

Two Models for Leadership of Congregational Singing  
(Mark Freundt)  
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To provide enthusiastic leadership of congregational singing, it is useful to study different models. When this course was first developed in 2006, it was taught with 5 different perspectives: vocalist, pianist, organist, other instrumentalists (including guitar) and contemporary stylist. While each of the 5 is an art form unto itself, we will be focusing on developing the gifts you bring to your congregation as a vocalist and as a pianist. While there are many shared commonalities, each model has its own unique characteristics. As different ways are described, we hope the experience will lead you to growth in new ways.

With your gifts as a **vocalist**, you naturally bring your "presence" in front of the congregation. That is to say "they see you" and "hear you." From the immediate visual connection, they read not only your eyes, but also the nuances of body language (gestures and posture). From listening to you introduce the song/hymn and/or giving musical instructions, congregants will respond not only to your words, but also to the feelings and intentions that come through in how you deliver your message. Then there is vocal modeling that you give when you begin to sing. Your singing imparts many important and meaningful pieces of information including style, energy, mood, emotion, tone, inflection, emphasis, etc. These help prepare the congregant for individual connections to the music and possibly connections beyond themselves. (i.e. James Luther Adams' concept of "intimacy and ultimacy.") All these clues (both verbal and nonverbal) are what congregants pick up on when you invite and lead them to participate in worship with vocal leadership.

With your gifts as a **keyboardist** (piano and organ), you bring mostly sonic leadership. Often times with sanctuary setups as they are, the pianist and/or organist is out of sight and hidden from view. This often makes it impossible to lead with visual cues. (Though, hopefully at least the choir can see this leader for their anthem.☺) We also tend not to sing from the keyboard--but with a microphone and a boom stand, this can be remedied. Then, you may have a similar situation as I do. In my church the piano is in the front to the right of the pulpit. This is wonderful until the congregation is invited to "rise as they are willing and able" upon our flat-floored sanctuary. As they stand, the first 2 rows immediately obscure me from the view of congregants farther back. I do try to conduct with my body as I play, but I realize that how I play can lead the congregation from comforting introductions to prayerful moments to ecstatic joy. An effective pianist or organist leader invites the congregation into worshipful space with the notes that he/she chooses to play or not (i.e. settings or arrangements) and how they are played (i.e. dynamics, octave doubling, swell, registration, etc.). It is our artful attempt to reflect the text as musical poetry. The written notes on the page are an invitation to create musical and participatory worship for all who have gathered.

Though not the focus of this course, I would like to lift up the gifts of "**other instrumentalists**." Often times you are able to bring both sonic leadership and visual leadership simultaneously. When you strum a guitar and sing or play djembe and sing, you lead on 2 fronts. What a powerful combination that is! Leading with guitar or various percussion appear to be most common, but with creativity there is an inexhaustible list of possibilities of "other instrumentalists." Long time UUMN member, John Hook, often leads his congregation with autoharp and voice. I have also used boomwhackers and voice or lap dulcimer and voice (in an intimate setting). As an "other instrumentalist" you sensitively shape the arrangement in response to your own singing and the congregation's participation. For instance, a guitarist may dig in a little stronger to energize the pulse for the last verse that describes resolve and conviction or a shakere player may decide not to play during 2<sup>nd</sup> verse that describes introspection and inner peace. By simultaneously leading vocally and instrumentally, you have the unique ability to lead and connect on two fronts.