offering*

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*For many years churches have passed round a bag or plate during a service to collect offerings of money. It is probably fair to say that the reasons for doing this are little understood by the average congregation.*

The passing of bags or plates can imply that what is being sought is a spontaneous cash contribution towards the church's running expenses. Yet the purpose of the offering is far deeper than this, and should be an integral part of the act of collective worship.

This pack offers some resources to help parishes enable their offering to move closer to becoming both a joyful act of worship and a committed part of discipleship. Within this pack you will find:

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## Why think about the offertory?

Throughout scripture the practice of giving combines the practical resourcing of priestly ministry and the work of the church with the act of making an offering back to God which expresses our thanks for his rich generosity to us. Giving has always **formed a part of worship**. It could hardly be otherwise for God made us body *and soul*. But in practice, many churches have thought little about why we have an act of giving as part of our worship.

From the earliest times, the offering of sacrifices and the burning of expensive incense enabled the giving of an offering to be a part of worship. The law of the first fruits in Deuteronomy 26:1-11 is an **act of thanksgiving** for God's provision and **act of proclamation** as those for whom the land is God's gift tell the story of the rescue from Egypt. In Numbers 18:21-32 the tithe sustains the Levites, and the passage establishes a principle, if not a definitive pattern, of **financial support for local church leadership** which in 1 Corinthians 9 becomes the key principle that those who share the gospel get their living from the gospel (1 Cor 9:7-12). And, of course, King David's great prayer of thanksgiving as material gifts are given to build the first Temple is echoed in churches every Sunday as the financial gifts of God's people are received (1 Chronicles 29:10-20)

Acts describes the early church **giving to share in a communal life**. Those who had used what they had to meet the needs of others. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 of a **collection for the poor** and of the interplay of financial and spiritual blessing and elsewhere of churches sharing their gifts and skills as well as food and money. Giving in the context of worship reflects the importance of giving in community.

Almsgiving has long been linked to the offering. The earliest version of the Book of Common Prayer in 1547, *"In the meane time, whyles the Clerkes do syng the Offertory, so many as are disposed, shall offer unto the poore mennes boxe every one accordynge to his habilitie and charitable mynde."* Historically the church appointed a deacon as a kind of 'social security fund' officer sharing what was collected according to need.

**Giving expresses our love for God, and responds to God's generosity to us.** Such grace not only creates a beautiful world for us to inhabit, provides generously for our daily needs and enables us to love and be loved. Supremely in Jesus' self-offering, we have the way to be reconciled with the Father and to enter into an eternal relationship with him.

Since "where our treasure is, there our heart is also", **the offering of money provides a unique proxy for offering ourselves back to a generous God.** All of these rich themes feed into the offertory as the most visible and tangible expression of our giving as Christian people, and our offertory practice should reflect this.

## Questions for PCC Reflection

These questions are here to help you think through your church's practice in relation to the offering of money. It's not just about "how much is received" but also about how we enable church members to make an offering of money as a proxy for offering themselves in the context of worship, and whether we enable people to give at realistic levels, joyfully and with thanksgiving.

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### 1 What does your giving mean to you in the context of worship? (tick all that apply)

- a) It's my contribution to the work of the church
- b) It's a scramble to find some cash that interrupts my worship
- c) It represents the giving of myself to God
- d) It's a way to say thank you to God
- e) It makes me feel like I'm part of a community
- f) I've never really thought about it
- g) Something else

*Giving is far more than collecting funds for the church's mission and ministry. It can provide an opportunity to offer ourselves, individual and communally, in the context of worship, with money representing all that we stand for – our values and priorities.*

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### 2 Which of these practices applies to your church? (again, tick all that apply)

- We pass around a bag/plate during the service
- We tend to use the same offertory prayer
- A bag or plate or box is available at the back
- We sing a hymn whilst this happens
- Our service sheet explains what we are doing and why
- We have tokens for regular givers
- The bag or plate is brought to the front during the service
- The offering is announced from the front, and we explain its purpose
- It always happens at the same time during the service
- We occasionally do something different that makes us think

*Many churches have not thought about their practice in relation to the offering and have simply continued practice that may have been established years ago. This exercise provides you a chance to think about what you are doing and why.*

**3** *As you think about your church's practice, in what ways does it help, and in what ways does it hinder, a sense of offering in the context of worship?*

THINGS THAT HELP	HOW OR WHY DO THEY HELP?
.....	.....
.....	.....

