

# Hymnary 2020

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## 1. Introduction

Hymnary.org has not previously had a mission statement or a strategic plan. Its development has been guided by grant proposals and perceived need. Now that development grants have ended, Hymnary.org needs to become self-supporting, with a sustainable financial model and activities that make the model possible and serve to meet the mission.

Hymnary.org has probably already become the most comprehensive, most authoritative, and most-used database of hymnody. A vision for a thriving Hymnary.org by 2020 might build on that, continuing to add historical hymn information by a team of volunteers and keeping up to date with the addition of popular modern hymnals by staff. Hymnary.org could aspire to be “the world’s repository of hymn information.”

Hymnary.org could also have a collection of fully-treated hymns, with all resources needed for use in worship services. These hymns should be diverse enough to support users from different denominations, with different worship styles, and for different topics and events. Hymnary.org could become a “full-service online hymnal.” Some of these services might include the support of worship planning and presentation software.

With a large body of hymn data and information about the searches people do and the hymns they use, Hymnary.org could further improve hymn recommendation and discovery features. It could provide hymn recommendations and resources for other projects needing that data, such as preaching and worship websites and providers of worship planning and presentation software. It could become the “hymn discovery and resource backbone of the Internet.”

Achieving all aspects of this vision for Hymnary.org 2020 would require significant resources. It will be the task of this document evaluate the plausibility of the different aspects of this vision and plot a path toward getting there.

## 2. Process

Hymnary.org has not previously had a mission statement. We will offer a mission statement for the website. We will consider key users and use cases. We will identify principal objectives arising from the mission statement and use cases. We will then identify a number of possible strategies for achieving the objectives—strategies that may or may not prove viable or cost-effective but are worth considering. For each, we will consider how it might be implemented, what it would cost, and the benefits it would provide. We would also consider the data useful for and made available by

each strategy and how that data may be used to assess and improve performance. Finally, we will prioritize the strategies with an eye toward resource availability and effects on long-term sustainability.

The strategic plan should be developed with input from the CCEL advisory board, the Hymnary editorial board, the Hymn society, and other interested people.

### **3. Mission**

Hymnary.org mission statement:

The mission of Hymnary.org is to provide comprehensive information on hymns and hymnals for worship leaders, scholars, and others. It should support researchers with an index of hymnals that is as comprehensive as possible, scholarly information on hymns and hymnals, and search tools that enable them to find the information they need. It should support worship leaders with easy ways to select hymns for worship services, resources for use in worship, and technologies needed for using hymns and hymnals in and out of worship services. It should support other interested individuals easy ways to find hymns, resources for their use, and interesting information about the hymns. Hymnary.org should have a financial model that ensures long-term viability as a non-profit project.

### **4. Users and Use Cases**

Understanding users and use cases for a website is essential for creating an effective, efficient experience that meets users' needs. In this section we will consider the key users and use cases we are targeting.

#### **4.1 Users**

A survey of users was administered to volunteer participants on the Hymnary.org website from August 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012. There were 217 survey respondents. Of our survey respondents, nearly two thirds (64%) were involved in leading church worship. Just over 20% used Hymnary.org for hymnology research. 43% of survey respondents reported using the site at least weekly.

One key finding was that 69% of survey respondents are in churches that subscribe to the CCLI licensing program. This implies that they use blended worship and music from a variety of sources. Such congregations also frequently project songs and may use praise bands.

The predominant reasons users reported for using Hymnary.org were for worship planning (57%) and research of some type (62%—half student, faculty, composer, etc. and half independent/miscellaneous).

Users had an opportunity to suggest additional functionality for the site. Some of the suggestions were bookmarks, guitar chords, and more of just about everything.

## 4.2 Use Cases

**Case 1.** Worship planning is the largest use of Hymnary.org and hence the most important use case. In this scenario the user is a worship leader. In many cases, this may be the pastor as well. The worship leader starts with information about the topic of the upcoming sermon or service—a lectionary week, scripture passage, topic, season (e.g. lent), or event (such as a wedding or funeral). She wants to select appropriate hymns. She visits Hymnary.org, performing a search or viewing a page with top hymns in various categories. She looks at a handful of candidate hymns, bookmarking them for consideration. For each one, she reads the teaser and the words, views a page scan of the score, and listens to a recording. She sees a note about when it was last used in worship. She selects one and decides to use it. She sees a green license indicator showing that she has a license, or a red indicator showing how she can license it. She reads the worship leader hints and accompanying liturgical elements such as prayers that are provided. Then she may purchase a FlexScore to get projection, bulletin, lead sheet, or instrumental scores. She clicks “I used this hymn in worship” and its use is reported to her licensing agency. She may wish to keep notes on the hymn, and she may wish to email scores to musicians. She may want to import the words or a score into PowerPoint or worship presentation software such as Media Shout.

**Case 2.** Some worship leaders use worship planning software such as PlanningCenterOnline.com. That software ties primarily to CCLI, but in this use case, users of such software who are looking for hymn recommendations would be able to search, see recommendations, and get resources for hymns from Hymnary.org.

**Case 3.** Another use case involves scholars who use the website for hymnology research. They mainly perform searches and view hymns and hymnal contents. There were no indications of needed additions to search capabilities in the user survey, but more indexed hymnals and other hymn data will always be helpful.

