



Worship and Liturgical Resources

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Leading Assembly Singing

Scheduling details

This module is not like the others. It is intended to be led by someone who has been particularly prepared to do so. Currently, there are three musicians from across the church, as well as Scott Weidler, who can do so.

When a synod (or other sponsoring group) wants to schedule this event, they should contact Scott Weidler (see bottom of Resources list in handouts). He will work with them to schedule a date and presenter. Each sponsoring group pays \$475 (to ELCA Worship) to cover some of the expenses. WP will subsidize the rest. Therefore, no more than 6 of these can be scheduled in one year. This allows synods from across the church to take advantage of this opportunity for the same expense.

Synods (or whoever sponsors this) are encouraged to charge a small fee to cover the \$475, the copying of handouts or other print materials and, perhaps, a lunch.

Audience

This module is intended for anyone who leads assembly singing, whether with organ, piano, guitar, or voice alone. The basic skills and techniques can be applied to all instruments, including praise bands. (However, this is not a “how to organize a praise band” workshop.) This material can be adapted to all skill levels and experience. Many well-trained musicians still need the fundamentals for leading assembly song.

Improvisation

This module only deals with improvisation in-so-far as it is needed to minimally interpret a particular style of music.

Length

This module is designed to be approximately three hours, although there is plenty of material for it to be lengthened. It could be combined with the *Exploring the Musical Riches in ELW* module to create an all-day workshop.

Location

This module need to be led in a church with both an organ and piano readily available near each other, either up front or, if all participants can fit, in a balcony.

Materials

A local host will need to copy a set of handouts (approx. 15 pages) for each participant. In addition, each participant will need a copy of ELW (pew edition). These can be at the church, brought in for the event, or each participant can be instructed to bring one. In local advertising, it is important that they know that ELW is being used as the primary resource for the event, but that the skills and techniques being explored are applicable to any songs being lead in worship.

Leading Assembly Singing

Why we gather – Why we sing

The right attitude

Human voice & breath

Tactus – the heartbeat

Tempo

Anticipating challenges

Articulation & accent

Turnarounds

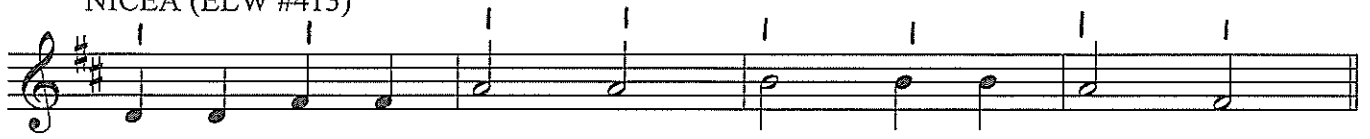
Introductions

Timbre

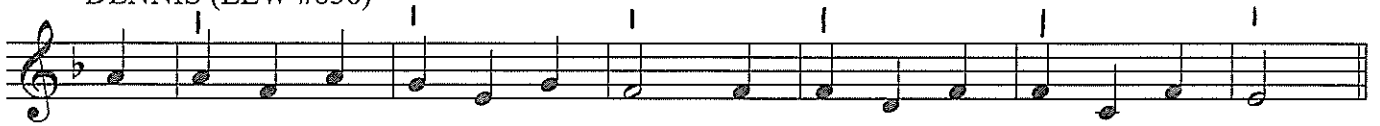
Song-leading tips

Tactus examples

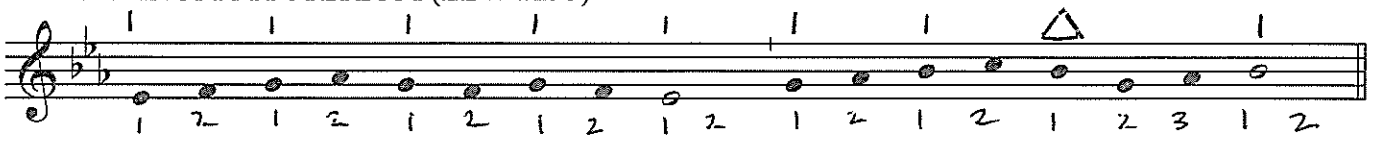
NICEA (ELW #413)