THINGS THAT HINDER	HOW OR WHY DO THEY HINDER?
.....	.....
.....	.....

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**4** *If a visitor came to your church, what would they understand the collection/ offering to be about? Why would they think that?*

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**5** *What do you think are the arguments for and against passing a bag or plate in church?*

FOR	AGAINST
.....	.....
.....	.....

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**6** *How might you change your current practice to enrich it?*

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*This resource pack provides materials to help parishes think through their practice in relation to the offering. You will find material to help you consider whether to pass a bag or plate around during a service, different offertory prayers, ideas for doing it differently for a change, and much more. It can be found at [www.parishresources.org.uk/offering](http://www.parishresources.org.uk/offering)*

## *Whether or not to pass a bag or plate...*

Offertory collections developed in the days when people were paid weekly in notes and coins. These days most people's income comes through bank accounts, including pensions and social security benefits. For many people, it is easier to give by bank standing order, as it saves finding the right change each week. It also helps people gradually to increase their regular giving from year to year in line with inflation, without having to find odd amounts of cash every week. Switching to direct debits or standing orders:

- improves the regularity and consistency of church income
- cuts the volunteer time needed to open and check the envelopes after the service
- minimises the risks involved in weekly cash banking
- cuts stationery costs - dated envelope sets are fairly expensive
- helps the church to budget and manage its finances more effectively, and
- bank statements provide an independent audit trail for the Inland Revenue.

However, there is something very significant about money representing us – what we do with our money defines us and our priorities. The offering of money within the context of worship provides an opportunity for a symbolic offering of ourselves and our resources. The National Stewardship Committee encourages parishes to review whether or not it's right for them to continue to pass an offertory bag during the service.

### *Benefits of passing a bag:*

- Everyone is physically involved in liturgical action
- Visible symbol of gratitude to God
- Offers the opportunity to explain what is going on and why
- Better described as "receiving an offering" rather than "taking an collection"
- Can use (recyclable) "My Gift to God" tokens for standing order givers to put in.

*But*

- Can imply a small cash gift is all that is required for generous giving
- Can be embarrassing for newcomers who are unprepared
- Some people find it interrupts their worship or singing.

### *Benefits of having a plate at the back:*

- Less obtrusive within worship liturgy for newcomers who may feel uncomfortable
- No need to organise sidespeople or collectors
- Promotes electronic giving
- Easier for people to give at realistic levels via standing order, and to adjust this with periodic cash donations when needed.

*But*

- Some churches may worry that they will "lose out" (in fact, most churches gain by stressing standing orders)
- May be a security concern if the plate is left unattended.

Whether or not a bag or plate is passed around during worship, it can still be brought forward so that the gifts of God's people are offered as a part of the worship.

## Offering Rather than Collecting? A Case Study.

When thinking about what the offertory represents we decided to look for ways in which the liturgy could convey a sense of offering your life rather than collecting your money. Through discussion we realised that there are several things we do simultaneously at the peace: Greet one another and form community; preparing the altar; sing; hunt desperately in our pockets for something to put in the bag when it is sent along our row.

What if we were to offer our whole lives? What if we were able to bring ourselves and put ourselves to God's use? What if we took more than just money at the offertory? What if each one of us brought ourselves forward with our gifts and placed them in front of the altar? What if we did this more than once a year when we put fruit and veg and tins of beans next to the altar at harvest?