**Case 4.** Another use case concerns individuals using the website for personal use—perhaps finding a remembered hymn or viewing a hymn for devotional purposes. This user locates a hymn of interest and reads the teaser and blurb. He listens to the hymn and reads the words. He may display a score, possibly playing the hymn on piano or another instrument.

**Case 5.** We recently noticed a large number of Sunday-morning users of the website. Another use case involves users who bring a mobile device to church and view hymns in worship services. It may be that they want to see music for projected hymns or simply save paper.

**Case 6.** A final use case concerns a congregational musician who helps lead worship. She may be interested in displaying an instrumental score for rehearsal and/or performance. She may want a way to turn pages backward and forward that does not involve her hands, perhaps with a foot pedal.

These use cases suggest the need to be able to:

- Search for hymns by scripture passages, seasons, events, topics, worship element, or lectionary week
- See top hymns for seasons, events, or topics
- Access all hymns, even copyrighted ones
- See teasers and blurbs
- Mark hymns for consideration; see marked hymns
- Keep notes on hymns
- See background information about a hymn and author
- Listen to the hymn
- Determine whether she already has a license to the hymn, and if not, how to license it
- See worship leader hints and liturgical elements
- Purchase a FlexScore
- Track usage
- Report usage to licensing agency
- Share a score with musicians
- Play a hymn from a tablet, turning the page with a foot pedal

## 5. Objectives

1. Have comprehensive data on hymnals and hymns
2. Enable researchers to find the data they need
3. Facilitate finding hymns for worship services
4. Offer supporting resources for the use of hymns
5. Support the technology employed for using hymns, in and out of worship services
6. Be financially self-sustaining

### 5.1. Have comprehensive data on hymns and hymnals

Hymnary.org already has the most comprehensive index of North American hymnals in the DNAH. However, that project probably has only a quarter to a third of the target hymnals indexed, and it doesn't cover hymnals published in other countries. Hymnary.org is already the best such resource for researchers, but it is not truly comprehensive.

In order to continue improving the coverage of historic hymnals, the best approach might be to encourage volunteers to add information to Hymnary.org. Perhaps we could promote a vision of Hymnary.org as “the world’s repository of hymn information” and build a community of editors interested in adding data here.

Worship leaders are interested in contemporary hymnals, and for those, Hymnary.org has much richer information including tune data and scores, worship notes, and the like. We have the most important contemporary hymnals covered, but new hymnals are continually published. In order to maintain good coverage of popular modern hymnals, we will have to continue to index modern hymnals at a rate at least equaling new publication.

### 5.2. Enable researches to find data

Hymnary.org’s current search engine is its fourth iteration, and this one works quite well. It is easy for casual use, but users who have more sophisticated query needs are able to perform them. In addition, there are a few other tools for researchers such as the query graphing tool. Bugs in the search engine occasionally arise, and there are some remaining usability issues, so continued maintenance is needed. However, further major development is probably not necessary at this time.

### 5.3 Facilitate finding hymns for worship services

Being able to find appropriate hymns for worship services is of primary importance for worship leaders—that capability brings in the users and enables them to perform their tasks. The usability of the search engine for this purpose is good. When designing the current search engine, we analyzed queries that users

performed, and we determined that about 98% of them were simple searches on one of seven fields. We made those fields visible in the search box on the left of the page, so it is always easy to perform a query on one of those fields. However, there may still be some usability issues, especially with respect to the type of result returned.

The quality of our data for making recommendations is less certain. For example, a search for “Christmas” returns any hymn that is listed as a Christmas hymn in any hymnal, without ranking or prioritization. Thus, some odd results appear for each search. Similar comments apply for other means of finding hymns. We have also hand-selected a number of hymns for each lectionary week, but users see a list of hymns for each week with no context. It would be better if there were some indication of why a hymn is recommended. Then too, the hymns we return are not ranked in a meaningful way. Options for ranking by popularity, relevance, or freshness would make the searches more useful and friendly. We could offer a page of top-ten lists of hymns by popularity, for seasons, topics, and the like.

Another way to assist worship leaders who are searching for hymns would be to build tools for supporting the process. For example, we could enable them to build a list of hymns under consideration for a worship service, keep notes about each hymn, share scores for a list of hymns with musicians, keep track of when hymns have most recently been used, build a table of credits that can be included in a bulletin, and report usage to licensing agencies.

#### 5.4 Offer supporting resources for hymns

Hymnary.org can currently display full scores for Hope and GIA hymns as well as those in the public domain. Some worship leaders who use Hymnary.org have a hymnal in the pews and use Hymnary.org as a convenient way to search for hymns from their hymnal. In this case, a pure index of first lines has some value, though having the full text or score adds to the value, as do associated resources such as lead sheets, PowerPoints, and alternate arrangements.

However, our last survey indicated that many of Hymnary.org’s users come from churches that use blended music and may not have hymnals in the pews, and to be useful to such users, full scores must be present, and associated resources are very helpful. In addition, individual users who want to use the website for access to a hymnal in church must see whole scores. As it stands, we can only offer public domain, Hope, or GIA hymns in such cases. A sample of *Glory to God* suggested that less than half of the hymns were available with both words and music, and in about 14% of the cases, nothing was available.

