



## Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

### How do we introduce new music to our congregation?

*The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.*

*These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.*

*The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.*

The introduction of new music can be an energizing and enriching experience for a congregation, but for the music to be a benefit, those doing the introducing need to prepare carefully. First, it is important to know the congregation. Some congregations thrive on new hymns and easily accept a variety of liturgical settings. Others may find one new hymn every two or three months about all they can manage. Certainly a congregation's tolerance for new things is an important guide for planning. Careful preparation with this guide in mind will help to smooth the way to successful introduction of new material.

#### **Why Introduce New Music?**

A very basic question behind the topic of *how* to introduce new music is *why* a congregation would do this in the first place. Practical answers could include a desire for more variety or for a challenge, but a deeper reason would be that the Spirit is at work through the talents of text and tune writers. Musicians of every time and place create music for worship. As a way to honor the fact that we are creative people, we introduce music of many styles and forms. We sing songs across time and space, including music that is either new to your congregation or newly composed.

#### **What Do We Introduce?**

Discernment and careful planning is required when deciding what new music to introduce. The first step is to spend time discovering what areas of the congregation's song can be expanded and in what directions. Would you like to include new hymns? (see also, ["How do we expand our congregation's hymn repertoire?"](#)) A new setting of the liturgy? New ways to sing the psalms? (see also, ["Why do we sing the Psalms?"](#)). Musicians and pastors as well as worship committees and teams can make a wish list of what they would like to introduce over the next months or years. Then you will want to prioritize and be sure not to introduce too much too soon.

#### **When Do We Introduce It?**

There are two dimensions to this question: How frequently or in what order is new music introduced and when is new music introduced or taught in the worship service itself.

When introducing a new setting of the liturgy, a gradual approach is normally best. Perhaps teach the Glory to God during the Sundays after Epiphany, adding also the Gospel Acclamation. During Lent, teach the Lenten Verse and the music surrounding Holy Communion: Holy, Holy, Holy and the Lamb of God. In Easter, introduce “This is the Feast.” Many other scenarios are possible, but a little at a time will allow the assembly to know the music well.

Above all, keep in mind both the learning ability of the congregation and the difficulty of the setting you’d like to introduce. If you decide to introduce the musical portions gradually, appropriate hymnody or choral settings may be substituted for the remaining parts of the liturgy. Carefully prepared printed worship folders can assist in this process by reducing the number of books to juggle and, therefore, reducing the frustration level.

However you choose to introduce a new musical setting of the liturgy, be sure to return to something familiar in the next season. 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 openness to learning something new.

For guidance on introducing new hymns, see [“How do we expand our congregation’s hymn repertoire?”](#).

For some assemblies, introducing will simply mean singing it in the service, often with choral leadership. Others will want sessions where the music is taught to them. If this is the case, try to set aside some time immediately prior to the service as rehearsal time. The rehearsal time allows you to give whatever instructions and commentary are necessary to present the new material. Rehearsal also allows the congregation to sing through the new setting—working a bit on any difficult spots—before actually using it in a worship setting. A cantor who “lines out” the melody, a process whereby a single line is sung by the leader and repeated by the congregation, can teach new melodies quickly and effectively. The cantor continues to lead until the entire song is learned.

Some congregations resist rehearsals, so you might need to find some creative ways to teach new settings. Try having each canticle sung twice, the choir singing alone the first time through, the congregation joining on the repeat. Remember, however, that repetition can increase the length of the service, an important factor in overall planning.

### **How Do We Introduce It?**

You can approach the actual introducing of new music in various ways. Yet, as noted by Robert Buckley Farlee in *Musicians in the Assembly*, “When you are teaching a new song to the congregation, two things can be invaluable helps: the choir and repetition (18).

With that in mind, consider the following:

**Allow the tune to be heard often before singing it.** When learning a new melody, hearing it often will make it easier to sing. Include the tune in prelude or postlude music or perhaps during communion distribution. After the tune has been heard, have a cantor, choir or ensemble sing the tune with its text.