So we did. Our building is a small 1950's building on a social housing estate and the altar is often on the same level as the congregation. At 'the peace' we brought our gifts and placed them into a basket given to us by the parish we are linked with in Africa. Instructions were given at the beginning of the service the first week that we did this. By the second and third time it had become second nature. We provided small glass beads for people to use who pay by direct giving or other means. This is the liturgy we used:

### PEACE AS THE PLACE OF OFFERING.

#### *Stand*

As we gather as community, we respond to what God has given us.  
We make our lives an offering, our time, our money and our love.

#### *Informal instructions are given:*

*During the peace we will greet each other as a sign of our community. We will offer our gifts into the basket.*

Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.

**All things come from you,  
and of your own do we give you.**

#### *Seasonal words of introduction to the peace*

The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
**And also with you.**

*We exchange a sign of God's peace during which people may bring up their offering and place it into the basket.*

#### **Hymn**

*A member of the congregation/child/bishop may pray:*

Receive and bless these gifts and our lives  
O Lord,  
which we offer in response to your love.  
As your Son Jesus transformed people's lives,  
may the lives of others be transformed through  
these gifts,  
our love and our witness.  
Through Christ our Lord,  
Amen

A child prayed the prayer of offering whilst two other members of the congregation held up the basket of financial gifts and another held up the bread and wine before they were poured out and placed upon the altar. We then carried on with the sursum corda and proceeded as normal.

Having reflected corporately we discovered that this worked really well for the congregation. It was felt that the offering was more of a spiritual activity rather than just financial. A by-product was that the service also felt more inclusive of all ages as there were things that children could offer that didn't involve being given small coins. We also discovered that this works really well during non-Eucharistic worship as the offering is no longer just tagged on at the end as an afterthought. On reflection, we probably wouldn't do this every week but perhaps once a month at our all age services. We are also going to put together a laminated card with different offering prayers on it so that whoever is praying can choose whichever they want.

*Case study contributed by Robb Sutherland,  
Church of the Holy Nativity in the parish of Mixenden and Illingworth.*



## *Ideas to enhance a sense of offering*

*In this section we offer a range of ideas to help church members gain a wider understanding of the offertory, and to provide different ways of expressing this in worship. Many are intended to be used occasionally as a change to regular practice, as this can help people think differently. When using these ideas, we suggest that it is explained what is being done and why.*

1. *Coming forwards.* Encourage church members to come forwards during a hymn to place an offering in a bowl or plate at the front. It's helpful if tokens are provided for those who give by standing order or direct debit. (see the case study on p5)
2. *In silence.* If your normal practice is to receive an offering whilst a hymn is being sung, then consider doing it in silence, encouraging people to think about God's generosity to them.
3. *Varying the point in the service from your usual practice.* Although there is a more natural time for the offertory in a eucharist, see the page on Giving in non-eucharistic worship for a variety of ideas.
4. *Using a mirror – 'give yourself'.* Encouraging people to come forwards to make their offering, place a large mirror behind the plate or bowl. As people see their reflection as they offer their gift, encourage them to see their gift as a token of their life, values and priorities.
5. *Interviews.* Ask three or four church members why they give. They should be briefed that this is not about how much they give, but about what's important to them in making an offering. These might be staggered over a series of weeks.
6. *Mission Sunday.* Make the most of a time when a special collection is being given for the work of a mission or humanitarian organisation.
7. *Jars of Grace or Lent Boxes.* It may seem dated, but there is something powerful in encouraging people to set some money aside every time they cook a meal. This again engages with the circle of us giving back in response to God's generosity to us.
8. *Text Giving.* Where you have a collection for an external charity that supports mission giving, you could encourage the congregation to give via text simultaneously – in introducing it, the communal nature of giving can be emphasised, and possibly linked with the practice of the early church.