We have considered displaying the first system of copyrighted hymns using our FlexScore system, under a public domain theory. However, the advantages to users offered by this plan are relatively minor. Users would be able to see the first part of music for hymns, which would be convenient for those who have the hymnals in the pews, but those who don’t have the hymnal would still need to find scores and other resources.

For worship leaders, many resources beyond basic scores would be useful, including alternate arrangements, lead sheets, bulletin, projection, or instrumental scores, suggestions for worship leaders, and YouTube clips of performances. Our mission includes providing supporting resources for the use of hymns in worship services, and these resources may also prove useful in other circumstances such as hymn information pages for a mobile hymnal app.

We have already put considerable effort into this objective, defining “fully-treated hymns” and creating 164 of them to date. Our goal has been to create full treatments for 1000 hymns, but a better goal might be to have enough to support the majority of hymn use in worship. We hope that these hymns will constitute a collection that would serve well for churches that don’t have hymnals and perhaps a nice mobile app.

Our fully-treated hymns provide many resources for worship leaders, and our FlexScore system provides most if not all needed score versions. We also offer arrangements as products for sale. However, we don’t have data on how well the fully-treated hymns and FlexScores are meeting needs or whether there are needed resources we aren’t providing. Assessment of their performance and adjustment of the standards would be a good idea, and it would help indicate a level of future effort on these fronts.

To meet this objective in an ideal fashion, we would select a collection of hymns for full treatment that covers important needs and popular current usage. We would create full treatments for these hymns including FlexScores and suggested usage data, and we would obtain rights from publishers to offer these resources online and to offer performance licenses.

## **5.5 Support technology for using hymns in worship services**

Hymnary.org is one of the few hymnody resources that is up to date technologically, and it is in a unique position to support the use of hymns in environments that use current technology. Current examples include worship planning and presentation software, automatic licensing control, the use of tablet computers for musical scores, and the use of mobile devices in worship services. This is an area where Hymnary.org can contribute and stay on the leading edge.

Worship services are increasingly being organized by software such as PlanningCenterOnline.com and run by worship presentation software such as MediaShout, ProPresenter, or EasyWorship. Many of these software packages come with CCLI integration, but no such integration exists for hymns as far as I know. These packages may handle reporting to CCLI as well. It would be ideal if Hymnary.org could offer support similar to CCLI’s for hymns. We would have to offer access to our database to these software packages, including a unique identifier like CCLI’s number, search capabilities, and usage reporting to a licensing agency such as OneLicense.net or Licensing.

We also recently discovered that a growing number of Hymnary.org accesses are occurring on Sunday morning. Apparently, individuals are using Hymnary.org

during church services. Anecdotally, some of this usage is from people with tablets or smartphones, perhaps desiring to display music for hymns that are projected as text or simply avoiding the use of paper. Tablets are also growing in popularity for musicians. They can customize and order scores for convenient performance. Some report that though the screen is smaller than a sheet of paper, it is brighter and therefore just as easy to read. Larger tablets are on the horizon as well. We should support the needs of musicians, especially on tablets.

## **5.6 Be financially self-sustaining**

The development of Hymnary.org was funded by grants and the CCEL, and now it must move to a financial model in which it covers its own expenses. Revenue has grown very slowly to date, but there are promising developments for the future including an upturn in advertising revenue and the addition of a mobile app and FlexScores.

Offering full support for the use of hymns in worship would mean offering some kind of licenses for use. This may mean partnerships with LicenSing and OneLicense and the ability to offer single-use licenses for hymns.

Offering full support for worship planning would be expensive, but perhaps we can look into a partnership with a system such as PlanningCenterOnline.com. We would be their partner for hymn information and resources, and they would be our partner for worship planning support. We could also consider licensing resources to publishers of worship planning software.

We could also consider a subscription model that eliminates ads and provides access to advanced features. Ideally, we would offer a subscription program that includes access to all copyrighted hymns.



## 6 Strategies

1. Offer a collection of fully-treated hymns
2. Offer FlexScores for popular hymns to meet all score needs
3. Implement subscriptions
4. Index popular modern hymnals
5. Build a community of editors
6. Improve hymn discovery
7. Improve the user interface
8. Publish hymns of independent authors and composers
9. Offer hymn discovery and resources to partners
10. Offer more mobile apps for popular hymnals
11. Offer support for worship leader and musicians
12. Have a sustainable financial model

## 6.1 Offer a collection of fully-treated hymns

In this strategy we create a broad selection of fully-treated public domain and copyrighted hymns, with all the resources users might need for using the hymn in worship. Fully-treated hymns have a rich, full feel, and they add significant value for worship leaders. Users report using them for personal use as well as for leading worship. The goal is to offer them for a large and diverse body of fully-treated popular hymns, copyrighted as well as public domain. For copyrighted hymns, we will need to address licensing issues, with the goal of creating a way for churches to acquire resources and use licenses for hymns a la carte and/or on a subscription basis.

Our current standards for fully-treated hymns include full texts, hints for worship leaders, bulletin blurbs, recommendation data such as lectionary weeks, and MusicXML scores, though we will be changing the latter to FlexScores. For comparison, CCLI offers “Song Select” as an add-on to their licensing program. They have four options: basic, harmony, melody/chord, and premium, for \$50, \$125, \$145, and \$185/year respectively. Thus, the resources we offer are richer and fuller than those of the Song Select program.

