

The Sunday Assembly: Foundational Reflections Session 4: Music and the Arts in the Assembly

Pastor Bruce Dillman



Introduction

- The arts are an integral dimension of Christian worship.
- They play a critical role in grounding worship in a specific time, location, and context.
- Visual art and images, music of voices and instruments, poetry and drama, movement and gesture all serve to engage the assembly in multiple ways, using multiple senses.
- A Lutheran understanding of the arts in worship sees them assisting in proclaiming the word in the assembly.



Introduction

- Art forms that are more than verbal provide a balance to the spoken word, so that worship is not overwhelmed with words, but rather includes other forms of expression that are also gifts of God to engage the whole person.
- Visual arts, architecture, paraments, banners and other fabric art, stained glass, sculpture, projected images, drama and dance, music...
- Of all the arts, music has historically played an especially prominent role in Lutheran worship.
- Lutheran music is congregational, not performance based.



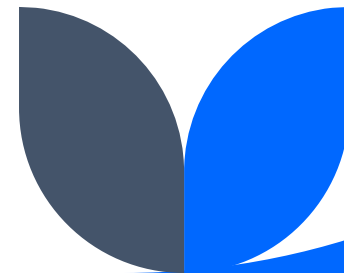
Introduction

- **Martin Luther called the gospel the "sounded Word"-- music is important in this regard.**
- **As an assembly sings, so it may come more fully to believe and live.**
- **Rich history of hymns passed on from Lutheran hymnal to hymnal, sometimes with generational enhancements.**
- **Music ties us to the church of history as well as to the church today throughout the world.**



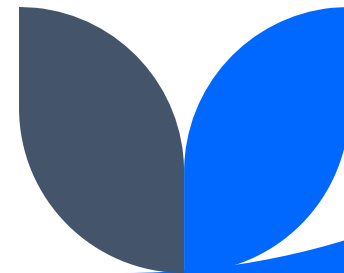
Introduction

- "...we praise your name and join their unending hymn,"...Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
- In this way, music joins THIS assembly's voice to the church's song "of every time and in every place."
- Diversity in our musical expressions helps us better to apprehend an image of God, of harmony in diversity.



Luther and the Church's Song

- Luther in a letter to George Spalatin: "Our plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people in the vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so that the word of God may be among the people also in the form of music."
- In Luther's liturgical reforms, he wasn't satisfied just bring the Latin chants forward, but rather using German chorales, folk-based tunes and newly-composed tunes.
- Adapting ancient liturgy to German language and culture.



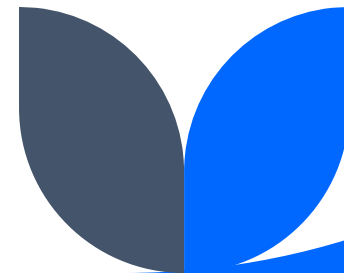
Luther and the Church's Song

- In addition to paraphrases of liturgical song, the early years of the Reformation saw new contributions to hymnody from Luther and other.
- Luther was convinced that the reclamation of the gospel in the language of the people called for new songs to carry it.



Music for the Sunday Assembly in *Evangelica Lutheran Worship*

- Following Luther's lead, and using the criteria he saw as important, in the ELW priority is given to song that is suited for bearing and proclaiming the word, that is accessible and invites assembly participation, and that can endure over extended time and use.
- Vernacular today is more complicated than 16th century Germany.
- Thus, Setting Seven has bilingual sung portions (English and Spanish)



Music for the Sunday Assembly

in *Evangelica Lutheran Worship*

- ELW's organization emphasizes the centrality of the Sunday assembly—ten musical settings of Holy Communion are provided.
- A service-music section provides further selections in a range of styles for use in the various services.
- Finally, the hymn collection has been designed primarily to support the Sunday meeting, with expanded sections for gathering song, communion song, and sending song, as well as an extensive collection of hymns for the seasons of the church year.



Music for the Sunday Assembly in *Evangelica Lutheran Worship*

- The music in ELW covers many musical genres to cover a diverse church.
- Holy Communion Settings One through Five use multiple musical styles familiar to most Lutherans.
- Setting Six: African American gospel-and jazz-style setting.
- Setting Seven: Central and South America, Latino composers from the U.S.



Music for the Sunday Assembly in *Evangelica Lutheran Worship*

- Setting Eight: popular music styles
- Setting Nine: commissioned for the "Renewing Worship" process
- Setting Ten: hymn-tune setting along the lines of Luther's German Mass
- ("All Creation Sings" has added two more settings)
- Taken together, these musical resources serve as signs of unity and diversity in the church.