9. *Introducing the Offering.* As well as having a prayer or dedication of the offering as it is brought forwards, it's good to introduce the offering and why it's being taken. See our page of ideas on how you might do this.
10. *Read out the Vision or Mission Action Plan before the offering is received.* This helps remind the gathered people of God that we are giving to enable us to participate in God's mission to our communities.
11. *Change for Good.* Encourage your childrens and youth groups to adopt a particular mission and over a period of time save coins towards this mission. The coins are brought forwards during the offering, and the children are encouraged to make as much noise as possible putting their change into a metal plate or pot to make a "joyful noise to the Lord" in their offering to Him. (Thanks to the Barnabas Foundation for this suggestion)
12. *Making the most of Harvest.* Encourage church members to bring something that symbolises their day to day lives, and offer that as part of the service.
13. *Time and Talents offering.* Provide the congregation with slips of paper and pens, and ask them to write down a few words or short sentence that reflects how they offer their time and skills, reminding them that just as money "represents us", so does the way we choose to spend our time. This shouldn't be limited to 'church ministries' but might include caring for family and loved ones, serving in schools or community organisations and so on. This might be done in addition to the offering of money.
14. *Use Offertory Tokens for Standing Order/Direct Debit givers.* This avoids newcomers thinking that the offering is only for them, and enables those who give electronically to have something to offer in worship.
15. *Reverse offering.* Catch people by surprise, and rather than ask people to give, pass a bag or plate around with sweets or mini crosses, and use as a simple illustration of God's generosity towards us. This may be followed by a normal offering later in worship.
16. *Reverse Food Offering.* A bag or plate is passed around with slips of paper on which various food items are written. Each person takes one from the offering plate as it is passed. They are asked to bring that item to the front of church the following Sunday for the local food bank.

## *Communicating how and why we give*

*The offering is not the most important part of the service, and there is a danger of over communicating. However, it is our experience that many churches under communicate, newcomers do not know what to expect, and regular members forget what the offering is all about. Here are some ideas to help with effective communication:*

*Service sheet* – It’s good to include something in the preamble to alert people that there is the opportunity to give money during worship, so that they can be prepared. At the point of the offering in the service, a brief note explaining what will happen can be helpful – newcomers may well not understand the phrase “Offertory Hymn”.

*Noticeboard* - When advertising services that include a collection for an external charity, it may be helpful to include this collection as part of the publicity. This enables people to come prepared with cash to give, especially those who normally give by standing order.

*Offering tokens* - We suggest that if you pass around a bag or plate, that the church makes available a token so those who give regularly by standing order can take part in the offering. This might be a laminated card that says: “All things come from you, O God, and of your own do we give you.” It might say that “my gift is given by standing order” – this explains why some people give a token, but excludes those who have nothing to give from the offering. This avoids the mis-communication that the offertory is only for newcomers or a select few.

*Gift Aid Envelope box* - It is helpful to put a simple sentence on the front of the box. Title FOR YOUR GIFT and a simple sentence that says ‘The church will receive an extra 25p for every pound donated by taxpayers if you fill in this envelope and place your gift within it’.

*Website* - It’s good to explain what will happen in a typical church service on your website. This helps newcomers understand what to expect (and makes it clear that newcomers are welcome). As well as briefly explaining the church’s practice, you might link to a separate page which explains why the church needs money, and provides some brief stewardship teaching that money acts as a proxy for the offering of ourselves in worship – representing our values and priorities in life; and that everything that we have in life is a gift from God.

## Introducing the Offering

As part of an introduction to the offering, it's good to explain what will happen, particularly if there are visitors in church to avoid them being caught unawares. You might say something like:

During our next hymn, an offering will be received. This helps to resource the ministry of this and other churches, and also provides us an opportunity to symbolise the offering of ourselves by the offering of money. If you do not wish to contribute, just let the bag pass by. Many members arrange their giving via standing orders, so will not be putting anything in the bag.

