

Why buy physical music when we could project it on a screen or print it in a bulletin?

This is a common question in today's church - what is the point of a physical hymnal in this modern age? What benefits could it offer? Consider the following...

Creation care

- It's a green investment. As a steward of the Earth, buy it for \$15 and you get to use it for decades. Paper comes from managed forests, like crops, with regulations and care for the environment.

Artwork

- Beautiful and playful artwork accompanies different settings and sections, bringing the reader in to a greater depth of experience that is lost when printed or projected.

Layout

- We've thought a lot about how to present liturgy, prayers, hymns in a way that is clear and engaging for those using the book – a difficult thing to do each week in a bulletin.
- Credits are often the first thing to go on a slide or bulletin. Who wrote this? How old is it? Important attribution details are included in a physical copy.
- Notes on some hymns provide pronunciation and background that can give context that helps pieces resonate with congregants.

Availability of worship resources

- Worship materials belong to everyone!
- Worship books are useful outside of Sunday morning worship. Included prayers are useful for personal devotion, family or church gatherings, choir rehearsals, or whenever someone shares a joy or a concern. A physical hymnal can be picked up and brought to another space to continue its use.
- Readers can see Spanish and other languages represented, a gentle reminder of our global neighbors and a "you're seen, welcome, and beloved here" to members seeing their mother tongue in their church.
- "Scriptural Images for God" puts our ELCA social statement into action by providing expansive images to every person in the pews.
- A topical index is in every pew edition because everyone can use it. This provides a chance for members to find comfort, understanding, and support for their life experiences in the solace of a worship space.

- Not everyone can process every word of a hymn as it is sung. With a hymnal, everyone can have the chance to re-read hymn texts and liturgy on their own to understand what message is being shared.
- Hymns are more likely to be chosen if no graphic design or slide creation is needed to be able to sing it. This is simply easier to do with hymnals.
- Having the ability to flip through the pages of a hymnal, exploring the hundreds of pieces, or even taking it home to it on the piano/guitar/recorder is how future worship leaders get started. Keeping music accessible to all is an investment in the future leadership of the church.

Physicality

- “The medium is the message:” words and songs are meant to be held, examined, studied, played with, and embodied.
- Books in pews tells people what this church believes, who is included, who we have been, who we think God is, and who we hope to be. Walking into a church and seeing ACS makes a theological statement without ever opening it.
- They carry the names of the saints of our church. Hymnals purchased in honor of loved ones keep stories and names alive and remind us that we have never been alone in faith.

Tradition and Unintended Use

- The simple presence hymnals are a deep tradition in the church. Hymn boards with the numbers for the day are an iconic reminder of a shared understanding. Hymnals become the hard surface on which young and old draw, color, and write. They are set on bulletin piles at an outdoor worship to keep everything from flying away. They provide a special moment between caregiver and child as they point and whisper, “we sang this one at your baptism.”. Through all their iterations, publications, denominations, and myriad of uses, hymnals have become synonymous with music in a church.

We hope that these points have been able to answer the question of “what is the point of a physical hymnal in this modern age?” in a way that resonates with you and your church. The quick answer that encompasses the above is that ***a hymnal in the hands of a congregant will imbue meaning, translate a message, offer comfort, memories, and connection, deliver social statements, be used creatively and beyond the sanctuary, and steward the reader, congregation, and earth better than one that lives on an administrator’s computer.*** This is not to say that there is no place for printed and projected hymns, merely that they serve different purposes and all can be used together for the greatest service to the whole congregation.