

both sides now

Church Music in the Time of COVID:

How Can Pastors Support Musicians?

by Nancy Raabe

One month. Six months. Nine months. Remember glancing over our shoulders at the mile markers along the way as they whizzed by? How long have we been singing the Lord's song in the foreign land of the pandemic—almost a year now? And we simply do not yet know, as a church, when our exile will come to an end.

If in former times someone had told us that a pandemic would shut us out of our building for more than a year, we probably would have assumed the worst: giving would plummet, staff would be cut back or laid off, churches would close, people would find other things to do with their Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings. It would be the beginning of the end of the church as we've known it.

If this has been your experience, I am very sorry. But I don't think it's been the norm. In fact, churches are proving astonishingly resilient. Pastors have had to get creative and learn more about technology than they imagined they'd ever need. Recording and producing a lively, good-quality virtual service is now, unofficially at least, part of the job description in most

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of our congregations. Church members have jumped, or maybe struggled, up onto the Zoom or Facebook Live bandwagon, but at least they are there. And those who aren't inclined to be part of a livestream have figured out how to locate online services on their phones or computers and have made watching those part of their weekly routine.

But who has truly been leading the way in keeping hope alive? Our musicians.

All you have to do is visit one of the church music Facebook groups and take in some of the choral productions that members have been sharing. Here we find creativity, determination, resourcefulness, and the willingness to invest what must be countless hours into learning and perfecting new technologies, right down to making those wave forms of the layered voices line up perfectly so the result is seamless and harmonious. ALCM can be enormously proud of the deeply moving mass anthems it produced for Pentecost and Christmas.

"It has been quite a year," Abby Schoppe, director of music at Faith Lutheran Church in Andover, MA, messaged me when I asked her for tips on how she produced their lovely Christmas choral anthem. "And through it all, my choir has been steadfast as a rock, faithfully and tirelessly operating in 'virtual choir' mode to lead all hymns and service music every single week. Even after spending hours upon hours editing the audio for [the

Christmas anthem], seeing and hearing it during the service even made *me* cry."

So how, pastors, can you support musicians during this time as a way of saying "Thanks for keeping hope alive?"

- Don't give in to the temptation to cut musician salaries or services if your offerings are down during the pandemic. After all, other costs have fallen, as have revenues.
- Come up with the money in your church budgets to support investments in new music technologies. Free software can get us only so far.
- If your council tells you the money isn't there, go out and find someone to sponsor the investment. Offer to recognize the donor in the videos each time the technology is used.
- Include these choral pieces in your regular online services at the appropriate liturgical spot, rather than featuring them as separate videos on your YouTube channel—or forcing the musicians to share them on their own YouTube channels.
- Acknowledge your music staff verbally at the beginning of each online service, not just in the titles or credits. I always say of our organist, "Carol and I are delighted to welcome you to worship." Present your musician as an equal partner in the enterprise.

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- If your staff meetings fell by the wayside when the church closed down, get them going again on Zoom. Your music staff will have many good ideas for you on how to liven things up—after all, they’re technology experts now, too. Our organist, Carol, helped a lot with strategic planning for Ash Wednesday by thinking it through early. Church musicians have been reading the Facebook groups more than you have, so they probably have many good ideas to share.
- Plan this spring for the equivalent of Music Sunday, which you probably missed in 2020. It could be in the form of highlights from the year or a new piece that you might have introduced to the congregation during a typical year. Provide in that service for a special offering for the music program just as you’d have done if it happened in person.
- Promise your musician or music staff that, when all this is over, you’ll take them out for a really nice lunch—and then plan to make that a regular practice.



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Quiz

Name That Bible Story from Liturgy

“Most of the liturgy in the Lutheran hymnal is actually words directly from Scripture.” That sentence appears elsewhere in this issue of *In Tempo* and in many a Lutheran liturgical apologist’s teaching. Can you name the *earliest Bible story context* of the following short excerpts from Lutheran liturgy?

1. **“Gloria in Excelsis Deo!”**
 - a. Isaiah’s vision of heaven
 - b. The greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary
 - c. The shepherds’ proclamation to those gathered at the manger
 - d. The “Angelic Hymn,” as Luther called it, announcing Jesus’s birth
 - e. Eggshells and day-old chicks gathered under a glorious hen
2. The salutation “The Lord be with you!”
 - a. Boaz greeting reapers
 - b. Jezebel greeting Elijah
 - c. Gabriel greeting Daniel
 - d. Gabriel greeting Zechariah
 - e. Gabriel greeting Mary
 - f. c., d., and e. above—Gabriel repeats himself a lot
3. **“Hosanna in the highest!”**
 - a. Isaiah’s vision of heaven
 - b. Hosanna, Gloria, and Agnes Dei were Moses’s sisters, who sang after crossing the Red Sea
 - c. a cry of praise to God and for God’s salvation from Psalm 118
 - d. a cry of praise to God and for God’s salvation at Christ’s entry into Jerusalem
 - e. c. and d. above
4. **Angus Dei**
 - a. A ram offered by Abraham instead of his son Isaac, foreshadowing Christ
 - b. Isaiah’s prophecy of the wolf and lamb at peace together
 - c. John the Baptist referring to Jesus
 - d. John’s vision of a lamb on the heavenly throne
 - e. all of the above
 - f. none of the above
5. **Benedicamus**
 - a. God’s blessing and command in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply
 - b. Noah praising God, sometime after the Flood
 - c. Aaron blessing the Children of Israel
 - d. Christ blessing the bread and wine in the Upper Room
 - e. A Hebrew holy day meal made with poached eggs, hole-y bread, and ham

Answers on page 35.