Fully-treated hymns will include FlexScores, which we are currently able to offer for public domain hymns and hymns with Hope, GIA, and PCC copyrights. Therefore, most of the fully-treated hymns are public domain, though we have started adding fully-treated hymns owned by Hope and GIA. Adding hymns from additional publishers requires individual negotiations with those publishers for permission to sell FlexScores, but it is key to a significant aspect of our financial model.

A fully-treated hymn is really our own edition of the hymn. As such, we will select the particular version of a text and tune to use. In some cases these will have to be approved by the copyright holder, and we can get that approval by getting permission to sell a FlexScore of the hymn. This may mean we will need FlexScore permission for each instance of a hymn we offer.

### 6.1.1 Full treatment specifications

After several abortive attempts, we finally created fully-treated hymn specifications that we were happy with and got into production. We have created about 150 of them. However, recently CICW created resources similar to fully-treated hymns for the LUYH hymnal, giving us resources similar to a full treatment for an additional 965 hymns, and at the same time we moved our resources into the production of FlexScores for the *Glory to God* hymnal. It is time to review the specifications in light of experience, the introduction of FlexScores, and the strategies outlined in this plan, update the specifications, update our existing fully-treated hymns, and get back into production.

We need to make the following changes to our fully-treated hymn requirements:

- Drop the Sibelius and PowerPoint files
- Add a FlexScore with guitar chords if possible
- Add a couple of alternate tune suggestions in most cases

- Modify the lectionary week recommendations: add a note about *why* the hymn is recommended for the lectionary week—for example, quotes a scripture passage (say which one) or is thematically related to a passage (say which one and what theme)
- Change the liturgical use or season specification to checking relevant checkboxes from a list for liturgical use, season, or event (e.g. wedding)
- Topic (theme) requirement: check relevant topics from the list of 200 or so that will be created for the Preaching and Worship Portal project
- Add checkboxes to indicate whether the hymn is gender neutral or non-archaic
- Piano recording of hymn: optional but desirable. Use the FlexScore MIDI file when no other recording is available
- Copyright holder record, includes licensing organizations the copyright holder subscribes to
- License from copyright holder to display a screen-res version of the hymn to subscribers and to sell FlexScores (see 6.3)

On the other hand, extensive notes for worship leaders and extensive background information are less essential. We could consider shortening them a bit or worrying less about them if they are expensive to produce.

### 6.1.3 User Interface

Fully-treated hymns are displayed on text authority pages. The pages are full of information, and people like them quite well. However, they may be more complicated than necessary for someone looking for a hymn to use quickly for worship. We should review the page design and make sure that the essentials are above the fold. Here is a nice example:

<http://www.lnwhymns.com/Hymn.aspx?ID=293>

### 6.1.4 Implementation

We should select hymns to treat according to permissions and popularity. That is, we need permission from the publisher for selling a FlexScore for the hymn (subject to approval of the score) and for displaying the score and words to subscribers.

After that, we should select hymns largely according to popularity measured as page views of the authority page or any instance. We can add additional hymns to the queue for full treatment if we may want to promote them. It's important to our financial model that a good portion of our fully-treated hymns be copyrighted.

We should prepare a blanket permission letter and sent it out to as many copyright holders as we can track down. When we receive permission, their hymn becomes a candidate for full treatment and goes into a queue of hymns waiting to be treated.

We can place hymns fully treated according to the old standard at the head of the queue, followed by LUYH and *Glory to God* hymns since we have or will soon have FlexScores and other data. We may wish to place hymns from the current Baptist and Methodist hymnals in the queue as well.

Creating a fully-treated hymn from scratch may cost \$100 or \$150. However, much of the work has been done for our 150 older fully-treated hymns as well as the 1700 in *Glory to God* and *Lift Up Your Hearts*. Perhaps we can set a target creation rate of 100-200 per year, more with external funding or if Hymnary.org revenue rises.

#### **6.1.5 Analysis**

Fully-treated hymns are an important part of our strategy going forward. In particular, the importance of being able to display fully-treated copyrighted hymns on the web is hard to overstate, as it gives us the basis of a subscription program, enables us to make desirable apps, and gives us a distinctive that is hard to duplicate.

## 6.2 Offer FlexScores for popular hymns to meet all score needs

FlexScores offer a variety of score types to meet the needs of worship leaders who want to use hymns in a worship service. Since they are sold with a perpetual church copy license, they are a complete package for using a hymn in a church indefinitely, and as such they are a very good deal.

They are a key component of Hymnary.org's financial model. Currently we sell FlexScores a la carte for \$10, but long term, when we have a large collection, we may want to consider offering all available FlexScores by subscription. This might be appealing as an add-on package that OneLicense.net could offer in conjunction with their copy license.

We have created 800+ FlexScores for the *Glory to God* hymnal, but the only ones we have permission to sell individually are some with Hope, GIA, and PPC copyright. We need to seek permission widely to create FlexScores for hymns. Copyright holders often want to review new hymn editions before publishing them, so we should ask for blanket permission subject to approval, and when that is received, we can work on creating FlexScores for that publisher's songs and getting approval for them individually.

We will have to write a standard agreement letter for copyright holders and send out a mass mailing getting blanket approval subject to individual hymn FlexScore approval. Then we can add their hymns to the list of those we can create FlexScores for.

