

SERVING IN SONG:

The Lutheran Choir's Role and Repertoire

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"The choir has a unique and significant place in Lutheran worship...What is important and crucial is that **choirmaster** and **singers** together – as well as the **pastor** and **congregation** – **understand what the real function of the choir in liturgical worship is**, and that, understanding their **priorities**, they work toward carrying them out in interesting, effective and meaningful ways that will contribute to the worship of the whole congregation."¹

RECLAIMING OUR REFORMATION ROLE

I. The choir is a ____ (TEACHER)_____.

"The common people will learn from the pupils [choir] what, when, and how to sing and pray in church; they will also learn what to sing by the bier or at the grave. When the pupils kneel and fold their hands...the common people will imitate them."²

"The school choir was the pedagogical tool whereby the congregation learned to sing the new melodies, so that both choir and congregation could proclaim to each other the essence of the Gospel."³

"[At Vespers, the scholars] in the middle of the church [shall] sing with the people the German Magnificat."⁴

"We serve by "helping the priesthood of believers carry out their responsibilities as confidently, meaningfully, and enthusiastically as possible."⁵

**"The goal for every Lutheran worship leader
[choir director] should be that the whole congregation
joins in singing God's praises."⁶**

¹ Schalk, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 256.

² Luther, 'On the Councils and the church' 1539 LW 41:137, Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*.

³ Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 296

⁴ Quote from the Wittenberg Church Order (1533), Leaver, *The Whole Church Sings*, 133.

⁵ Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy*, 82.

⁶ Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 268

II. The choir is a _____(PARTNER)_____.

"Lutherans see all music in corporate worship as part of the people's work of the liturgy."⁷

"Each partner in the gathered assembly participated in ways uniquely suited to their abilities and talents. At the same time, *each helped the other* to offer their best in the praise of God and in the proclamation of his name."⁸

"The German Litany [1529] was intended...to be sung antiphonally by choir and congregation, the choir being designated "Der Erste Choir" (the first choir) and the congregation "Der Ander Choir" (the second choir). At specific points both choir and congregation sing together."⁹

III. The choir is a _____(STEWARD)_____ of God's gift of music.

"Thus it was Luther's view that the most highly developed musical forms of his day--Gregorian Chant and polyphony--should be taught to the youth and sung in churches, together with simpler congregational song...The Lutheran reformation...successfully encouraged the reciprocal interaction of art music of the most highly developed kind together with simple congregational song."¹⁰

"I would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who made and gave them."¹¹

"Good church music...helps the Christian community focus attention where it belongs: on Christ and what he has done for us."¹²

**"After the pastor, the choir constitutes the most important force
in the effective worship life of a congregation.
Almost anything is possible
for a congregation blessed with the strong leadership of a choir."¹³**

WHO IS THE CHOIR?

"Any combination of singers who assemble to prepare music for the liturgical service."¹⁴

"To Luther, music in worship was to continue to be liturgical song, no matter how modest the musical resources."¹⁵

Mixed Choir

Duet/Trio/Small Group

LES Classes

Youth Group

Men/Women's Choir

Sunday School/Preschool

Family Choir

Praise Band

⁷ Schalk, *Pastor and Church Musician*

⁸ Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*, 45

⁹ Leaver, *The Whole Church Sings*, 149-150

¹⁰ Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*, 35

¹¹ Luther, Preface to *Chorgesangbuch*, 1524, Leaver, 295

¹² Schalk, *The Pastor and the Church Musician*

¹³ Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy*, 92

¹⁴ Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy*, 92

¹⁵ Hermanson, *The Lutheran Church Choir*

I. TEACHER

The liturgical choir supports and adorns the congregation's song.
(HYMNS and ORDINARY)

HYMNODY

When we sing hymns, we confess our faith and we respond to all that God has done for us.¹⁶ In early Lutheranism in the 16th century, hymns were selected to match assigned Scripture readings for each Sunday of the church year. Today, the Hymn of the Day remains, "one of the central musical components in the Lutheran liturgy...its purpose is to help focus on the central theme of the particular Sunday or festival of the church year being celebrated. For Lutherans that central theme is determined by the appointed Scripture lessons, especially the Gospel, as they unfold in the context of the church year."¹⁷

Why should we sing it?