DENNIS (ELW #656)



DIVINUM MYSTERIUM (ELW #295)



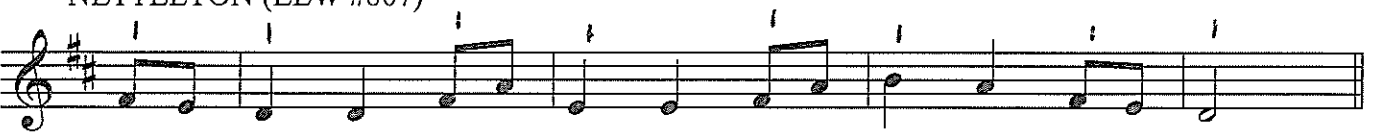
FREU DICH SEHR (ELW #256)



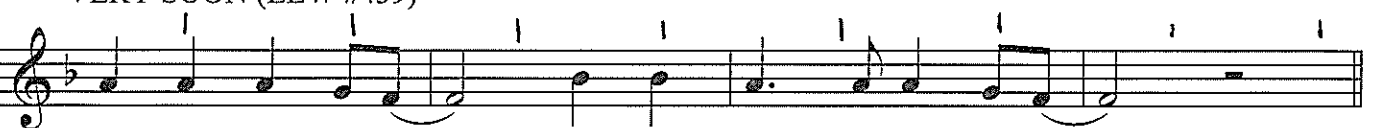
EIN FESTE BURG (ELW #503)



NETTLETON (ELW #807)



VERY SOON (ELW #439)



LA MANOS DE DIOS (ELW #889)



GLORIA

Reprinted from ELW
Pew Edition
for educational use

1 An - gels we have heard on high, sweet - ly sing - ing o'er the plains,
2 Shep - herds, why this ju - bi - lee? Why your joy - ous strains pro - long?
3 Come to Beth - le - hem and see him whose birth the an - gels sing;

and the moun - tains in re - ply, ech - o - ing their joy - ous strains.
What the glad - some tid - ings be which in - spire your heav'n - ly song?
come, a - dore on bend - ed knee Christ the Lord, the new - born king.

Refrain
Glo - ri - a

in ex - cel - sis De - o; glo

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

by Erik Floan

Director of Worship Music & Arts

Cross of Christ Lutheran Church, Bellevue Washington

www.cofclc.org

Last year I uttered a phrase that, as a classically trained church musician, I had not imagined ever saying: “Drummer, can we get a stronger back-beat, and steady eighths on the high-hat?”

The almost foreign words flew from my startled lips midway through my first month leading the band that leads worship for my congregation’s “Contemporary” service. Nobody in the band blinked at the statement—and the drummer gave me what I needed—but it was a moment I won’t forget. It was the “this is for real” moment in my new life leading a worship band.

I came late (and at first seemingly wholly unqualified) to lead what is known as contemporary worship music—meaning, in this case, worship music led by a band with a guitar, electric bass, a trapset, piano, synthesizer, and vocalists. Sound is mixed through a massive and expensive soundboard, and pumped into the sanctuary through equally massive and expensive speakers. Words are projected on a screen. Our sound is somewhere between a classic rock and gospel, with occasional folk-hints.

My musical, academic, and personal pedigree would not hint that I’d be qualified to lead a worship band: degrees in organ and church music from St. Olaf College and the University of Notre Dame; a love of liturgical worship; a suspicion of most music written after 1750; a healthy skepticism of novelty, pop-culture, and slickness.

And yet, here I am, leading the band. How did this happen? What have I learned? What can I share to help another learn to lead this style? What observations do I have?

How I Got Here

In September 2003 I became full-time Director of Worship, Music & Arts for Cross of Christ Lutheran Church in Bellevue, Washington (suburban Seattle). In Cross of Christ’s forty or so years of history, the congregation has enthusiastically supported classical music: great congregational singing, an internationally touring adult choir, multiple handbell ensembles, a pipe organ, a grand piano. Cross of Christ was known throughout the region as a major music center.

