



Introducing New Music

Knowing your assembly

The introduction of new music can be an energizing and enriching experience, but for the music to be of benefit to a worshipping community, those doing the introducing need to prepare carefully. First, it is important to know the people with whom you sing. Some thrive on new hymns and easily accept a variety of liturgical settings.

Others may find one new song every two or three months about all they can manage. Certainly knowing how much new material they can handle is an important guide for planning. Careful preparation with this in mind will help smooth the way to successful introduction of new material.

As music leader, you might first work with the worship committee to discover what areas of the assembly's song can be expanded and in what directions. Start by making a list of all the hymns, songs, and liturgical music in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* that your assembly already knows. Revisit this list frequently and use these pieces as you proceed with teaching new things to keep some balance between new and familiar.

Then make a list of specific things that you would like to introduce. This list might include new musical settings of the liturgy, new hymnody, and psalmody. If yours is a lengthy list, prioritize the items, keeping in mind which things your congregation seems to need the most. If your worshipers know only one setting of the communion liturgy, perhaps a new musical setting will be at the top of your list. If their repertoire of hymnody is limited, perhaps you will want to move to expand their knowledge and understanding of the vast body of hymns and songs that can enrich worship and spiritual life, while using a familiar setting of the liturgy. Much of what was in *Lutheran Book of Worship* is included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

Preparing to teach

When you are ready to begin singing new music with your congregation, think about how to ensure that the new does not become a barrier to worship for some people. There are basically two ways to approach this task.

Different approaches work with different communities.

- Just dive in and introduce all the sung portions on the same day.
- Begin with one or two portions, adding others gradually over the course of a season.

When making this decision, keep in mind both the learning ability of the assembly and the difficulty of the setting. Carefully prepared worship folders and succinct, but clear, verbal announcements can assist in this process.



Assembly rehearsals

Some congregations value a brief time of rehearsal immediately prior to the service. The rehearsal time allows you to give whatever instructions and commentary are necessary to present the new material. Rehearsal also allows the people to sing through the new setting – working a bit on any difficult spots – before actually using it in a worship setting. New melodies can be taught quickly and effectively by a singer who “lines out” the melody, a process whereby a single line is sung by the leader and repeated by the assembly. The leader continues until the entire song is learned. Having a melody instrument such as violin, flute, oboe, or trumpet doubling the melody also provides helpful leadership for assembly singing.

Some congregations resist rehearsals before worship, so you might need to find some creative ways to teach new settings. Try having each sung segment sung twice, first by choir or soloist, then repeated by the assembly. Remember, however, that repetition can increase the length of the service, an important factor in overall planning. During longer seasons, like the times after Epiphany or Pentecost, the choir or a soloist might sing one or two portions of the new music and use appropriate hymnody or familiar music for the remaining canticles. The following week, those choir portions can be sung by the congregation, and the choir can introduce one or two more. Over the course of several weeks, the entire setting will be sung, leaving several more weeks to sing the entire liturgy as an assembly, so that it begins to become familiar.

How much? How fast?

Depending on the season in which you choose to introduce a new setting, the amount of material the congregation needs to learn will vary. For instance, during Advent or Lent, the congregation may only learn the Kyrie, “Holy, holy, holy,” and “Lamb of God.” A Cantic of Praise is not normally sung in these seasons. Notice the flexibility built into *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, especially during the Gathering time. It is not expected that there always be a hymn and a Kyrie and/or Cantic of Praise. Perhaps, as the music at key liturgical moments (Gospel Acclamation and music during the Great Thanksgiving) is learned, you simply sing a familiar hymn at the Gathering, learning Kyrie, “Glory to God,” and “This Is the Feast” at a later time.

However you choose to introduce a new musical setting of the liturgy, consider returning to something familiar after spending time with the new. The return gives the congregation a sense of grounding and is like a visit with an old and dear friend. Knowing that the familiar will be back often creates an openness to learning something new.



Choirs as teachers

Choirs, both adult and children, can be valuable tools for teaching new hymns. Children are particularly effective in enticing adults to try new things. Adults are often happy to participate with children and will wholeheartedly embrace their teaching, while they might turn away from adults doing the same introduction. Whatever choirs are used, be certain that they are carefully rehearsed and can present a new hymn with accuracy and enthusiasm. Choirs need time to become comfortable with new styles, especially when introducing hymns from other cultures. They need to be convincing in their singing and convey the spirit and sense of the people and the culture from which the music comes, as well as make it accessible to the people who will learn to sing it. Music leaders will want to become fully acquainted with the new styles so that they, in turn, can adequately teach that style. If your congregation does not regularly have a choir, consider recruiting a handful of singers for a short-term commitment to occasionally learn, then teach, new music.

Methods of introduction

Let's consider some easy and helpful ways to introduce new hymns to a congregation.

- A new hymn might serve as a choir anthem for a particular service and be used the following week as an assembly hymn. Be sure to alert worshipers to this plan so they will pay close attention to what the choir is singing.
- A song that is fairly easy to learn might be introduced by having the choir sing stanza one alone, with the assembly joining on the remaining stanzas.
- A hymn or song with a refrain can be introduced by having the assembly sing the refrain, while the verses are sung by a choir or cantor. This is true for some settings of the longer liturgical canticles as well, such as "Glory to God" and "This Is the Feast." Use instrumental settings of a new melody as prelude music or during the distribution of communion before teaching it. This will help people to assimilate the new melody.

Any new music should be used frequently when it is first learned, so that people will become comfortable with it. Many congregations find that designating a new hymn as the "hymn of the season" works well for them. Try to vary the placement of the hymn in the service. For example, some hymns can be used as a Hymn of the Day for one liturgy and a hymn during communion the following week.



Think about the people

The suggestions here are intended to help you to generate more creative ways to introduce new music with your congregation. However you decide to proceed, do so with pastoral sensitivity to the needs and concerns of the people, as well as a clear sense of how new resources will foster the spiritual growth of those who gather as a worshiping community.

Resources

Buckley Farlee, Robert, ed. *Leading the Church's Song*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998.

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