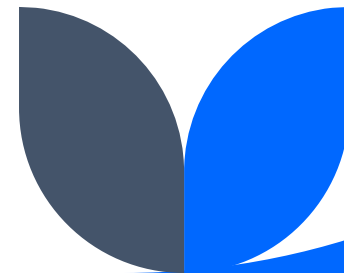
The Assembly's Core of Song

- **Balancing what the assembly knows well and sings all of the time, and introducing something new. Four questions:**
- **How many and which songs are currently well known by the assembly?**
- **What songs have the greatest value for the greater worship life of the congregation?**
- **What songs seem as though they will hold their value and appeal over years and decades?**
- **Approximately what number of songs would provide sufficient variety without overloading the congregation's capacity?**



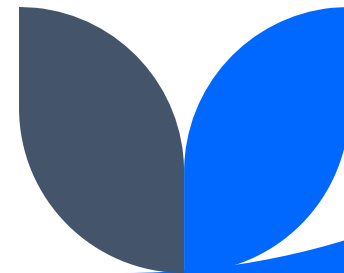
The assembly's current body of song

- **Current core will vary from assembly to assembly**
- **For some, 150 hymns and songs and one or two settings; for others it might be 300 hymns and songs and five or six settings.**
- **Be careful to answer these questions honestly with the entire assembly in mind, and not what music leaders "think" the assembly is familiar with.**



Assessing the value of the songs

- Hymns and songs become loved for many reasons: associations with a time or season, with a pastor, music leader, or family member, well-crafted words or melodies and many more.
- Once the current core is identified, second step is to determine the value of each one.
- Some might be moved to less frequent use, perhaps others to more frequent use...where are there "holes?"



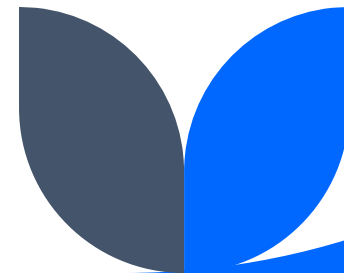
The staying power of songs

- **Applies not only to current songs, but ones under consideration for use.**
- **Some may have wide appeal due to simplicity, but can quickly wear thin.**
- **Difficult to predict which will last and which will not.**
- **Good to have a balance of lighter, more accessible songs, and those that may be more challenging but also more nourishing.**



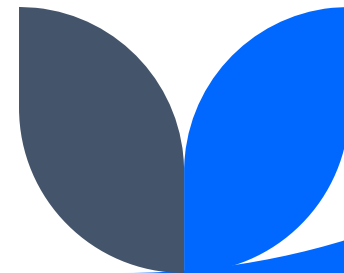
The assembly's capacity for song

- **Some assemblies have a capacity for a large inventory or songs, while others feel burdened by too many songs.**
- **New songs must be introduced, but should older songs be released from the inventory?**
- **Familiarity of songs is not only important for the congregation but also for visitors: "A Mighty Fortress" (Luther), "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" (an Anglican priest), "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" (Charles Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement), "Amazing Grace" (a slave trader undergoing conversion)**



Teaching and Learning Assembly Song

- Teaching new song to a congregation requires skillful planning.
- If the music, even difficult music, is taught in an inviting way, the congregation will respond.
- Some pieces require more introduction than others.
- Music that steps outside of comfortable boundaries will require strong leadership, patience, and care in its introduction—but may well be worth such an investment.



Teaching and Learning Assembly Song

- Choir introduction (don't sell the choir short!)
- Choir alternation ("repeat after me")
- Instrumental introduction (keyboard plays through once)
- Assembly rehearsal (just before the service begins)
- Congregational communications (email, web posting, etc.)
- Teaching a song orally (call and response)



Contextualizing the Song

- In identifying and implementing new songs (especially contemporary songs), it is important to not only carefully read the assemblies ability to learn and accept new music, but also that the new music is "contextualized"--that is, the music feel as though it fits within the assembly's unique context.
- For a church like ours that separates contemporary and traditional worship, important to not "pigeon hole."
- The following steps might be helpful...



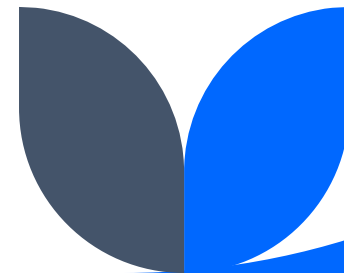
Identifying the contextual location

- **Geographic (rural, city, suburbs, etc.)**
- **Characteristics (families, retirement community, etc.)**
- **Denomination, ecclesial tradition within a denomination, and congregational characteristics.**
- **Differences between assemblies at the same church.**
- **Each community has unique characteristics giving it an identity, and so you can't just duplicate what another church is doing in your own.**



Identifying how meaning is articulated

- **What does this community believe itself to be**
- **An assembly can look at the way it prays, the physical environment for worship, the vitality of its singing, and the way visitors are (or aren't) welcomed.**
- **What theological content of songs speaks to the assembly? (Images of God, ethical claims, is there anything not being said that should be said, etc.)**



Encountering expressions beyond the assembly

- Engages the assembly with musical resources from other communities, cultures, or traditions.
- Expands an assembly to encounter the wider community in new and fresh ways.
- Relationships deepen and become more complex as a community engages more and diverse resources.
- Repeated presentations over an extended period of time, employing variety, will give a broader learning experience and increase the possibility of the assembly's reception.



Developing meaning in the assembly

- **The assembly that has encountered and engaged a new resource now asks itself: Does this resource carry meaning for this assembly? Is the word of God proclaimed for this people in this place through the use of this new song?**
- **Will it stand the test of time? In the repetition of the song, does the assembly engage it?**
- **If no, discard it; if yes, it becomes part of the assembly's core.**



Evaluation and assessment

- **An assembly that finds meaning in new and diverse musical expressions will be expanding its own identity and its own proclamation. In the contrast provided by these new expressions, an assembly begins to understand itself in new ways. Its own proclamation becomes more complex as it engages a growing richness of meaning.**
- **Consider not only whether the community likes a particular song and "takes to it"--also consider the values of expanded horizons.**