Unfortunately, a massive congregational conflict erupted over the last several years, some of which surrounded worship and music; Specifically, the introduction of a “contemporary” service into the congregation’s common life. There is much more to this story, but the resolution to the worship question was that the church would support both a traditional and a contemporary service. Another part

of the resolution was to seek a music director to help them live into this reality, by being responsible for both styles of worship.

So, to some extent, I did not have a choice in the matter: If I wanted the job, I needed to be willing to lead both services. I did not have to live through the arguments for or against contemporary worship. Contemporary worship simply “was”; that battle was—and is—over.

I admit I am grateful to have inherited the service, rather than be tasked with setting it up from scratch. Now that these overall decisions have been made, it is my job and my challenge to make it actually work.

Contemporary Lutheran

There are a variety of solutions to the question: how can worship be contemporary and Lutheran? Multiple solutions play out in congregations nationwide.

In my setting, the congregation has chosen to offer two Sunday services, one called Traditional, the other Contemporary. The contemporary service has morphed since it was first experienced. It began as an evening “seeker” service targeted at those who may not have any previous connection with a congregation. Today the service is at 11:00 am Sunday morning (the “traditional” service is at 9:30). The service retains a seeker-friendly atmosphere, but I don’t consider it a seeker service. The service order follows the classic Western church’s ordo—Gathering, Word, Meal, Sending—as at the traditional service. We celebrate weekly communion, we utilize all the lectionary readings (including the psalm), we hear a sermon (the same sermon as at 9:30). The essential differences are the musical style (led by the band), the delivery of resources (simple bulletin, words on the screen), and the overall attitude (no vestments, a more casual presidership style).

Transferable Skills

It is my belief that if you can lead a choir and a small orchestra well, you can lead a worship band. I was not formed as a contemporary band leader, but I have discovered a well of easily transferable skills from my classical training.

Openness to a variety of styles

I am naturally open to and respectful of a variety of musical styles. Personally, I like plainsong, early/medieval music, and Bach best. I also like high-energy dance club. (Ok, I do hate heavy metal. I really hate country and western. Otherwise, I can handle about anything). Being open helps me better understand what the band needs to do to sound its best. I couldn’t lead this music if I didn’t really respect it.

Conducting from the keyboard.

At the traditional service I am both organist and choirmaster. I conduct from the organ keyboard, with my left hand, while the right plays and the feet do the pedal work. I also bob my head and mouth words. At the contemporary service, it's the same drill, but at the piano.

Band as Chamber Ensemble

I learned to think of the band as just another chamber ensemble. For example, I don't play violin or flute, but when I conduct a chamber ensemble I can tell a violinist or flutist "be softer here" or "play this an octave higher" or "give those eighth notes a swing." I don't play guitar or drums, but the same principle applies to the band. I am learning the limits and possibilities for the band instruments.

Orchestration/Registration

Most of the time I find I am simply orchestrating a piece of music for band instruments. For example, when I inherited the band, it seemed everyone was playing everything all the time. (Mostly loudly.) It would be like playing the organ with all the stops on all the time. But it is the variety of instrumentation, orchestration, and texture that give the music life and interest. Sometimes a strummed guitar and one vocalist are more effective than having everyone "on". But, sometimes, we peel the paint off the walls.

Organization

I'm an organized person. I usually pick hymns, anthems, and preludes a year in advance. When I inherited the band, they got their music at rehearsal, put it together, and never had much time to really hone a piece. The Sunday band was whoever showed up, regardless of whether they knew the music. Now, we get music a season in advance, we rotate through singers and band members as the music indicates a need. Being organized frees the band to really work on music, rather than freaking out over last second "who is doing what" questions.

Contemporary Worship Myths

Contemporary worship/music is easy.

Some of the tunes are simple—many are not—but making a whole service work is not easy. Most contemporary music is rhythmically challenging. Most singers don't read music, so instead of looking at the notes and saying "correct/incorrect", you instead have to be sure your singers agree on the tune. Some guitarists can pick, others can only strum. You need qualified folks to set up sound, operate the projector, deal with power outages. You need a place to store all this stuff. And money.

Contemporary worshippers love change/variety.

