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# MUSIC AS A TOOL OF NONVIOLENCE

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## Claiming our Voices – Building a Singing Community:

- It's important to create a supportive, safe, nurturing space for singing to rise up
  - listen to music
  - sing in worship
  - share songs with friends
  - hold song circles or community singing events once a month or every two weeks
  - play an instrument
  - form a peace and justice choir
- Singing is like a muscle – you have to use it to keep it vibrant.
- Start small – a carpenter works on small projects before building a house.
- Faith communities and social movements have a rich tradition of song to learn from.

## Songs for Activists:

- **Characteristics of a good Peace & Justice song:**
  - accessible - easy to join
  - builds unity
  - empowers, encourages and emboldens those gathered
  - expands the message
  - challenges power
  - asserts prophetic voice
  - recognizes connection to long history of peacemakers
  - easy to harmonize
- **Factors that help make a song accessible:**
  - certain types of songs are more easily accessible than others: *zippers, call and response, rounds, chants*
  - song sheets
  - familiarity (as long as it isn't sung to death!)
  - appropriate tempo (not dragging, but not too fast for large group to keep up)
  - appropriate key
  - re-writes of songs using familiar tunes with issue-specific lyrics
  - leader calls out lines (prompting or queuing)
  - bilingual or multi-lingual as appropriate
  - fun – be creative; play with it; different sub-groups sing a line or verse (women, men, kids...)

## Music for Rallies, Vigils, Public Witness, Marches / Processions:

- **Tips for Success:**
  - music/song sets the tone and reinforces the themes – select music that expresses the spirit of the event.
  - music/song magnifies our voice as a gathered body – plan for amplification.
    - ✓ have adequate gas or battery power for PA system.
    - ✓ amplification can be difficult outdoors – think about the space and group size when choosing PA system (half-mile hailer, bullhorn, speaker system...)
    - ✓ singing facilitates the empowerment that comes when individuals see themselves as part of a larger body.
  - select songs/music based on characteristics and accessibility factors mentioned above.
- use clapping, drums and simple rhythm instruments (buckets, tambourines, shakers...) to help maintain unity in singing.
- a capella may work better than trying to sing with instruments – expand on the idea of voice as primary God-given instrument with great potential.
- keep things simple for marches/processions – it's very difficult for the back of the line to keep up with the front
- **Pitfalls for Avoid – What a Good Rally Song is NOT:**
  - just “filler”
  - an afterthought
  - someone's way of trying to be impressive
  - too many words crammed in – too busy
  - too dependent on recorded music
  - too dependent on elaborate instrumentation
  - worn out, trivial, mocking

## Examples of Different Types of “Accessible” Songs:

- Zippers
  - “We Shall Not Be Moved”
  - “Wade in the Water”
  - “Keep On Walkin’ Forward”
  - “Down by the Riverside”
  - “Marching in the Light of God”
  - “Oh, Freedom”
  - “Honey in the Rock”
  - “Guide My Feet”
  - “While I Live”
- Call and Response
  - “I’m On My Way”
  - “Hopi Peace Song”
  - “And When I Rise”
  - “Up Over My Head”
- Rounds
  - “Vine and Fig Tree”
  - “Dona Nobis Pacem”
- Chants
  - “If We Have Courage”
  - “The Gathering Chant”

## Resources:

- People – regular sharing draws from what people already know
- Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook – edited by Peter Blood and Annie Patterson
- “Movement” Musicians – Pete Seeger, Charlie King, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Voices, Utah Phillips, Holly Near...
- Libraries – recordings and books
- People’s Music Network – national network promoting progressive music from different movements
- SET UP YOUR OWN MUSIC FOLDER – collect song sheets, ask performers to send you lyrics, etc.