- To focus the congregation's attention on the Gospel theme for the service
- To model and reinforce strong, precise, enthusiastic congregational singing
- To build the congregation's repertoire by teaching new or unfamiliar hymns
- To add beauty and festivity to familiar hymns
- To add variety to a hymn with many stanzas
- To allow the congregation to pause and reflect on the words of the hymn
- To add expressive musical elements to emphasize texts

How should we sing it?

- Support unfamiliar hymns
 - Practice the Hymn of the Day as part of weekly rehearsals and encourage your singers to lead confidently from the pews
 - Sing verse 1-2 in unison (for harder hymns, sing all stanzas but the last one)
 - Sing a new hymn as an anthem, then have the congregation try it the following week
 - Use a children's choir (LES or SS) to introduce unfamiliar hymns
- Adorn familiar hymns
 - Sing in alternation with congregation (unison, harmony, men/women, soloists/small groups, using alternate accompaniments or unaccompanied)
 - Add descants to congregational singing
 - Consider dynamics and tempo as you present the text
 - Sing a hymn as a 2-pt canon
 - Try a new tune pairing for a familiar text
 - Try singing the hymn with a different accompaniment, or *a capella*
 - Use prepared concertatos or create your own!

¹⁶ Baumler, *Christian Worship Manual*, 230

¹⁷ Schalk, *The Hymn of the Day and Its Use in Lutheran Worship*, Church Music Pamphlet Series, St. Louis: CPH, 1983), 5.

TRY THIS!

- ❑ Ask your Pastor if each week's Hymn of the Day could be made available in advance for the choir to rehearse. Start singing upcoming hymns regularly in rehearsal and encourage your singers to think of themselves as leaders in the pews.
- ❑ Sing a stanza of the Hymn of the Day every time your choir sings an anthem - even in unison!
- ❑ Try a "homemade" concertato using just the hymnal

CW 234 "Praise To The Lord, The Almighty"

Intro:

Verse 1:

Verse 2:

Verse 3:

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

- ❑ Collaborate with the pastor and organist to introduce a new "Hymn of the Month" (or season). Repeat the hymn in different forms throughout the month (organ offertory, choral anthem, congregational hymn). Include bulletin notes on its origin and text.

SONGS OF THE ORDINARY

The songs of the *Ordinary* are the song texts that repeat every time we gather for worship, which help us proclaim the word of Christ to one another. These five song texts - *Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy)*, *Gloria (Glory to God)*, *Credo (I Believe)*, *Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)*, and *Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)* - are based in scripture and have guided Christian worship for 2,000 years. Because the songs of the *Ordinary* repeat, they are most often sung by the congregation. Other liturgical songs that recur in our orders of service include: Magnificat, Create in Me, Nunc Dimittis, Benedictus, Te Deum, and Venite.

Why should we sing them?

- To add musical variety and festivity to recurring service elements
- To model and reinforce strong, precise, enthusiastic congregational singing
- To signal their importance in the service
- To help the congregation learn new musical settings

How should we sing them?

- Add soprano descants or instruments (CW: Service of Word and Sacrament)
- Sing an alternate Gloria or Song of Praise
- Try a new version: a responsorial setting or a hymn paraphrase (see CW Manual p. 155)
- Work with your pastor to introduce a new musical setting of the entire liturgy
- Occasionally sing liturgical songs as anthems

TRY THIS!

- ❑ Sing "This is the Feast" (CW 265) in place of the Song of Praise for the Easter Season. Start on Easter Sunday, with the choir singing the verses and the congregation the refrain.
- ❑ Have the Sunday School or Elementary School sing a song of the liturgy instead of an anthem
- ❑ Talk with your pastor about the possibility of introducing new musical settings of the liturgy and make a plan for how and when to start adding this variety

II. PARTNER

**The liturgical choir proclaims the Word in dialog with the congregation.
(PROPER)**

In liturgical worship, the recurring songs of the *Ordinary* partner with texts of the *Proper*. The Propers are the parts of the service that change weekly to walk worshippers through the life of Christ and his teachings: scripture lessons, sermon, prayer of the day (Collect), psalm, verse of the day. They direct worshippers to a specific Gospel focus for each Sunday. Because they change each Sunday, the Proper **Psalm** and **Verse of the Day** are often presented by choir or pastor.