Again, not so. This was the biggest surprise to me. At our traditional service we rotate through six or so liturgical settings, and rarely repeat hymns more than twice a year. The contemporary service gets antsy whenever we change a beloved response or don't do a certain song more than once a month. I was startled, too, to discover that, one year after I started with the contemporary service, I went to a Contemporary Christian Music conference and knew all the songs!

Anyone can be in a worship band.

You can get away with dead weight in a large choir, but not in a small worship band where every person has a microphone. An out of tune singer, a fumbling guitarist, or an insensitive drummer can kill a song.

What you hear on the radio—Christian Contemporary—works great at worship.

Just as a recording of a great choir does not mean my choir singing the same music will sound great, so too a studio-produced song one heard on the radio may not be the best thing for worship. For one thing, most radio music is for a soloist, not a congregation. Most radio music is performed by professionals, not volunteers. And, most radio music goes through multiple takes, not a one-shot Sunday morning service.

Contemporary Worship Challenges

The line between contemporary music and evangelical/fundamentalist teaching is too thin.

Most people associate contemporary music with the so-called mega-churches, and most of those churches have a fundamentalist bent. This is the biggest challenge to me: how can the Good News with Lutheran values and perspective be shared through a musical vehicle commonly associated with decision theology, scurrilous television evangelists, and Promisekeepers? For me, that line is still too thin.

Great tune, questionable theology

How do I explain that this song a singer loves that speaks about being born again and accepting Jesus, doesn't square with Lutheran baptismal understanding that God is the active agent? How about the song with the line that Jesus died for me and now everything in my life is going to be fine—because it's not!

The cult of Me

A lot of Contemporary Christian music is “I/me” centered (as are many pietistic hymns: this is not a new issue). It is a weekly struggle to make sure the music reflects that “We” are a community praising God as much as “I” am.

Rehearsals are more fluid than a traditional choir.

Traditional choirs generally operate on the premise that the conductor is in charge of the rehearsal. Choir members don’t “jam” experimentally until they get their part right. In a band, however, most instrumentalists decide on their own how to play their part. I can offer suggestions and vary the orchestration to some degree—mostly along the lines of “can we have something like” such-and-such a sound or style, but most instrumentalists figure out what they are going to do on their own.

Song Sources

There is no shortage of contemporary music to choose from—but some sources are better than others. Most songs are available online, usually in collections published by a particular artist (my least favorite and the least cost effective). Quality compilations have begun to appear. We draw from the excellent Augsburg Fortress published “Worship & Praise.” We also use a collection “All the Best Songs” and a variety of lead-sheets available from online resources, such as CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International).

Repeating Music, Teaching Children

Contemporary worship presents a particular challenge for children. At our Contemporary service I noticed right away that while some children bopped around to the beat, most were sitting in the pew coloring offering envelopes. They were not engaged, and not singing. This seemed counter intuitive—isn’t the music more interesting to them? The music, it turns out, is not the primary issue.

Young children learn by repetition and by discernment of symbol and text. Do you notice how primary school teachers teach by repeating lessons (ABCs, 123s) and by allowing children time individually to work out the visual-aural-mental connection? Witness how a child will slowly sound-out words and sentences, a finger flowing along the page.

At the contemporary service words are projected on a screen, not printed on a page. We noticed our children couldn’t see the screen because the tall adults in front of them were in the way, and anyway most children couldn’t read the words as they changed so quickly either. By contrast, at the traditional service, most parents were pointing out words in the hymnal as they went by, and most of our children were following along if not actually singing. Also, constantly changing music prevented the tunes from sinking in.

The biggest change I made to our contemporary service—and the one that faced the stiffest opposition—was the inclusion of seasonally repeated music. That is, for the season of, say, Lent, we’d repeat each one of the three weekly opening songs. For Easter we’d repeat an Alleluia song before the Gospel. Sometimes we’d repeat the same communion song several weeks in a row. Some members of my band balked at this, arguing that it wasn’t contemporary if we did it two weeks in a row. I argued that as a congregation there were some texts we needed to own, and that the only way to own them was to repeat them.