You might then finish the introduction with a sentence of scripture or a quote:

- 'From what you have take an offering for the Lord. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord and offering of gold, silver and bronze.' (*Exodus 35:5*)
- 'The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.' (*Proverbs 22:9*)
- 'But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.' (*1 Chronicles 29:14*)
- 'But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.' (*Matthew 6:3*)
- 'But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' (*Matthew 6:19-21*)
- 'None can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will devote to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.' (*Matthew 6:24*)
- 'All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.' (*Acts 2:44,45*)
- For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you though his poverty might become rich.' (*2 Corinthians 8:8,9*)
- 'Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, not to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.' (*1 Timothy 6:17*)
- 'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said 'never will I leave you never will I forsake you.' (*Hebrews 13:5*)
- "You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you." (*John Bunyan*)
- "It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving" (*Mother Teresa*)
- "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do." (*Edward Everett Hale*)
- "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give" (*Winston Churchill*).

## Offertory Prayers

*It's good to vary prayers from time to time. This section offers a variety of resources for eucharistic and non-eucharistic worship, including some seasonal material.*

Generous God,  
creator, redeemer, sustainer,  
at your table we present this money,  
symbol of the work you have given us to do;  
use it, use us,  
in the service of your world  
to the glory of your name.  
Amen.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation;  
through your goodness we have this money to  
offer, the fruit of our labour and of the skills you  
have given us.  
Take us and our possessions to do your work in the  
world.

**Blessed be God for ever.**

Let us pray.

**Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them  
our lives,  
to be used in your service;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

O Lord, giver of life and source of freedom,  
I know that all I have received is from your hand.  
You call us to be stewards of Your abundance,  
the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us.  
Help us to always use Your gifts wisely and  
teach us to share them generously.  
May our faithful stewardship bear witness to  
the love of Jesus Christ in our lives. Amen.

*Archdiocese of Chicago*

God of life, saviour of the poor,  
receive with this money  
gratitude for your goodness,  
penitence for our pride  
and dedication to your service  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

God of all goodness and grace,  
receive the gifts we offer;  
and grant that our whole life  
may give you glory and praise;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Lord Jesus,  
As you fed 5,000 from the gifts of a young boy, we  
pray that you will transform our gifts to spiritually  
feed many spiritually hungry people through the  
ministry and mission of this church. Amen.

Heavenly Father, you have given us riches  
beyond measure. We can only return a  
fraction of what we owe you; but we ask,  
Lord, that you will bless our offerings  
and help us to use them wisely in your  
service and for your glory. Amen.

*Church of Scotland*

## *Seasonal Material*

*In addition to the seasonal suggestions below, you may find David Bell's offertory prayers helpful at: [davidsbell.org/Offertory\\_Prayers.html](http://davidsbell.org/Offertory_Prayers.html)*

### *Advent*

God of our future,  
whose compassion is unlimited,  
all that we have is yours  
and to you we shall render account for all you have  
given us.

As we offer you these gifts we enjoy from your  
bounty, grant that we may live well, love generously,  
and seek first your kingdom, on earth as in heaven,  
through Jesus Christ our most kind Judge and  
Saviour. Amen.

### *Epiphany*

Loving God, we follow the Magi in giving you gifts,  
praying that as you receive our acts of offering, you  
would shine the light of Christ in our hearts to lead  
us in lives which serve you more deeply. Amen

### *Passiontide*

God of grace, your limitless love gave us everything  
in Jesus, and through belief in him, you offer us life  
in your kingdom. Accept our gifts, but as we give,  
warm and soften our hearts to lead us into lives  
which reflect your generosity. Change us we pray.  
Amen.

### *Pentecost*

Holy Spirit, we thank you for coming upon the  
Church and inhabiting the lives of Christian disci-  
ples. We offer you these financial gifts in gratitude  
and to express our desire for all your gifts to us to  
bear your fruit in our lives.  
Amen.