PSALM

The Psalms are the songbook of scripture and have supported the praise of God's people since the time of King David. They were written in poetic form, intended to be sung, and St. Paul encourages, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*singing psalms* and hymns and spiritual songs." Luther called the Psalter "a little Bible" for "In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible."¹⁸ Carl Schalk describes, "From earliest days psalms were sung antiphonally in the church, that is, in such a way that two parts of the congregation or two choirs, often facing each other, sang alternate verses."¹⁹ Today, psalm settings can be found from every era in history and in every musical style, offering us a staggering variety of resources for worship.

Why should we sing them?

- To proclaim God's Word to one another
- To connect ourselves to the practice of God's people over 2,000 years
- To reinforce the theme of the service
- To provide musical interest in between the reading of the lessons
- To infuse the service with musical variety

How should we sing them:

- Chanted psalms (CW/CWS): sing responsively with the congregation
 - Sing all verses in unison or harmony
 - Alternate verses creatively: choir/cong, pastor/cong, men/women, soloist/children
 - Add variety with new refrains and chants
 - Try refrains that match the season or that quote familiar hymns
- New Musical Styles: Through-composed, Verse/Refrain, Metric/hymn-based
- Psalm Anthems

TRY THIS!

- When your choir sings an anthem, also prepare the unison verses of the CW/CWS psalm
- Have the Sunday School children sing a psalm refrain as a group with soloists on the verses
- Your church doesn't sing the psalms? Talk to you pastor about how the choir can help get them started! (See Christian Worship Manual p.149 for a guide for introducing psalm singing)
- Try new styles of psalms, accompanied by piano or other instruments

¹⁸ Luther, Preface to the Psalter (1545), Luther's Works vol.35, LBW Manual, 20

¹⁹ Schalk, 'Method of Performance,' from *Key Words in Church Music*, 166.

VERSE OF THE DAY

The *Verse of the Day* is another text of the Proper which is traditionally sung by the choir. Since the time of the early Christian church, sung scripture verses (Gradual) were presented between readings, and Alleluias and a verse were sung in preparation for hearing the Gospel. *Christian Worship Manual* explains, "This [verse] is a way of praising God and preparing our hearts to receive the Word of God in the Gospel. After the Alleluia is sung once, a Scripture verse is sung that points to, and usually summarizes, the Gospel reading about to be proclaimed. After the verse, the Alleluia is sung again." The Verse "looks forward to and welcomes the reading of the Gospel" and "reinforces the theme or tone of the day or the season of the church year."²⁰

Why should we sing it?

- To reinforce the message, meaning, and mood of the Sunday²¹
- To break the monotony of readings, adding interest and change of pace
- To highlight the changing seasons of the church year for the congregation
- To remind worshippers that the Lord is speaking in the coming Gospel lesson
- To add musical variety with little rehearsal time

How should we sing it?

- Sing a through-composed unison setting
- Sing a setting with a congregational refrain
- Stick with one refrain for an entire season and schedule choir, children, soloists, pastor to sing the solo portion each week
- Use hymn stanza alternates (Appendix C)

TRY THIS!

- Try a one-page, unison Verse with your choir. Notice how little rehearsal time it takes!
- Ask your pastor or other soloist to sing the Verse and add a note about it to the bulletin
- Use one Verse refrain for an entire season, with choir, soloists, pastor, or kids filling in the verses
-

"For Lutherans, music in worship - whether congregation's song or the music of choir, pastor, organ, or other instruments - is liturgical song...For choirs it means giving primary attention to psalms, responses, Gospel motets, offertories, music to enrich congregational singing, and similar literature." ²²

²⁰ Baumler, *Christian Worship Manual*, 151-2

²¹ Backer, *Singing the Verse in Lutheran Worship*

²² Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*, 42

III. STEWARD

**The liturgical choir provides attendant art music that proclaims the Gospel.
(ANTHEM)**

THE ANTHEM

Lutherans have long adorned worship with artful choral music in service that supports the song of the people. This may be best exemplified by the cantatas of J.S. Bach which grew out of the tradition of Lutheran chorale motets. However, the “anthem” as we now know it is a relatively recent development. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the revivalist movement put the choir front and center in worship. They “developed mass choirs who sat behind the preacher and became regular features of revivals.”²³ Soon, the choir’s music “became lighter, semi-sacred, and commercial.”²⁴