The unforeseen byproduct of this repetition was that our children suddenly owned a part of worship they had otherwise been excluded from. Several weeks into last year’s Easter season, we noticed our children singing the songs we had repeated. The children, in fact, fussed when the Easter season was over and “their” songs were not being sung. The children had come to “own” certain songs, because they learned them through repetition. We now make sure to repeat songs for a season, and also to teach the song to the children in their Sunday morning church classes. The music is now, truly, theirs.

Technical Support

Running the Soundboard and/or Projector is an unsung but vital part of the contemporary worship skillset. It is my experience that there are three areas of sound support: Design, Operation, Technical. Usually a person is good at one or two of these, but rarely all three. For example, your resident computer geek may be able to wire the board, but may not have an ear or mixing skills for a good ensemble. Likewise, some people have great “ears” for the ensemble, but may not know how to adjust monitors, prevent feedback, or connect cables.

Another tech guru might be able to set up the screen and projector, and maybe even create a slideshow, but they might not be the best person to operate the slides. It is an art, not a science, to know when to change the slide mid-tune, so that the congregation can continue to sing.

Divas

A traditional choir of 30 can absorb a diva or two—both vocally and attitudinally. But one diva in a band of perhaps two, three, or four singers and a few instruments is one diva too many. (Luckily, I have a secret “turn it down” signal for the soundboard operator.)

Contemporary Music Delights

Most musicians are gung-ho about the music.

I have never met a contemporary musician who is not 100% passionate about this kind of music. If everyone in my traditional choir, the bell choir, or the congregation at large was as passionate about

learning, loving, and performing this music as my band members are, I would be a very happy church musician.

Exploring Crossover

It is possible to make a classical hymn contemporary, but not likely to make a contemporary song classical. I appreciate, for example, the ELCA Renewing Worship attempts to craft texts and melodies that can be used at both services. Joel Martinson's "Lamb of God" (now in ELW, Setting 9 of Holy Communion) is one of those pieces—we sing it at both services, but to differing musical styles. At Reformation, for whatever reason the band requests to jam on LBW 228—the rhythmic version—while the choir sticks to LBW 229. (At Christmas, by the way, you had better include traditional carols at the Contemporary service... or else!)

Conclusion

I have grown to appreciate the place of contemporary music in the life of our church. I have also grown as a musician. I have come to more fully appreciate my classical training as a basis for exploring other musical styles. Most of all, I'm thrilled to report that, yes, even I can do this. Most likely, so can you.

Reprinted from ELW
 Accompaniment Edition
 for educational use

Hal - le - lu - jah!
 Hal - le - lu - jah!
 Hal - le - lu - jah!

1 We know that Christ is raised and dies no more.
 2 We share by wa - ter in his sav - ing death.
 3 The Fa - ther's splen - dor clothes the Son with life.
 4 A new cre - a - tion comes to life and grows

Em - braced by death, he broke its fear - ful hold,
 Re - born, we share with him an eas - y life,
 The Spir - it's fis - sion shakes the church of God,
 as Christ's new bod - y takes on flesh and blood.

and our de - spair he turned to blaz - ing joy.
 as liv - ing mem - bers of our Sav - ing Christ.
 Bap - tized, we live with God the Three in One.
 The u - ni - verse re - stored and whole will sing:

BUNESSAN

Reprinted from ELW
Accompaniment Edition
for educational use

Alternate accompaniment

C Am Dm G

F G Am

Em Am Em

G Em

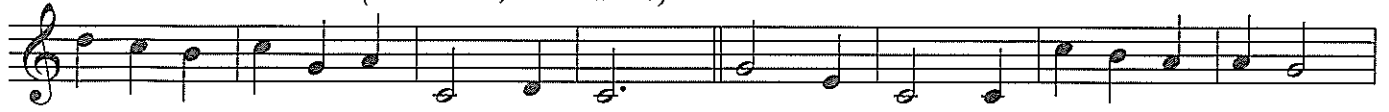
Am F G

F G C

Em Am Dm G C

Turnaround examples

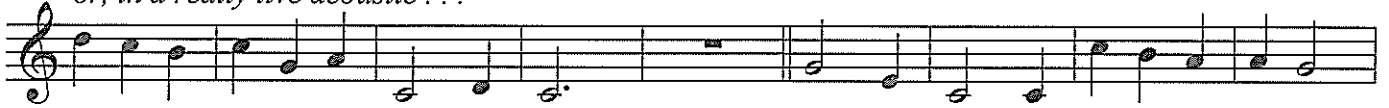
ABBOTT'S LEIGH (as written; ELW #526)



could become . . .



