



Shaping theFuture

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School Practices and Experiences to Enhance Students' Worship Lives

by Matt Gerhardt

*Children of the heav'nly Father
Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.¹*

So sang the students gathered for chapel on the first day of the new school year. They sang beautifully and from the heart, so much so that a new faculty member was moved to tears. How does this happen? It is the result of coordinated teaching and consistency throughout the school.

Anecdotal evidence from colleagues across the country is that fewer students attending our Lutheran schools are members of Lutheran churches, and many have little or no experience participating in worship. This trend gives those serving in Lutheran schools a tremendous opportunity to implement intentional practices and experiences to teach the importance and the “how-to” of worship.

A grounded examination of practical ideas must begin with an understanding of worship itself. Timothy Maschke writes “[Worship] is a matter of God’s gracious gift of faith.... Such faith-based activity is most evident... as we gather as God’s guests to receive from

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Him and to express our thanks and praise to Him.”² This understanding should provide the framework for any practices or experiences we wish to implement in a Lutheran school.

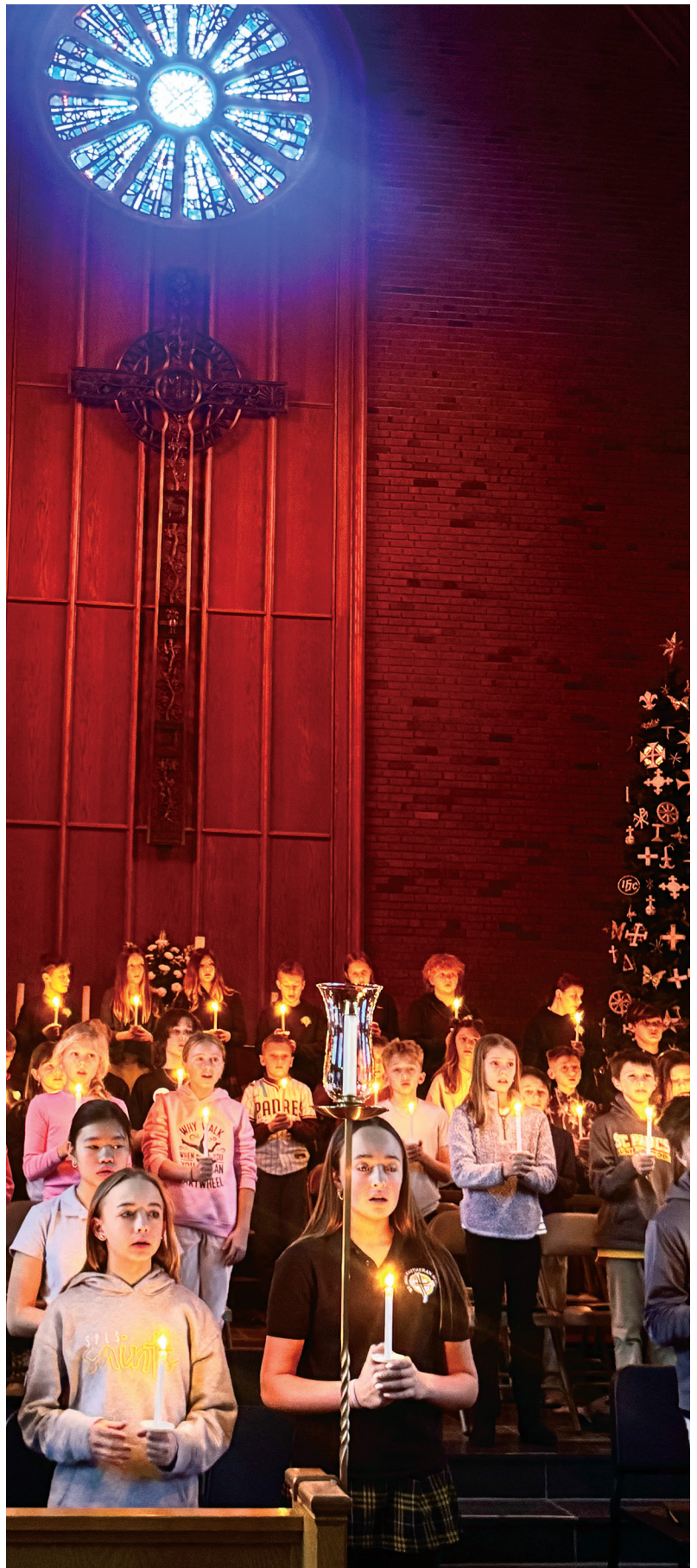


The hymnal is one of the most powerful tools for enhancing students' worship lives. *Lutheran Service Book* and *My First Hymnal*, both published by Concordia Publishing House, can serve as tools for faith development—in similar ways to Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* and the Bible. Hymnals also do double-duty and serve as tools in the music classroom. When resources allow, providing either classroom hymnals or personal copies has a profound impact on the students we serve.

One effective school- and congregation-wide practice is adopting a common "Hymn of the Month." This hymn can be sung during weekend worship services, school chapel, music classes, and in each classroom. A hymn with rich text offers numerous opportunities for age-appropriate theological discussions, vocabulary development, and much more. Repeating and memorizing this music gives students another comfortable means of actively participating in worship services.