We will need to set a rate for creation of fully-treated hymns including FlexScores. Creating 100 fully-treated hymns per year including FlexScores should be a minimum if revenue permits, with a goal of a considerably higher rate. The good news is that we created a large number for *Glory to God* and will be creating many more for *Lift Up Your Hearts*.

We could offer a page where users can set their hymns to music and create nice, typeset versions. We would offer this either for tunes that are part of FlexScores that the user owns or for all public domain tunes for Hymnary.org subscribers.

## 6.3 Implement subscriptions

Hymnary.org has a large number of infrequent users—over 320,000 unique visitors in the last month as of this writing—but a more limited number of heavy users. In the last 30 days, there were 9,434 visits by people who have visited more than 50 times. At a guess, there may be 4,000 people who visit every week or two. Anecdotally, many of these users have come to depend on Hymnary.org, even calling it an “addiction.” The large number of infrequent visitors suggests advertising as a revenue source, and the small number of heavy users suggests subscriptions as a revenue source.

At the same time, one of the major limitations on the utility of Hymnary.org is that we can’t display all hymns because of copyright restrictions. This affects researchers, worship planners, and casual users, for example, those who would use Hymnary.org on a mobile device in the pew. A subscription program that offered full access to all hymns would be appealing to many users. If it is successful, it could also be the difference between mere survival for Hymnary.org, without much change or growth, to growth into a thriving project with a significant budget.

### 6.3.1 Copyright licensing

There are three services to consider in providing full access to hymns: church copying license, access to words and music, and access to media files such as bulletin scores and lead sheets. Each has individual value and cost, but they are most useful together. Hymnary.org can offer access, and we can offer FlexScores for which we have obtained permission from copyright holders, but we aren’t able to display copyrighted hymns except those from a couple of publishers from whom we have permission.

However, almost every church that cares about copyright and that uses songs outside of any hymnal they have in the pews will have a subscription to a copyright licensing program. This gives these churches the right to copy or project hymns covered by the agreement if they can obtain the words or text somewhere. For these churches (the vast majority of those of interest), licensing is covered if we can provide access and resources. However, it doesn’t cover individuals who are not a part of a subscribing church, and it doesn’t allow Hymnary.org to make these resources available, even to subscribers.

We would need permission to display hymns to users who are using Hymnary.org for research or personal interest, especially if we receive subscription revenue for offering that access. Unlicensed worship leaders who want to use a hymn in worship need access to the scores with a right to project or copy for bulletin or musicians. FlexScores give those permissions.

It might be attractive to users if we could offer a subscription program including the ability to view copyrighted hymns and all FlexScores of public domain hymns. We would have to ask for permission from all hymn copyright holders for this program.

### **6.3.2 Subscription benefits**

We might offer two levels of subscription. At the lower level, subscribers would not see ads and would not be subjected to monthly pageview limits on hymnal, text, or tune pages for non-DNAH hymnals. We could initially set the pageview limit fairly high until we obtain some experience with user reaction and numbers of subscribers. We might charge about \$50 per year for this type of subscription.

At the higher level we would offer access to (notionally) all copyrighted hymns as well as the public domain ones. We could also include all public domain FlexScores. However, the scores that they see will be grayscale images at screen resolution, so that they will not look good when projected or printed. To get a high-resolution score, users will have to purchase a FlexScore. This comes with copying permission, so this is sufficient for churches to use the hymn in worship. We would automatically report the usage to the appropriate licensing agency. This could be a \$50 add-on to the lower level subscription.

### **6.3.3 Implementation**

We will need to write a standard copyright permission letter and send it to all copyright holders. This letter would seek permission to

- Display words and a screen-resolution score to subscribers
- Sell a FlexScore of the hymn with copying license

For the right to display, we would distribute 25% or 50% of subscription revenue to copyright holders pro-rata. For the right to sell FlexScores we would pay 25% of the purchase price. These payments would be biannual, subject to a minimum check size of \$50. We would also offer a page copyright holders can log into to view access stats of their hymns.

We would have to have a database record for each copyright administrator with data on the hymns they handle as well as their addresses. They would have to be able to log in to view access and FlexScore sale statistics.

Initially, there will be few copyrighted hymns for which we have permission to display and sell FlexScores. To get subscription revenue immediately, we could offer subscriptions at a low introductory price and offer viewing of Hope, GIA, and PPC hymns.

If we institute page limits for non-subscribers, we should offer institutional subscriptions. These would be authenticated by IP address and priced similarly to other subscription programs—perhaps \$250, \$450, or \$750 depending on institution size?

### **6.3.4. Analysis**

To implement the subscription program, we would have to add support on the website for subscriptions, create copyright holder database entries and identify the copyright holders of all copyrighted hymns, and write letters to all copyright holders. We would also need to continue to create FlexScores and fully treated

hymns. We could perhaps implement this for \$40k the first year, with \$20k costs in later years for bug fixes and system maintenance, user tech support, and copyright holder payments.

With a subscription price of \$100 per year and page limits set so that 500 heavy users subscribe, we would receive revenue of \$50,000 per year after the first year or so. Usage of Hymnary.org continues to grow, and as we add FlexScores and copyright permissions, the value of this program to subscribers would grow, so we could anticipate continued growth in revenue.