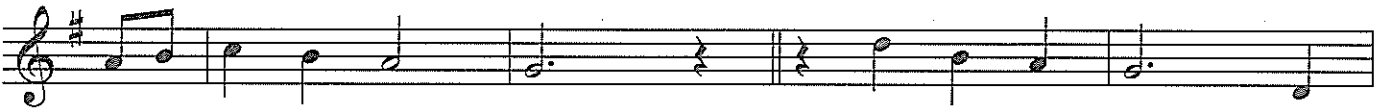
or, in a really live acoustic . . .



SINE NOMINE (as written; ELW #422)



could become . . .



or, in a really live acoustic . . .



SALZBURG (as written; ELW #310)



could become . . .



or, in a really live acoustic . . .



Important Teaching Techniques

A quick overview of 16 tips to remember

when introducing music from another culture to a singing assembly

*By Tom Witt with thanks to John Bell, from the Iona Community, Scotland for helping to articulate some of these techniques. See his tips outlined more fully in the book, **The Singing Thing Too**, available through GIA Publications, Inc. (#G-5510) www.giamusic.com or 1-800-GIA-1358.*

Get people to sit close together

This helps people sing together better, because they can more easily hear one another. If you can find a non-threatening way to pack people in more closely, you'll improve assembly singing on just about anything you attempt to teach. Sitting closer together is also something we can learn from other churches around the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America, where worshippers often gather as a close-knit community rather than as isolated individuals.

Teach at the right time

normally *before* the worship service has started, in order to not interrupt the flow of the liturgy. Set aside the traditional Prelude spot as "Gathering Music" or "Musical Preparation" and teach anything new during this time. If the assembly learns something before they sing it during worship, it will be in their short-term memory and will be recalled more easily either when the time comes to sing it.

Don't teach too much new music at one time

Worshippers sometimes feel alienated if there is nothing familiar to them in a service. As you are expanding the assembly's repertoire, intersperse familiar hymns or chants that allow people to feel "at home" again. It's appropriate to challenge a congregation to learn new music, but don't create an atmosphere where people always feel uncomfortable.

Don't treat your congregation as though it were a choir

This includes grimacing if something goes wrong, referring to bar numbers and asking the altos or tenors to write in a breath mark in the third system. And try not to point to a section of the assembly and say "I think one or two of you over there are singing out of tune." Think *less* about being "the knowledgeable musician" and *more* about being "the enthusiast" who would like to hear a congregation sing well together.

Concentrate on using your voice to introduce a new song

The human voice is easier than another musical instrument to imitate. Worshipers will be much more willing to sing if you actually sing it first and ask them to repeat after you. Adding a lot of instrumentation during the teaching of a song will not necessarily help the assembly learn it.

Encourage paperless teaching

Don't use printed music unless you feel you have to. About 70% of the world learns music through the oral tradition; many of the songs from other cultures that you learn, were never taught with printed music. Even if you eventually *do* have people turn to a hymn number, see if it's possible to teach some of the song without worshippers having their nose in a book.

Use your choir

both as guinea pigs (by teaching something new to the choir first to see how it goes), but also as a secret source of power: Plant your choir members within the congregation and have them prompted to help the assembly respond to your teaching. It can be a huge advantage to have 10-20% of the overall group already know a new song before it's taught.

Share something about the song

If you know more about the song's origin or style or purpose, or perhaps an insightful line in the text, work out a succinct way to share that with the assembly so they have a context for singing it. Knowing more about a song will help them enter into it with you. At the very least the assembly should know what country it comes from and what language it was written in.

Don't sing a song only once.