### *Christmas*

Humble Lord,  
you surrendered the riches of heaven's palace  
for the poverty of Bethlehem's manger:  
as we offer you our gifts in thanksgiving for  
your gift,  
make us imitators of you in generosity and love,  
for the sake of the world you love so much,  
and for your Father's glory.  
Amen

### *Lent*

Lord God of all, accept our offering of money this  
day, but also the offering of our lives. Help us to  
live simply, generously and courageously, that our  
lives may point to you. Amen.

### *Easter*

Gracious God, through the resurrection of our  
Lord Jesus, you have given immeasurable grace  
to us. May our offerings reflect the grace we have  
received, and symbolise lives committed to the  
service of our risen Lord. Amen.

### *Harvest*

Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good things  
you continue to provide for us.  
Don't let us take your gifts for granted  
or abuse them.  
Instead, help us always to rely on you in faith.  
Use us and what you have given us  
for your good purposes.  
Amen. (*Church of Ireland*).

## *The Offertory in Non-Eucharistic Worship*

*Whilst the offering fits naturally at the mid-point of a Eucharistic service, there is greater flexibility offered in non-eucharistic worship, which enables us to vary how we celebrate God's provision and blessing for us, and our response to that. The fundamental question is whether we use that flexibility or simply pass around a bag or plate during the last hymn, because that's what we've always done?*

### *Getting the basics right*

1. Choose where the offering will come in the service. (This and the next point apply if a bag or plate is passed around during the service). See point 1 below.
2. Announce it – it's helpful for people to know in advance. You might say something like "In the next hymn, an offering will be received for the work of God in this church and beyond." This might link to the readings or talk, and there are sentences available to help with the introduction (page 10)
3. Choose your offertory prayer (options are available on p11). When you pray this, make sure you can be heard.
4. It's good practice to place the offering somewhere in the worship space rather than having it being whisked away immediately. This might be on the altar, at the foot of a large cross or possibly on a side table.

### *Being flexible and varying practice*

1. Choose where in the service it might come. It's good to have a normal practice, and to occasionally vary it. Pattern and routine helps people know what to expect and to connect with the worship, the occasional variation helps them think. It might follow the creed as a response to what we say we believe, it could come at the start of the worship, as we gather together and bring ourselves and our lives before the Lord, it could be tied in with a time of thanksgiving.
2. With family worship or the service of the word, you might get the person bringing the gifts up to lead the offertory prayer sometimes – this emphasises that it is the gifts of all of us offered to God, rather than the gifts of the congregation offered to the vicar.
3. One easy way of providing flexibility is to have a silent offering on occasions, rather than having a hymn being sung. Another option is to ask people to bring their gifts forwards (See the case study on page 6). These gifts may be things other than money – if the children and young people have produced things during their sessions, these can be offered too.
4. As well as offering gifts of money, it's good to sometimes offer our time and talents, and rededicate them to the Lord. The beginning of the year could be a good time to do this.

## *Offertory Hymns and Songs*

*Here are some suggested songs and hymns that may be suitable for the offertory:*

All I once held dear	I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
All my hope on God is founded	Lord for the years your love has kept
All that I am, All that I do	Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us
Angel Voices ever singing	Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy
Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart	Lord of all power, I give you my will
Blessed be your name	Meekness and Majesty
Christ is our corner-stone	O for a heart to praise my God
Fill thou my life, O Lord my God	O Jesus I have promised
For the beauty of the earth	O Thou who camest from above
Forth in your name, O Lord I go	Oceans (you call me out upon the waters)
From heaven you came (The Servant King)	Seek ye first the Kingdom of God
Give thanks with a grateful heart	Sent forth by God's blessing
Giving it all to you	Take my life and let it be
God forgave my sin (Freely, freely)	Thank you for saving me
God is the giver of all things (Timothy Dudley Smith)	The God of Grace is ours (Timothy Dudley Smith)
God of grace and God of glory (Cwm Rhondda)	This is my desire (Lord, I give you my heart)
How deep the Father's love for us	Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour
I'm giving you my heart (I surrender)	When I survey the wondrous cross
In the bleak midwinter	