

# Introducing New Hymns in Small Churches

**One of the huge challenges** facing any smaller congregation (whether rural or urban or small town) is how to expand the base hymnody and liturgy of the group, enabling the worshipers to encounter, become familiar with and maybe even just learn to love and appreciate a growing repertoire of fresh and new (or at least new to them!) music.

We'll be exploring this topic in a webinar on Nov. 15 with the Rev. William Weedon, the Director of LCMS Worship Ministry and the chaplain at The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's International Center. Weedon plans to cover a variety of simple ways to help pastors and musicians move the bar.

Carl Schalk, arguably one of the greatest Lutheran musicians of our time, perceptively observed that people may not know what they like, but they all like what they know. One big key to introducing new music is to have it played early and often in the congregation's ears before ever asking them to sing it.

Say the desire was to introduce 941 to the congregation: Steven Starke's now famous paraphrase of the great Te Deum Laudamus. The organist or pianist could begin a month or two out, using that melody as her or his prelude one week, a postlude the next week, the piece during the offering or a musical offering during distribution on yet the following week. Putting the piece into the ears of the congregation well in advance and repeating the tune often is an effective (and sneaky!) way to having the congregation "know" the music even without having been taught it. Your radio works like that! You hear a song for the first time, and then again, and again and again. Finally, it has become one of those privileged songs known as "that's an old favorite!"

Another effective technique is to have the piece partially sung by a solo or small ensemble. And if that ensemble is made up of kids, all the better! Once the kids know it, the nonsense about "no one could ever sing that!" is silenced for good. Weedon actually did this with the song just mentioned. A teacher in his parish school confidently told him that the kids couldn't learn to sing it. Ha! Just the challenge he needed. He sang it in the school several times a week and it became one of the hymns the kids themselves would ask for in the congregational hymn sings that preceded the midweek Advent or Lenten liturgies.

And there's another technique: use hymn sings! Weedon will explore those and a bunch more options in the webinar. Join us for a lively discussion of expanding the musical life of smaller congregations without risking life or limb.

**Rev. William Weedon**, director, LCMS Worship Ministry and the chaplain at The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's International Center

*Contributed through the LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission monthly newsletter by the Rev. William Weedon, the Director of LCMS Worship Ministry and the chaplain at The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's International Center.*

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