Throughout the 20th century, choirs in protestant churches continued to feature prominently as “anthem” choirs. The liturgical revival in the middle of the last century helped liturgical congregations recenter on the choir’s servant role. Today, choir directors face a dizzying array of anthems peddled by publishers, all with varying degrees of textual and musical suitability. Most of the anthems sold by large publishers are not composed with the liturgy in mind. Lutheran choir directors should take great care to select repertoire which reinforces the lessons and Gospel of each Sunday. Even in the singing of an anthem, the liturgical choir serves the Gospel and the congregation. Christian Worship Manual cautions, “It is important that choirs and their director understand that the most vital function of the choir in Lutheran worship is not to provide “churchly musical entertainment” but liturgical leadership.”

Why should we sing it?

- To reinforce the scripture lessons and Gospel theme for the Sunday
- To make use of God’s gift of music, in it’s full variety and excellence, in service to the Gospel

How should we sing it?

To the best of our ability and to God’s glory alone (*JJ* and *SDG*)

- After the Gospel lesson
- As an Offertory
- During Communion
- In place of the Opening Hymn (Introit)
- In place of the Psalm or Verse of the Day

How should we SELECT an anthem?

- Review the document *Planning Christian Worship* (WELS Connect) to understand the service’s focus
- Pursue excellent theology in text above all else; look for texts that focus on Christ’s work for us, rather than on our work for God, or our emotions
- Narrow the focus of your anthem using the four S’s illustrated below:

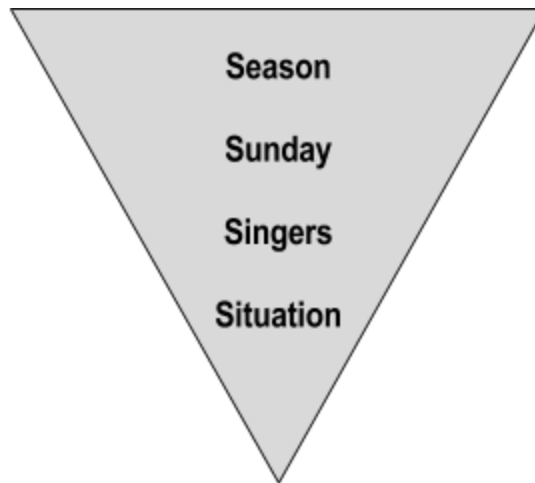
“We choose music *not* with an eye to whether it will move people emotionally, but with an eye toward complementing the lessons for each day. In that way the music will play its part in proclaiming the Gospel.”²⁵

²³ Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 269

²⁴ Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 269

²⁵ Zager, *The Gospel Preached Through Music*, 82

"I have no one to sing and chant about but Christ."²⁶



Fit the SEASON

In which season of the church year is the choir singing?
Consider the season's overarching mood and theme.

Fit the SUNDAY

On which Sunday of the church year is the choir singing?
Read the Sunday's prescribed lessons to better understand the specific Gospel theme for the service. All of the Propers - lessons, hymns, and prayers - will point to this theme. Read the Prayer of the Day and the text of the Hymn of the Day. Begin to look for anthems with texts which reinforce that specific Gospel truth.

Fit the SINGERS

Once you find an anthem with a suitable text, ensure that the anthem matches the ability of the singers - range, tessitura, harmonies, rhythms. Anthems should also be musically excellent and engaging. Consider the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic interest, accompaniment, and text painting.

Fit the SITUATION

Finally, consider your congregation's culture and work lovingly to incorporate variety and musical diversity. Consider an anthem's musical era and style, working toward a diverse repertoire that makes use of all God's gifts. Consider the place in the service the anthem fits best, and communicate with your pastor and office staff about your selection well in advance, so that bulletin notations can serve worshippers.

TRY THIS!