I can see Hymnary.org heading down two different trajectories: survival mode, with few new services and little new content, or growth mode, with higher revenue and continual growth. A subscription program would seem to be an essential component of a growth trajectory.



## 6.4 Index popular modern hymnals

Having popular hymnals indexed is key to attracting and keeping users. Indexed hymnals are one key differentiator from other hymn sites. When hymnals are requested, or when new hymnals are published, we should index them and enter full texts.

## 6.5 Build a community of editors

The older hymnal data on Hymnary.org came from the DNAH and the NEH project. These hymnals have much thinner information, ranging from the first lines, authors, and composers of hymns in hymnals along with page scans, down to page scans and hymnal bibliographic data only. However, it is this information that may be of most interest to hymnologists. It is probably not financially viable to pay to keep improving this data, but we could promote a community of volunteer editors to keep working on it.

Building a thriving community requires a shared vision, a place for community interaction, and a structure for doing and overseeing work that is done. The shared vision could be “The world’s repository of hymn information.” To promote this vision, we could

- Put the phrase on the Hymnary.org’s home page, linked to an essay promoting the vision
- Mention it at hymn society meetings
- Encourage others to promote the vision

We could further the feel of a community resource by adding a wiki section to authority pages, where anyone can add information or verify what others have added. Of course, the Wikipedia foundation employs many top-level editors, and we probably don’t want to follow this path unless our budget allows us to hire at least one top-level editor.

We should also keep the DNAH data free and unencumbered, and we should share the data as freely as possible. We could continue to offer such information for download and place the authority information on the semantic web, e.g. at Freebase.

## 6.6 Improve hymn discovery

The largest use case for Hymnary.org involves worship leaders finding appropriate songs for services. This location function is one of the most fundamental at Hymnary.org. Surveys and access logs show that people searching for hymns for worship services search primarily by topic, scripture passage, lectionary week, part of worship (e.g. call to worship), season (e.g. advent), or event (e.g. wedding). Of these, topic and scripture passage are probably most important and should be optimized first.

Currently we use index data from hymnals to power these searches. If any hymnal lists a hymn for a topic, it turns up on a search for that topic. This is too generous; any hymnal with a bad recommendation gets a hymn listed. Topic searches return too many hymns of dubious quality or relevance. Scripture search has similar issues. Too many hits are returned, some of dubious relevance, and none with an explanation of why they were returned. It would be good to be able to say that a hymn is recommended for a scripture passage because it quotes that passage or is thematically related. In the latter case, the theme should be given.

We can address these data issues by human editing or data mining. The data mining approach would use search history to improve our estimate of the relevance of a hymn to a topic or scripture passage. Human editing would be more expensive but more accurate. We could perhaps add indexing info requirements to fully-treated hymn specifications.

We could also improve the user interface for finding hymns in various ways. One would be to offer top-10 lists of the most popular hymns, or seasonal hymns, or hymns on lectionary readings. This would require knowing hymn popularity.

### 6.6.1 Data mining

We can use data mining to get hymn popularity data and data on the relevance of hymns to particular topics and seasons. We should log queries and tag the result lists with an indication of the queryID it resulted from in the URL. Then we can gather training examples of queries and the hymns viewed as a result. If we can gather information on hymns that are used in worship, that would be better data still.

We can easily get hymn popularity. We could also get seasonal popularity by looking for hymns that are more popular at particular times of year, or even hymns popular in the last week. We could also get a list of the frequency with which hymns are visited after particular queries or topics. This information could be used to rank result lists and to change the association of hymns with topics or scripture passages.

We could use data on search hits that are clicked to improve our linkages between search entries and hymns. For example, we could look at the hymns users view after they have entered a search for a scripture passage. The mass of data would improve our ability to return good results.

Many of the semantic search improvements being planned for the PWP and CCEL projects would also be applicable to Hymnary.org. One key capability is autocompletion for the search-everything box. This would help address spelling issues. We should also implement spelling correction.

### ***6.6.2 User interface improvements***

To facilitate fortuitous discovery of hymns, we should have top-10 lists ordered by popularity. We might have lists for featured, most popular, currently popular, seasonal, and lectionary lists. A page that does a nice job of suggesting hymns in different categories is here: <https://www.licensingonline.org/en-us/10/page/56>. We could have a page of recommendations—perhaps added to the “common hymns” page—with a currently popular list and link in a sidebar on the home page.

We could also offer another way to sort results on search and authority pages: popularity. We could perhaps add a popularity column (graphical indicator?), shown by default, so that clicking the column head would sort by popularity. We could add the graphical popularity indicator on authority pages. We should also have a way to sort by relevance, and that should be the default, if it isn’t already.

### ***6.6.3 Analysis and implementation***

This is important in that it makes our site more useful and more interesting. Its effect is likely to be gradual, with people finding the sight slightly more useful, so it won’t have immediate impact. However, we should update the fully-treated hymn spec to include scripture passages quoted and thematically related, and we should implement data mining soon, perhaps after a subscription program.

Data gathering would be the first step for the data mining component. Searches should be logged in a database, and search results should be tagged with the search that they resulted from. Hits on search results should be logged for the search.

