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# Hymns in Times of Crisis (Web Review)

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## Web Site Review

Hymns in Times of Crisis

<http://www.thehymnsociety.org/hymns-in-times-of-crisis>

The need seemed to creep up on us (i.e., the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada). We could see signs of what was coming, but the intensity of need was not deemed sufficient to prompt special action. Gradually, the increase tragic events over several years generated more urgent requests to the Hymn Society office for timely hymns, signaling that something should be done to provide a better response. Events included earthquakes in Haiti and the South Pacific; Hurricane Katrina; huge numbers of refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East and parts of Africa; unaccompanied minors heading to the U.S. to escape conditions in regions of Mexico and Honduras; mass shootings in public places, and so on. Were there hymns that would release congregations to give voice to the anguish they were feeling in the face of these tragedies? The Society's Executive Director had been fielding calls as best she could for several years, but no specific hymn or song collections were immediately available to meet these time-sensitive situations.

In the summer of 2014, the Society's Executive Committee agreed to the launch of a project to gather 'crisis' hymns, songs, and refrains from hymn writers in North America and beyond. In August of 2014 a general invitation went out through the Society's monthly newsletter. By the end of October some 280 submissions had arrived from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and New Zealand. Topics included responses to the destruction of the World Trade Towers, to devastating earthquakes and hurricanes, to families coping with the dementia of loved ones, to human trafficking, to random and mass shootings in public settings, and to international terrorist attacks.

An advisory committee sifted through the several hundred submissions and selected a body of 50+ hymns to begin the 'crisis hymns' project. Because the response was much larger than expected, it seemed best to offer a 'start-up' collection, and then to review and expand it in the months and years ahead. Matters of copyright and usage agreements had to be worked out with both writers and publishers. It was agreed that hymns not included in the initial collection would be retained for further consideration and possible inclusion. Submissions continue to arrive as more hymn writers become aware of the project.

In reviewing the submissions, the advisory committee looked for a strong and sensitive grasp of the subject matter, for poetic and pastoral sensitivity that would tap into



a singer's emotions and imagination, and for scriptural references that would genuinely connect with the crisis and provide a message of hope and understanding.

The advisory committee was greatly encouraged by the quality and poignancy of the textual submissions. The texts were remarkably free of platitudes. So often the imagery touched deeply and sensitively into the human experience. Most hymns had been written for use with familiar and appropriate tunes. Writers wisely realized that their texts required familiar tunes in order to serve an immediate need. A community gathering to mark a tragic event was not an occasion for introducing a new tune.

The *Hymns in Times of Crisis* collection is now available on the web site of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. Hymns can be downloaded free of charge and available for use over a prescribed time period. Oversight of the collection is now being handled by the Director of the Centre for Congregational Song (a new project of the Society), Mr. Brian Hehn. Questions and new submissions may be forwarded Brian (brian@thehymnsociety.org). It is the hope and goal of the Hymn Society to continue providing and expanding this resource in the years to come, thus supplementing current denominational hymnals.

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Project Coordinator  
Hymns in Times of Crisis