

# Five Things that Cantors Wish Pastors Knew

by Nancy Raabe

“Both Sides Now” is a resource for both clergy and cantors. The column explores the working relationship between the pastor and the musician in a Lutheran congregation. It offers suggestions, advice, and encouragement for all parties who are committed to the sacred vocation of leading worship in today’s world.

## 1. A little support goes a long way.

**m**artin Luther writes of “the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren” as one of the ways in which the gospel offers counsel and comfort. This applies to any collegial relationship but especially to those in the church. Pastors must not see cantors as adversaries but as colleagues, partners in proclamation. If the opposite is the case, the effectiveness of both diminishes. Just a few words of support from the pastor now and then can make a huge difference in the musician’s outlook. Even if pastors don’t know musical terminology, they can still find something to say that rings with truth: “People seemed to be responding to the way you were playing that hymn. They were really singing out.” Or even simply, “Thank you for your work today.”



## 2. Just because attendance is shrinking, it doesn’t mean the music program needs to shrink.

In fact, music is a key piece in drawing people to a congregation. When a church is struggling with numbers, this is the time to *invest* in music. If funds are an issue, just shake things up. Try out different musical styles on traditional hymns. Broaden the congregation’s repertory. Sing hymns in tandem that go together (a stanza of one, then a stanza of another). Host a hymn festival, which can be as simple as getting people together to sing through hymns on a Sunday afternoon, and invite musicians from neighboring congregations to participate. Schedule a “Music Sunday” that celebrates the resources that you do have.

## 3. Cantors are professionals, too.

These aren’t people who come in, sit down, play, leave, and then go back to their “real” life. Being a church musician is a sacred vocation, a calling, a life. Many have studied music in one form or another since childhood. Some have higher degrees. And for goodness’ sake, these are not people who “only” play because they love it. Of course they love it, but they are rendering the church a service in providing their professional expertise.

## 4. Music budgets are critical.

Don’t skimp. Remember, music may well be a church’s biggest draw. Music is not the place to start slashing when a hole opens up in the bottom line. Churches *must* budget for a music minister salary that is likely to attract the best people. Otherwise, to put

it plainly, congregations may well get what they pay for. When times get tough, maintain the music budget and try turning everything else around. The key lies in transforming a congregation's mentality from one of scarcity to one of abundance.

## 5. Choir members are among the most loyal in the church.

It's almost a rule that the core members of any given congregation also sing in the choir. Pastors would do well to consider joining the group on occasion. Not only will

they benefit from fellowship with choir members but their presence will have a positive impact on both choir and congregation. All that goodwill can go a long way.

**Next issue:** Five things pastors wish they could say to their cantors.

Send your comments, experiences, and challenges to [nancy@nancyraabe.com](mailto:nancy@nancyraabe.com) for discussion in future columns. May God bless you and your ministry, today and always.



Nancy M. Raabe is uniquely qualified to provide this perspective. She is the pastor at Holy

Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshall, WI. Nancy is a composer for the church, has written and edited five books for church musicians, and has served as music minister at congregations in Ohio and Wisconsin.

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