

Tackling Tough Tunes

A suggestion for singing more difficult hymn melodies in Christian Worship

This resource was originally shared with the WELS AZ-CA District in January of 2006.

Occasionally the suggested Hymn of the Day for a particular Sunday uses a melody that's unfamiliar or difficult to sing (or both). There are other times when the preacher would like to choose a specific hymn text that fits well with his sermon, but the tune assigned to the hymn text will be a challenge for his congregation. In order to preserve some of the great hymn texts of our Lutheran heritage, here are a few suggested approaches for familiarizing your parishioners with challenging hymn melodies. The District Commission on Worship offers these suggestions with the hope that they will serve as a springboard for other suggestions, ideas, and approaches to introducing new or unfamiliar hymn melodies in our services.

For any challenging hymn tune:

- Have the choir or soloist sing the first one or two stanzas; when the congregation joins, continue to have the choir sing in order to "lead" the assembly's singing.
- Have the organist play only the melody in octaves for the first stanza sung by the congregation; then play the melody in octaves with the regular bass part in the pedal for the congregation's second stanza; play the regular four-part setting for the congregation's remaining stanzas.
- A more accomplished organist could play the melody with a "solo registration" (such as a trumpet stop) in the right hand, the alto and tenor with a soft accompaniment in the left hand, and the bass in the pedal. This could be done both for hymn introductions or for stanzas sung by the congregation.
- Add a solo instrument (such as a trumpet) playing the melody on the first and last stanzas sung by the congregation.
- The organist can use hymn preludes that use the melody of the hymn for preservice music.

Examples for specific hymns: **Note:** In each of the following examples, the congregation sings the rest of the hymn after the choir introduces the first one or two stanzas.

- **To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord** (CW #88): Soloist or unison choir sings stanza one. Women of the choir sing stanza two in unison through the phrase, "Which we do well to ponder." Men of the choir sing stanza two in unison starting with the phrase, "This man is my beloved Son" (men's voices used to quote the words of God the Father).
- **Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands** (CW #161): Unison men and women alternate throughout the first stanza of the hymn:
Men: Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands
For our offenses given;
Women: But now and God's right hand he stands
And brings us life from heaven.
Men: Therefore let us joyful be
Women: And sing to God right thankfully
All: Loud songs of hallelujah. Hallelujah!
- **Jesus, Lover of My Soul** (CW #357): Soloist or unison choir sings stanza one. Two soloists or two-voice choir sings stanza two unaccompanied in a canon (round): second voice begins when first voice sings the first beat of the second measure.
- **I Trust, O Christ, in You Alone** (CW #437): Soloist or unison choir sings stanza one at regular volume. Unison or four-part choir sings stanza two quietly and "wearily" (reflecting the text).
- **In the Midst of Earthly Life** (CW #534): Female soloist or the women in the choir sing first half of stanza one; rest of choir joins at the words, "Holy and righteous God!" Same for stanza two except that the stanza begins with a male soloist or the men in the choir.