- Always use *Planning Christian Worship* to read the appointed lessons before selecting an anthem
- Consider how your choir might support the listed hymns, psalm, verse, or liturgical songs *before* selecting an anthem - perhaps an anthem isn't even needed!
- Use publishers' liturgical planning tools to search for appropriate anthems online
- Subscribe to publishers who produce liturgical anthems (Appendix A)
- Share repertoire ideas with fellow directors regularly

²⁶ Luther, from Schalk, *Not Unto Us*, 129.

POSTLUDE: The director's roles

COLLABORATOR

“Meaningful worship usually results when good planning has been done.”²⁷ Collaborate with your pastor. The best worship teams are partnerships between a ‘musical theologian’ (pastor) and a “theological musician’ (director). You both have expertise the other needs. He brings theological insight on the worship theme and use of the liturgy, and is discerning in selection of anthem texts. You bring musical insight on how to support and adorn the people’s proclamation with music.

“More than any others persons, the pastor and the church musician together shape the worship life and the church music practice in most congregations...Regular planning sessions are crucial, sessions devoted not only to the practical details of parish worship, but sessions in which all the leaders in worship can develop a common vision of what worship can be in a particular parish.”²⁸

ANNUAL PLANNING

The Pastor can...	The Director can....

QUARTERLY PLANNING

The Pastor can.....	The Director can....

EDUCATOR

It’s our privilege and responsibility to teach the singers of the choir the “WHY” - the beauty and value of liturgy and hymnody and the special role the singers play in supporting the church’s worship. Most adults love to learn, but can also grow comfortable with patterns and routines. If we make changes to the choir’s role without talking to them, the singers may rightfully feel confused or even upset. Educate patiently, and do not be deterred by one or two vocal nay-sayers. Culture shifts can happen quickly or can take time; persist and pray.

Hymnody - Take a few minutes at the end of warm-ups each week to sing through the Hymn of the Day or any challenging hymns for the coming Sunday. Help your choir to understand that their most important service to the church is their robust, enthusiastic singing from the pews that leads and encourages the congregation. Consider singing a seasonal or evening hymn to close rehearsal and have a brief devotion on the text.

²⁷Precht, ed. *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 557

²⁸ Precht, ed, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 259-260

Lectionary - Talk often about the connection between the choir's music and the season and Sunday for which they sing. Read the assigned scripture lessons together before they serve in worship. Make note of the changing seasons of the church year - try inviting your Pastor or an Elder to give a brief devotional thought on the season. Use lectionary devotions to close rehearsals, or email them to singers (or send copies home) in advance of the service for personal reflection:

- WELS Connect Lectionary Study Guides
- Bread for Beggars Lectionary Devotions
- "Worship Helps" email subscription

Liturgy - Use the brief descriptions in this packet to start to teach your choir about the parts of the liturgy. Invite your pastor to speak briefly (quarterly or even once a month?) on the texts of the songs of the Ordinary. Learn more yourself, and model sincere love and enthusiasm for your church's worship forms, and it will be contagious.

Music - Beyond notes and rhythms, work toward expressive singing with healthy, beautiful tone. Do warm-ups at every rehearsal to teach vocal technique and reflective listening skills. Intentionally teach your choir to read music, slowly but surely, with lots of encouragement. Intentionally select repertoire in diverse musical styles to keep the singers' ears and minds open to the full range of the artform God has entrusted to us.

**"Effective worship calls for competent church musicians who are
always growing
in their understanding and skills."²⁹**

LEARNER

A Choir Director is a... .. MUSICIAN... SINGER... CONDUCTOR... TEACHER... VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR... *LITURGIST?!... THEOLOGIAN?!*

**"Worship that is Lutheran sees music and the other arts as
blessings of God
for his people to use and enjoy,
but always in a *servant role*, serving the gospel."³⁰**

APPENDIX A - Bibliography and Further Reading

APPENDIX B - Liturgical Calendar and Planning Christian Worship excerpt

APPENDIX C - Repertoire and Resources for the Liturgical Choir

*APPENDIX D - Liturgical Anthem List, WELS National Worship Conference 2011
Christian Worship Supplement Octavos at NPH*

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²⁹ Schalk, *The Pastor and the Church Musician*, 9

³⁰ Valleskey, D. *What Does It Mean to be Evangelical Lutheran in Worship?*