



# Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Bill Tackmier is pastor and musician at St. Mark, Citrus Heights, CA. Previous service includes parishes in Owosso and St. Louis, MI. I admit to taking special delight in Tackmier's article because I once served this parish as pastor and musician—but not with as many instrumentalists as described below. St. Mark's music program is so vigorous that an enlarged balcony, part of a recent \$3M project, now provides ample room for their many musicians. For more info: [stmarkslutheran.com](http://stmarkslutheran.com)

Bryan Gerlach

## Cultivating Instrumentalists: One Parish's Story *By Bill Tackmier*

Ten years ago our congregation had only a handful of instrumentalists. Today we have 25 people who play an instrument other than organ in worship. We also have eight organists, a handbell choir, and a teen handbell choir. While many congregations struggle to find musicians, we have been extremely blessed. Each one of our musicians is a gift from God. How do churches discover such gifts? Let me tell you our story. I hope it opens your eyes to the potential in your church.

**Offer lessons.** We have two piano teachers who give lessons not only to students of our Lutheran school but also to members—children *and* adults. I have at times offered to give organ lessons to any member free of charge, and three people have made significant progress. One of our trumpeters gives lessons to a young girl in the congregation. These are fairly standard ways to grow talent. But a couple of years ago we tried something more out of the ordinary.

Our congregation found itself with timpani (kettle drums) but no one left in the congregation who played them. I called a local timpani teacher with an idea: "Will you come to our church once a week and give a group lesson to three students?" (I was trying to save money as well as develop multiple talent.) He said, "Sure." For the better part of a year I and two women took lessons.

**Encourage young musicians.** Whenever our piano teachers' students give a recital, I identify several children who are making good progress. The next Sunday on their

way out of church I compliment them and say, "Keep up the good work; some day you'll play in worship." Our youth pastor attends the band concerts of instrumentalists in his high school youth group. This not only encourages them to continue in music but also builds rapport with the teens.

**Model quality music.** Kids notice quality music. They notice when someone does well as a musician. Tim, an excellent organist in his early twenties, is a home-grown organ talent taught by several organists in our congregation. He has a winning personality with kids—talks computer games, plays basketball, etc. This year my wife and I told our son that after five years of piano he could choose whatever instrument he would like. To our amazement he chose organ! "What twelve-year-old boy *wants* to take organ?" we asked ourselves. I'm convinced his choice is due to the compelling influence of a young role model. Another high school boy plays violin well. I think he is why my daughter asked to take violin lessons.

**Collect and loan instruments.** Some people have donated instruments to our church: two trumpets, a flute, and a violin. We make these available to children who would like to try an instrument but whose parents aren't convinced about the cost of an instrument or a rental. They can use the church's instruments until it's evident that the kids will stick with it.

**Interview new members.** Near the end of a Bible Information Class, I have a personal interview with each new member.



We discuss things they may be uncomfortable discussing in class or which we just don't have the time to discuss in class. The personal interview includes a time and talent survey. When we get to the portion about music, I ask if they have any musical talent. The majority say, "Pastor, you wouldn't want me in the choir," or "I took piano when I was young, but you wouldn't want to hear me play now." Yet every once in a while someone says, "Yes, I do." One young woman got out her old flute, took some refresher lessons, and is now an accomplished flautist who plays regularly for worship.

**Find creative ways to use instruments.** Krys, a newer member, told me he was taking up bass guitar and asked if he could play in worship. We don't use rock/pop styles of music, so I wasn't sure how to fit him in. Then it occurred to me that music calling for a string bass might work.

We gathered an ensemble. Kry's played the string bass part on his electric bass, and it sounded just fine. After the group presented their first piece as an offertory in worship, Kry's said, "That was great! When can we do it again?"

**Nurture your musicians.** One of the best things congregations can do to improve worship music is to nurture their musicians. Send them to the WELS worship conferences every three years. They will get fresh ideas for worship music. Attend a School of Worship Enrichment\*. Pastors, when choosing hymns and other music for worship, give your instrumentalists plenty of lead time so that they can prepare their music and feel confident when they play.

I've discovered that musicians need other musicians to thrive. A church that has only one organist and that does not cultivate more musicians will burn out that one person. Musicians need to collaborate with other musicians in order to thrive and grow.

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A woman has played recorder occasionally in worship. Last year another woman saw a recorder at a garage sale and decided to try it. She bought it and was bitten by the recorder bug. She soon bought a better instrument and began practicing at church. A third member said that he played recorder too and began practicing with her. Finally, the first recorder player joined them. Now the three of them practice and play regularly in combinations of two or three, continually challenging one another with more complex music.

Our instrumentalists add an amazing richness to worship. Our brass quartet adds exhilaration and boldness to our proclamation on Easter Sunday. Our woodwind and string ensemble (flute, clarinet, violin, piano, acoustic guitar and bass guitar) add a calming, reassuring tone to the message on Good Shepherd Sunday. Our various percussion instruments (timpani, congas, tambourine, hand drum, and more) enlivened our Christmas children's service for a "Christmas Around the World" theme. A rich variety can serve the liturgy to enhance the various themes of the church year.

Your congregation probably has several people who could enrich your worship musically. May you discover them and nurture them so that their gifts bring glory to God and edify their fellow believers.

\* For information on Schools of Worship Enrichment, see [wels.net/worship](http://wels.net/worship).

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### Church-Owned Instruments

"When I lived in Germany, our parish church had a brass choir that assisted the organ in accompanying hymns. To make it easier for adults and children to participate, the instruments were owned by the church, and anyone could check one out, learn to play it, and join the ensemble. The children learned from the adults in the [brass] choir." Joseph Herl, "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Liturgies," in *Thine the Amen: Essays . . . in Honor of Carl Schalk* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005), p.162.



### Summer Music Camps

Summer keyboard or music camps for junior high children have been available on four WELS campuses: LPS, MLS, MLC, WLC. Missy Wiechmann (Grace Lutheran, Tucson, AZ) tells the story of one parish creating their own program to encourage young musicians. Note also the outreach angle.

"How off in making music we have found a new dimension in the world of sound as worship moved us to a more profound Alleluia! (CW #248)

"The music camp ran August 1-6 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. It was held throughout the entire church and fellowship hall. The average number of musicians per night was 47 compared to 35 from last year! All the participants were members of Grace except for three who were unchurched. It was exciting to see so many people trying out an instrument for the first time!

"Instrumental Music of Tucson loaned us 18 instruments from guitars to tubas to use for the week free of charge. With the amount of people in attendance we needed every instrument we could get.

"The final morning of camp we had a closing concert which included a guitar ensemble, band ensemble, violin soloists, and the tone chime choir. Each group sounded fantastic! What accomplished musicians in such a short time!"

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