



Parent Pages

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Martin Loved Music

We traditionally mark the beginning of the Reformation by the posting of the 95 Theses. Yet, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation celebrates so much more about Luther and his world-changing actions in Wittenberg. Luther changed the church, our understanding of key doctrines and even the German language. These things are often talked about, but did you know that Luther changed the role of music in the church also?

Martin Luther states, “Music is an outstanding gift of God and next to theology. I would not want to give up my slight knowledge of music for a great consideration. And youth should be taught this art; for it makes fine, skillful people.”¹

Luther wrote close to 40 hymns and chants that are with us to this day. When Luther served as priest, worshippers did not participate much in the service. Because of Luther’s view of music, this was not true in his reformed church. Pastor Luther created services where members participated in liturgy and worship.

In fact, the early Lutheran church was called the singing church. We can only imagine how the sound of jubilant singing drew people into the building so they could be a part of that joy. Luther’s strong belief in the use of

music for worship created a direct link between him and Johann Sebastian Bach, a rather famous Lutheran church musician.

As the above quote indicates, Luther was a proponent of young people learning music. In fact, one of the earliest stories we have of Luther includes him singing door to door with a choir of fellow students. Formal music training would have been a rather startling idea in a time where many children did not go to school at all and those that did focused on the basics: reading, writing, mathematics and religion. Luther not only promoted the idea that children should be educated past the first few years of school, but he also recognized the value of music education. 500 years later, a strong music program is a mainstay in Lutheran schools.

When Luther promoted music education, he did not have the benefit of the science we have now. Research into the advantages of music education shows that executive function skills are strengthened. Executive function skills allow learning

to happen through training on how to focus and connecting new learning to old learning. The focus necessary for singing and instrument playing build strong brains for academic learning. When infants listen



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—Martin Luther

¹ *What Luther Says*, 3099 Singing Frees the Heart (W-T 2, No. 2362 -SL 22, 1539, No. 2.)

to singing, language centers of the brain are stimulated to develop. This is one reason why adults tend to slip into a sing-song voice when cooing to an infant.

Because of his belief that music gave us an intimate link to God's Word, Luther recognized hymns as a tool for teaching doctrine. He wrote songs for the purpose of teaching. "These Are the Holy Ten Commands" (LSB 581) is a good example. In "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (LSB 655), we see his understanding of the blessing of Scripture. Luther translated Scripture into the language of the people and did the same for hymns. In doing this, he promoted both literacy and music for the common man. God changed the world through the work of Luther.

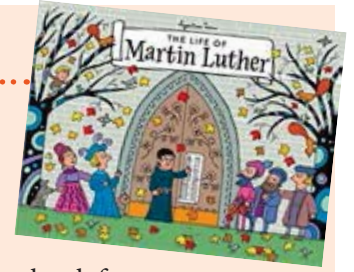
Certainly, Luther as a father shared his love of music with his own children. It is easy to imagine him teaching the faith to his children by teaching hymns. This legacy blesses us as parents, too. We teach our toddlers "Jesus Loves Me" and when they grow up, we sing with them "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (LSB 656). Music is an important way we teach and share faith as a family.

Luther was savvy about using technology. If he were here today, then perhaps he would use a podcast to teach a parenting class. One thing is for sure, he would remind us of the importance of teaching and singing the faith with our children. If we listen very closely, then we might

For Further Study

Concordia Publishing House has many Luther materials (cph.org).

- *The Life of Martin Luther* by Traini Agostino is a great book for young children.
- Luther quotes and information for this article are from *What Luther Says* by Ewald Plass.



hear him say, "Singing is the finest art and practice. He who is singing has no quarrel with the world ... Singers are neither worried nor sad but shake all cares from their souls."²

Luther would assure us that in spite of the differences between our world and his, it is still all about Jesus.

Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day (Ps. 96:1-2).

2 *What Luther Says*, 3099 Singing Frees the Heart (W-T 2, No. 2362 -SL 22, 1539, No. 2.)

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