# LCMS
## Worship Library

Title: Involving Children in Worship
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For those who have served in parishes of different contexts, it is evident that all of God's people desire our children to participate actively in the worship life of the church. Because all children have been blessed with a voice, singing is a logical way to involve them. This article seeks to offer a practical approach to evaluate what the children should sing and how to accomplish this participation.

### Four Criteria For Selecting What To Sing

First, the music our children sing is a prime opportunity to teach them the language of the faith. For example, the word "alleluia" is almost exclusively a word of the Church. By teaching even the youngest such language, we have cleared the way for them to participate in many parts of the liturgy and hymnody. For instance, little ones can be taught the alleluias of "Good Christian Friends Rejoice and Sing" (*LSB* 475) or "O Sons and Daughters of the King" (*LSB* 470/471).

Second, music should teach the content of Scripture. There are numerous hymns, for example, which are descriptive of Biblical events. "'Tis Good, Lord, To Be Here" (*LSB* 414) teaches the account of Jesus' transfiguration and "O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days" (*LSB* 418) describes Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

Third, if the music does not teach the specific language of the Church or a biblical account, it should teach Law and Gospel. In other words, it should describe our sinful condition and the forgiveness won by the death and resurrection of Christ. Again, many simple hymns fit this criterion such as "You Are The Way" (*LSB* 526) and "Abide, O Dearest Jesus" (*LSB* 919).

Fourth, as children move from grade to grade, the music they learn should build on itself. For instance, younger children can be taught the "alleluias" of "Thy Strong Word" (*LSB* 578) or the refrain of "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" (*LSB* 442); in later years they can learn the complete stanzas. In the liturgy, younger children can be taught the Gloria Patri of the Introit and the refrain of "This is the Feast."

### How To Train Them

When children are young, it is deemed "cute" when they sing unabashedly off key. However, as they grow older many of these untrained singers become self-conscious and withdrawn. Teaching proper vocal technique and pitch matching must begin very young. The typical Sunday School and catechetical instruction program can provide the opportunity for this training.

The main reason that children sing off key is their inability to switch from their speaking (chest) voice to their singing (lighter head) voice. The challenge is to teach children to recognize the difference and to learn how to use their singing voice.

One approach is to use imagery that can assist children in identifying their head voice. By encouraging them to imitate the sounds of an owl, siren, boat whistle, or train whistle, etc, young children can find their singing voice. When this is accomplished, they are prepared to begin to match pitches. Amazingly it takes only a few minutes per week to accomplish pitch matching. For instance, in the Sunday School of our rural parish, though we spend only 5-7 minutes each Sunday teaching this vocal technique, our children have had great success.

If children have not been trained to sing when they are young, it is never more evident than in their junior high years. Coupled with the difficulty in matching pitch is the challenge of changing voices (especially among the boys) and a general lack of the enthusiasm that they most likely had when they were younger. When children reach this age, one alternative is the use of handbells. Pre-teens seem to find handbell ringing intriguing and enjoyable. Even a director with little experience can find ways to incorporate handbells with older children. One approach is to select hymns that appear in public domain (i.e., they are no longer under copyright). All that is needed is to photocopy the hymn, mark the pulse, and highlight the appropriate bells in each chord. In this way, a basic musical score is ready for use which even includes the text of the hymn which the children can read and learn.

### No Need To Be Fancy Or Lengthy

For children ages six and under, the accompaniment should be very simple; perhaps only the melody should be played at first. Too much accompaniment obscures the melody line and makes the matching of pitch more difficult.

Children can be taught to participate in worship by singing and ringing handbells using quality music, and all this can be done within the context of the Sunday School and catechetical program of a congregation that doesn't have a Lutheran School. Two rehearsals of 20-30 minutes per week is sufficient! For instance, in our parish fifth- through eighth-grade students rehearse one-half hour during our two hour Wednesday evening catechism instruction class and all ages rehearse 20 minutes during our one hour weekly Sunday School.

### Conclusion

Martin Luther praised music as the greatest gift of God-next to theology, of course. The beauty of this gift is that it can be used and enjoyed by every generation. With some planning and determination, any congregation can share this gift with its children, both teaching them how to use their God-given voices and nurturing them in the faith as they sing praises to their Maker and Redeemer.

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More than a generation ago, Martin Franzmann preached a sermon in which he challenged the opinion that it is all right when we fail to give our very best in what we sing and how we sing it. The following is one of his illustrations:

Another argument might be called the "tin whistle" argument. Its essence is something like this: "After all, a man can make music on a tin whistle to the glory of God, and God will be pleased to hear it." True, true, true-if God has given him nothing but a tin whistle; but God has given us so infinitely much more. When He has given us all the instruments under heaven with which to sing His praises, then the tin whistle is no longer humility but a perverse sort of pride.

Taken from Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets

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