Dear Trinity Psalter Hymnal Accompanist/Guitarist,

Mobilizing God's covenant people in prayer and praise through singing in worship by the power of His Holy Spirit is a high calling indeed. I have had the opportunity of accompanying worship since second grade and have learned much over the years about empowering the congregation in vibrant worship using various mediums. I would invite you to read the following as a way of understanding how the lead sheets I have arranged may serve in your local context. I do not know the gifts that God has gathered in your worship community, but I do know that He is the one who has gathered them with purpose. My sincere hope is to help you coordinate those gifts in a way that multiplies. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at scott.finch@covenant.edu so that I can better serve you and your congregation. With this in mind, I would note the following:

1. Hymn and psalter singing is very important to the health of your local church. However, you may already know that the traditions that have historically shaped these two genres are significantly different from the culture that has shaped guitar playing, especially in the American context. Skilled pianists can change chords on every quarter or eighth note. This is not true of most proficient guitarists. The instruments are different, which is vital for everyone to understand. Scripture is canonized; though memorable melodies are very important, notes and rhythms of a Scripture-setting are not concrete. The goal is to propel the musicians/gifts in your local body in a way that enhances their eagerness to sing the songs together with one heart and voice in memorable ways. The chords should be a starting point for you, not the end in themselves. Always listen carefully and observe your congregation. If they are leaning into the singing, that is a good sign.
2. With number one in mind, the goal for the lead sheet is to help a guitarist to be able to accompany a song alone or with other musicians that can "realize" chords in the midst of the music. This, at times, may cause some slight dissonances between the parts that are actually in the TPH and the underlying chords in the lead sheet. The vocal parts should be able to function nonetheless even with alternative chords. Also, if you reference the indexes in your TPH you can locate other texts supported by the name of the tune listed at the top left margin of the arrangement.
3. Regarding the capo, some of the original keys in the TPH are not conducive for the guitar and will likely need a capo. If you would like an alternative key please feel free to reach out to me and I can easily produce one in a pdf format.
4. In thinking through your work as an accompanist you already know it always requires consistent rehearsal. I was born in 1974 and I still practice each week before I seek to support the congregation in worship. There may be chords that are less familiar to you that we often find in jazz harmonizations. These are meant to help support the melody line without having to add to the frequency of chord changes. There are a number of good resources online that can assist you in spelling them with your fingers depending on your instrument. The goal is to provide color changes in the music so that it is not just I, IV, V chords.
5. One of the trickiest parts about accompanying singing in worship is getting the congregation started with strength on each stanza. In my local church, I often work on getting the introduction and its timing in a way that can be replicated between each stanza and makes proportionate sense. Often when using guitar it makes good sense to suspend a chord for a measure and then add an extra measure without the suspension to create what we could call a "turn-around" for the congregation to breathe before singing again in a subsequent stanza. Be sure that it is predictable and consistent with clear visual cues.
6. With all of the above in mind, please take time to communicate proactively with your church leadership so that they understand and can empathize with the necessary distinctions of varying instrumentations. The needs of your congregation should be paramount in your discussions. The ultimate goal is for God's people to sing with all their heart, strength, mind, and soul.
7. Thanks for reading to the end. My invitation to you is sincere. Though my training is primarily classical, the ensembles I have had the privilege of leading have included a wide array of instruments, grooves and contexts. I want to be of help to you in your endeavors…so please reach out to me. With all these things in mind, remember that YOU are called to worship because of our shared status as the priesthood of believers. These lead sheets are meant to aid you in that calling so that you and your accompanying musicians may lead lives of grateful holiness as the redeemed and flourishing children of our Triune God.

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