## 6.7 Improve the user interface

Obviously the user interface has a large effect on user retention. It is worth investment to make sure it is as smooth as possible. We should perform user testing regularly and make indicated improvements. Perhaps we can make another round of user testing and interface improvement when subscriptions are implemented and tested. When we test the user interface, we should keep all use cases in mind, designing tests specifically to target the major use cases, including desktop and mobile access.

## 6.8 Publish hymns of independent authors and composers

We could consider offering to publish hymns for independent authors and composers. For say \$150 we would publish a hymn—create a FlexScore version, perform authority resolution, add indexing information, etc.—all the components of a fully treated hymn, though we would ask them to provide the data. We would feature it on a ‘new’ list for a week. Such users would get a page in which they could upload an image and a bio paragraph. It would list all their hymns. They would also get an authority page for each hymn containing the info they provide. Additionally, we could help them upload downloadable products that could be sold for the hymn—arrangements, recordings, etc.

These users would get \$2.50 from each sale of a FlexScore for their hymns. They would also get a pro-rata portion of subscription revenue according to the number of pageviews of their hymns. They would get half of the purchase price of each product sold. They would receive a biannual payment if their balance due is at least \$50. We would want to get their agreement for all the uses we might want to make of their hymn.

This approach would have pros and cons—it might clutter lists with poor hymns, though we could add a “published” qualifier to searches to alleviate that problem. It would require some time interacting with publishers. On the positive side, it would offer fresh hymns and add to the number of copyrighted songs we can display. There is a chance one of these might become popular. It would add unique hymnary.org content. Hymn writers would promote the site. We could consider featuring some of these new hymns.

To implement this program, we would have to create a Web page where users can enter a bio and upload a picture. We would need another page where they can upload a hymn for us to make into a FlexScore and enter the data for a full treatment. There would have to be an approval process on the FlexScore we create.

I like this idea reasonably well—much better than the old model for small publishers. However, it would require time and effort to implement, and its benefits are more likely to be long-term. Therefore it should be a lower priority that we consider again in a couple of years.

## 6.9 Offer hymn discovery and resources to partners

Worship services are increasingly being organized by software such as PlanningCenterOnline.com and run by worship presentation software such as MediaShout, ProPresenter, or EasyWorship. Many of these software packages come with CCLI integration, but no such integration exists for hymns as far as I know. PlanningCenterOnline, for example, lets users search for and organize hymns by CCLI number. These packages may handle reporting to CCLI as well. It doesn't appear possible to use non-CCLI music unless you create your own record and handle reporting separately.

It could be a boost to Hymnary.org if we could offer support for these applications similar to CCLI's, but for hymns. We would have to offer access to our database to these software packages, including a unique identifier like CCLI's number, search capabilities, and licensing. A software provider like PlanningCenterOnline would connect to our database and add our hymns in response to user searches. Users adding our hymns to their libraries would automatically have scores and other resources. PlanningCenterOnline could make it a \$6/mo add-on, covering search data, resources, and FlexScores.

MediaShout enables users to import hymns. We could support MediaShout users by providing a package of hymns, along with access to FlexScores, for a price. We could do the same for other worship presentation software.

This strategy is a lower priority than many of the others listed here. If Hymnary.org is continuing to grow in revenue as well as usage in 3-4 years, we can consider it again.

## 6.10 Offer more mobile apps for popular hymnals

One of our objectives was to support technology for the use of hymns, both in and out of worship services, and we invested considerable resources in developing the iPad app for *Glory to God*, an endeavor that helps meet that objective. We are receiving some revenue from the *Glory to God* iPad app that is helpful, but there is room for improvement. We can do better if we can create apps for other platforms and additional hymnals, now that the app is developed; making apps for additional hymns will be much less resource-intensive.

CICW has contracted with us to create an app for *Lift Up Your Hearts*, including FlexScores for the public domain hymns only for now. In preparing this app we will make the code work more easily with multiple hymnals. We are also hoping to add a couple of features, including foot-pedal support and a place where users can add notes for hymns. If we can get other denominations to agree to have an app developed for an upfront fee, that would be ideal. Nyna is pursuing this approach.

Developing other full FlexScore apps on a royalty basis may still be a possibility for the largest denominations. There are 16 million Baptist and only 2 million Presbyterians in the US. If an app for a Baptist hymnal sold 8 times as well, or even only twice as well, it might be worth developing on a royalty basis. There are 7.7

million Methodists in the US, so it might also be worthwhile developing an app for the Methodist hymnal on a royalty basis.

Note that we could prepare an app much more cheaply if we don't include FlexScores. Then it is even more likely to be worthwhile offering to develop such apps for additional hymnals on a royalty basis. For denominations that decide not to contract us to develop an app, we should offer to do so on a royalty basis, initially without FlexScores. If the app does well and our resources permit, we could add some or all FlexScores.

The other way to extend our reach is to develop for more platforms. People are more likely to have smartphones in church than tablets, and Android is a more popular platform than iOS, although iPads and iPhones are by far the most popular mobile devices for accessing Hymnary.org. We are exploring Android and iPhone versions of the app. We should have them all designed so that it is easy to publish multiple apps for different hymnals.