Unfamiliar songs – especially those from other cultures -- need to be sung over and over again in order to be known and loved. So find a good reason to teach the song -- beyond just doing it on Global Mission Sunday – and sing it the following week, so it can get into people's bones. Think about introducing a short chant *seasonally*, so that it's appropriate to sing for the 4 Sundays of Advent, or for 5 Sundays during Lent.

If the song is in a language unfamiliar to most of the assembly,

you might choose to *speak* each phrase in the language and have people repeat it back before you start with any of the music; or you might teach the melody first using the syllable "la" instead of the unfamiliar words. Learning both a new language and a new melody at same time can be difficult, unless it's just a few words.

Teach a song in short, manageable pieces

Break a song down into two, three or four smaller parts, if necessary. Don't be afraid to repeat a line again, if they're having trouble getting it — sometimes you might have to sing a section twice, if they're having trouble with it.

Be clear with your instructions

Most North American Lutherans are fairly obedient if you just tell them what to do. If you want to sing something first while they listen, just say "Listen once while I sing it for you" or "Sing back what you hear" or "First I'll sing, then you." And remember, with assemblies that are primarily European American, if you want them to move their bodies, you usually have to show them how!

Outline the tune in the air

Many people can pick up the pitch and rhythm of notes when they are marked in the air much more easily than when they are simply sung. Use hand and arm gestures large enough (and over your music stand, if you need one) to be seen in a big room. In a smaller setting, you can use smaller gestures.

Teach with encouragement and expectation

We only get from a congregation what we expect it to give. If we don't expect much, our behavior as song leaders will indicate that. But if we can look relaxed, smile and clearly anticipate a good response, we're more likely to get it. Never start with an apology or with mumbling...Instead exude *confidence*, both in yourself and in the people's ability to sing this song with you. Don't scold, but be *forgiving* if they don't get it at first. If they need help, you might say "that's a good first effort; let's try it once more."

If a song is call and response, sing the call only

As the leader, you are the *caller*, *not* the *responder*. Let others in the assembly take the response. It's similar to the liturgy where the presider says: "The Lord be with you" and the assembly responds: "And also with you." As in liturgy, it's a dialogue, of which you have one part, not both.

Get out of the way once the song is learned

Once you have taught people to sing the song, it should be theirs to sing. It's not necessarily the time for you to be a star performer, or to dominate the song by being the loudest. If you are not playing a critical role as cantor or caller, back off the mike, or disappear into the assembly so they can own the song as their own.

RESOURCES

Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Editions: Pew

Accompaniment: Service Music & Hymns

978-0-8066-7024-9

Accompaniment: Liturgies

978-0-8066-5621-2

Simplified Keyboard Accompaniment: Service Music & Hymns

978-0-8066-5670-1

Guitar Accompaniment: Service Music & Hymns

978-0-8066-5389-1

Principles for Worship 0-8066-3648-3

Or this can be downloaded from www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/LearningCenter/Principles-of-Worship.aspx

Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship 978-0-8066-5394-5

Musicians' Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship 978-0-8066-5389-1

Introductions and Alternate Accompaniments (many volumes for organ and piano)

Leading the Church's Song 0-8066-3591-6

All of the above available from:

Augsburg Fortress www.augsburgfortress.org 1-800-328-4648

The Singing Thing G-5510

The Singing Thing, Too G-6918

both by John Bell, Iona Community, Scotland,

The above from:

GIA Publications, Inc. www.giamusic.com 1-800-GIA-1358

Living Liturgy offers numerous conference/workshop possibilities, including Leading the Song of God's People. www.livingliturgy.com

Music that Makes Community offers conferences on leading assembly singing in a relational/communal way: without papers, books or screens. www.allsaintscompany.org

Leadership Program for Musicians (*servicing small congregations*) [LPM]

LPM provides a two-year (usually; it's flexible) curriculum with seven core courses of fundamental skills for those leading music in a congregation, including the leadership of congregational song (organ, piano, guitar, or voice). Coordinators are trained by the national board, then create the program locally. Local programs are often sponsored by a synod, often with ecumenical cooperation. www.lpm-online.org

Scott Weidler, Associate Director for Worship and Music

scott.weidler@elca.org 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2554

www.elca.org/worship

worship@elca.org