School and student-led Christmas services provide excellent opportunities to teach important worship traditions. They provide an arena to reflect on the traditions that are important to the congregation and community, and to explore ways to incorporate these traditions into the services. This might include important hymns or liturgies for the season, opportunities to teach about the use of candles, memorizing Scripture, and much more! Small moments of connection during these services can have far-reaching impacts.

Small moments of connection during student-led Christmas services can have far-reaching impacts.



The following ideas for classrooms, music class, and chapel come from various educators' experiences and what they have found effective in the schools and churches they serve. Every idea can be adapted as circumstances require, and this list certainly is not exhaustive!

Classroom Practices

- **Structured devotional time:** Educators understand that students respond well to structure and knowing what to expect. Devotional time can be as simple as a Bible reading, a hymn of the month, and prayers, or it can follow one of the brief Daily Prayer orders found on page 294 of the *Lutheran Service Book*. Brief classroom liturgies help develop students' understanding and expectations of chapel services and, ultimately weekend worship.
- **Sing together:** This can be as simple as singing a familiar hymn or the Hymn of the Month. Depending on your comfort level, you might also ask the students to choose hymns or music appropriate for the day or season. Music teachers can be a valuable resource, providing videos or links to assist with this time.



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- **Pray together:** Be intentional in this time. Pray the Lord's Prayer, Luther's Morning or Evening Prayers, in addition to the specific petitions that are on students' hearts and minds.
- **Classroom altar:** Depending on your classroom space, a small altar with paraments that correspond to the church year can serve as a visible connection to worship life. Church year posters are also available and can function as both classroom art and teaching tools.

- **Pastoral involvement:** Invite your pastors to join your devotion or prayer time and encourage them to sing with the students. This is deeply formative for students and helps foster relationships with the pastors that will hopefully last well beyond their time at your school.
- **Invite your students and their families to worship:** A personal invitation can help alleviate any misgivings about attending. When they do come to worship, be sure to greet them! These simple steps encourage people as they enter potentially unfamiliar settings.

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Music Class

- **Establish intentional goals:** My overarching goal as a music educator is to equip students to participate fully in worship. The entire music curriculum is structured around this goal.
- **Cohesive repertoire:** The repertoire for music class and worship should be cohesive. This does not necessarily mean only singing hymns and neglecting other forms of music. However, as previously mentioned, hymns are chock full of educational and theological value; why would we not use them? Developing a scope and sequence of core music based in worship will reap significant dividends.
- **Music literacy and vocal technique:** Teaching basic music theory and healthy vocal techniques opens avenues for active and appropriate participation in worship.



School Chapel

- **Intentionality:** Understand the overarching goals for school chapel. The pastors should be instrumental in this discussion and understanding as well.
- **Order of service and/or liturgy:** Consider potential connections to Sunday morning worship. If your congregation loves to sing “This Is the Feast,” teach it to the students during chapel. If Matins or the Service of Prayer and Preaching are familiar, use them! Consistency is key. The order of service should be substantial enough to be repeated regularly, perhaps even for half of a year, but also simple enough to be memorized by the youngest students to allow them to participate as well.
- **Scripture readings:** Relating the Scripture used in chapel to that used on Sunday creates a powerful connection between church and school and can help foster an understanding of what happens in weekend worship.

Too often, we overlook the importance of teaching participation in prayers, spoken parts of the liturgy and worship service, and music.

- **Hymnody:** In addition to a Hymn of the Month, sing additional musical pieces and songs that will be used in worship.
- **Service participants:** Find meaningful ways to involve students. They can serve as acolytes, greeters, ushers, or readers in appropriate contexts. Groups of singers can be used to teach Psalms or unfamiliar music. There are certainly age-appropriate ways to involve children in worship.
- **Teaching:** This extends from the classroom to chapel. It is easy to forget that the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed may be completely unfamiliar to many students. Too often, we overlook the importance of teaching participation in prayers, spoken parts of the liturgy and worship service, and music.





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The greatest blessing of a Lutheran school is the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in everything we do. Encouraging healthy practices and meaningful worship experiences strengthens our proclamation of the Good News and helps to shape the children we are blessed to serve.

A few weeks into the new school year, my school introduced a new Hymn of the Month. The text and tune are centuries old, and this hymn is often considered lengthy and too difficult for children to sing. After two weeks of learning the hymn, one of the faculty members commented on how well the students

sang it during the chapel service. It was a group effort to teach with commitment and enthusiasm, and it was truly exciting to hear all the voices singing together:

*His grace remains forever,
And children's children yet shall prove
That God forsakes them never
Who in true fear shall seek His love.
In heaven is fixed His dwelling,
His rule is over all;
O hosts with might excelling,
With praise before Him fall.
Praise Him forever reigning,
All you who hear His Word
Our life and all sustaining.
My soul, O praise the Lord!"³*



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Quoted Scripture: [ESV®](#) and [NIV](#)

Photos courtesy the author.

Review, Reflect, Resolve

- What are one or two ideas I could bring into a classroom to help my students gain a deeper understanding of worship?
- What are the overarching goals of our chapel services?
- How are we fostering connection between school and church in our common worship life?

Endnotes

1. *Lutheran Service Book*, Hymn 725, stanza 1.
2. Maschke, Timothy. *Gathered Guests*. Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, MO, 23.
3. *Lutheran Service Book*, Hymn 820, stanza 4.



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