### **6.11 Offer support for worship leader and musicians**

We have had the addition of support for worship planners to Hymnary.org on our to-do list for some time. The idea would be to add features like making a list of hymns under consideration, tracking hymns used in worship services, sending out hymns and other resources to musicians, and the like. To date, it has been a lower priority than other tasks. If the site continues to grow in usage and revenue, we may still wish to add that support.

However, the needs could expand for full-fledged worship leader support—scheduling musicians, calendars reporting hymn usage to agencies, displaying music for tablets with foot-pad control, scheduling rooms and resources, etc. It may make more sense to partner with something like [planningcenteronline.com](http://planningcenteronline.com), which does a nice job with all of those things. We would suggest their website for planning, perhaps offering subscriptions on our website, and they would offer our hymns and scores to users for a monthly charge, in addition songs covered by CCLI.

This strategy depends on having good location resources and a good collection of FlexScores, and we will only have the resources to pursue it if Hymnary.org continues to grow, so we may wish to consider it again in a couple of years.

## 6.12 Have a sustainable financial model

The main source of revenue for Hymnary.org in the past has been grants—support for several years from CICW and a big NEH grant—in addition to subsidy from CCEL. This year, CICW is supporting the development of infrastructure for the LUYH hymnal, and this will also help Hymnary.org. However, advertising and e-commerce revenue have been very small in the past.

We put effort into increasing ad revenue over the last few months, with considerable success. Together with hymnal app sales and product sales, we may have nearly enough revenue to keep Hymnary.org running at a basic level, without much growth. We might call this the static model.

Allocating half of the revenue for management and support and the other half for development, we could keep an editor half time, hire a summer programmer, and spend about \$10k per year creating full treatments including FlexScores. This would support keeping up to date with new hymnals, adding 50-100 fully-treated hymns per year, and making minor improvements to the website.

This would be a considerable step down from the current rate of development, however. Considering the grants received as well as the time spent developing the site which was not supported by external grants, I estimate that we spent about \$1 million developing Hymnary.org over seven years—about \$150k per year. To keep it growing at the current rate, unsubsidized, we would need to bring revenue up to that level. This would be a good goal for a site that continues to grow and thrive. We might call this the growth model. But it would require much more revenue.

Site usage continues to grow, but growth has slowed. Comparing pageviews over the last four years, growth was 57% in 2011 over 2010, 84% in 2012, and 57% in 2013. There is indication that recent growth in pageviews is more like 20-25% over the prior year, though that corresponds to times in which we have added advertisements with motion. We can perhaps hope for continued slow growth absent subscriptions. If we implement subscriptions with page limits, we could see traffic remain closer to constant, so we shouldn't hope for much growth in advertising revenue.

At this point it seems unlikely that eCommerce will ever provide much revenue—perhaps enough to keep the program running, but not a major contribution to Hymnary's financial model. However, offering these products for sale increases the value of the site to users, so it's worth keeping for that reason, if not for the revenue.

Development and sales of mobile apps can help, but to reach the “growth” model, we will need subscription revenue, targeted at the “subscribe to see all [many] copyrighted hymns.” FlexScores are not selling well, but they could help add value for subscribers if we include the public domain ones in a subscription program. One could imagine a combination of current revenue sources, additional hymnals, and subscriptions getting us to the growth target.

For the growth model we would need added revenue, presumably from a subscription program. We would also have a fair amount of extra work managing

copyright information, requesting and tracking permissions, and handling payments to copyright holders. Perhaps we could hire a part-time person to handle these tasks.

It is worth asking whether the growth model is preferable to the static model. As a Hymnary.org user, would I rather have Hymnary.org as it is now, free, or would it be better to have continued growth and development, along with free access for a limited number of pageviews per month a subscription option available that provides FlexScores and lets me see copyrighted hymns? As a project director, would I rather spend the additional time on Hymnary.org getting it to that point or would I rather allocate that time to other pursuits, perhaps teaching? Neither answer is obvious, but perhaps the growth model is slightly preferable.

We should also ask whether we have the capital needed to invest in Hymnary.org to get us into the growth model. For the coming summer we have one programmer hired for Hymnary.org. That may be enough to implement the subscription program and get us moving along that path. We also have a hymnal app contract that keeps us moving on that front. However, we would need to send out many copyright letters and prepare to handle payments to copyright holders for display of their copyrighted hymns if we go that route.



## 7 Roadmap

Plans, as they say, don't survive contact with the battlefield—er—website, so a roadmap is highly speculative. However, perhaps we can identify and prioritize tasks for implementing high-priority strategies, assuming the growth model:

Tasks:

- Copyrights:
  - Write a model FlexScore/copyright letter
  - Send to many copyright holders
  - Hire copyright person/FlexScore manager
- Subscriptions:
  - Get ability to display hymns online at low resolution from major publishers
  - Implement subscriptions this summer
  - Get permission from copyright holders to display copyrighted hymns at screen resolution
- Fully-treated hymns
  - Update the specifications
  - Update existing fully-treated hymns
  - Get permission to display to subscribers and sell FlexScore
  - Create additional fully-treated hymns for which we have permission
- Mobile apps
  - Complete LUYH
  - Develop an Android app for hymnals
  - Offer to create a non-FlexScore app on a royalty basis for Baptists, Methodists

Lower priority tasks—next year?

- Promote vision; build editing community
- Use data mining to improve recommendations
- Create a page of top-10 lists
- User testing and interface improvements