**Present the text in a variety of ways.** In addition to having the text sung for the congregation, consider writing a newsletter article on the new hymn or posting something on the congregation's website (be sure to secure copyright permission). People often appreciate knowing something about the hymn—who wrote it and under what circumstances (see the Hymnal Companion in resources). Pastors can include images or phrases from the hymn in their preaching, especially if the new text will be sung for the Hymn of the Day.

**Straightforward presentation is best.** When singing a new hymn, be sure the music leader(s) plays the melody very clearly. Variations and alternative accompaniments surely have their place, but they will be more useful once the new music is well established.

**Teach the hymn to a small group first.** A choir (children's or adult) is a natural candidate for learning and teaching a new hymn. Consider also teaching the hymn to another group such as Vacation Bible School, during a youth or adult retreat or at another gathering. Because the setting is out of the ordinary, there may be an openness to music that is out of the ordinary as well. Then, when the hymn/song is sung in worship, a group will already be familiar with it.

**Consider teaching "by rote."** Some hymns and songs can be taught by having a leader sing unaccompanied and having the assembly repeat back to them in a call and response fashion. This is usually the most successful way to teach new music to children, but it works for all ages. See [Music that Makes Community](#) in resources for more on this ancient yet new approach to assembly song.

**Repeat, Repeat, Repeat.** Once something new is learned, do not wait too long to sing it again. This may seem difficult when learning a hymn or song that is very particular to one set of lectionary texts or to a season, but with planning and creativity, it can work. If learning a new Advent song, consider having it sung all four Sundays in Advent. If learning a hymn very particular to a text, look ahead to see how it might work in future weeks.

## RESOURCES

### [Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

- ↪ How Do We Expand Our Congregation's Hymn Repertoire?
- ↪ Why Do We Sing the Psalms?
- ↪ How Can I Create Simple Liturgical Music?

### [Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:](#)

- 📄 Worship Formation Resources: produced by the ELCA Worship Staff may help a congregation dig deeper into many aspects of worship including assembly song.

### [Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:](#)

- 📖 *Musician's Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007. This resource offers guides on leading assembly song and

- assistance in leading each hymn, song and piece of liturgical and service music in Evangelical Lutheran Worship.
- 📖 *Sundays and Seasons*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. Print version published annually by church year.
    - 📄 Also available as an online subscription at [www.sundaysandseasons.com](http://www.sundaysandseasons.com).
  - 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008. See especially Chapter 4: Music and the Arts in the Assembly.
  - 📖 Buckley Farlee, Robert. *Musicians in the Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001. One of the first publications in the new Worship Handbook series. This small booklet is intended as a primer for all who serve as leaders of church music in congregations.
  - 📖 Westermeyer, Paul. *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010.

### Other Resources

- 📖 Bell, John. [\*The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song\*](#). Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc. 2000.
- 📖 Bell, John. [\*The Singing Thing, Too: Enabling Congregations to Sing\*](#). Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc. 2007.
- 📖 Parker, Alice. [\*Creative Hymn Singing\*](#). Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw, 1976. (BA: Amazon link is: (limited available and only as used)
- 📖 Parker, Alice. [\*Melodious Accord, Good Singing in Church\*](#). Chicago: Liturgical Training Press, 1991. (BA: Amazon link is:
- 📖 Sydnor, James R. [\*Introducing a New Hymnal: How to improve congregational singing\*](#). Chicago: GIA, 1989.
- 📖 Wren, Brian. [\*Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song\*](#). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- 📄 [\*Music That Makes Community\*](#). These events are three-day workshops sponsored by [All Saints Company](#). Music that Makes Community “renews ancient ways of singing together, sharing music as people did before music or words were written” For more information and video clips, visit their website.

*Revised January 2013*

Copyright © 2013 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. [www.elca.org/worshipfaq](http://www.elca.org/worshipfaq).

*This document may be reproduced for use in your congregation as long as the copyright notice appears on each copy.*