

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

July 2000. Volume Four, Number Three



**The Cute, the Cool, and the Catechized:
Generational Segregation in the Church - p.4**

**Are Today's Ears Hearing the Timeless Message?:
Law and Gospel for Every Generation - p.6**

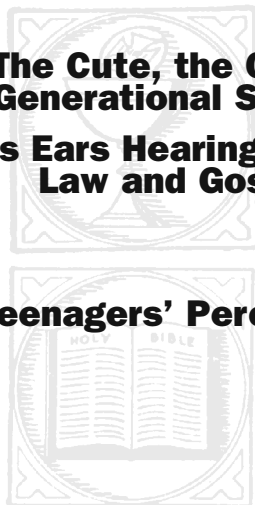
Holding Dear Herman - p.8

**Yours, Mine, or Ours:
Teenagers' Perceptions of Church Music - p.11**

In the Field - p.14



CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY
P R E S S



CONTENTS

page 11



page 4



page 6



page 8



page 14



For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

PRESIDENT
Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe

PUBLISHER
Rev. Scott Klemsz

EDITOR
Rev. John Pless

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Monica Robins

ART DIRECTOR
Steve Blakey

For the Life of the World is published quarterly by Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 6600 North Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher of *For the Life of the World*. Copyright 1999. Printed in the United States. Postage paid at Fort Wayne, Indiana. To be added to our mailing list please call 219/452-2150 or e-mail Rev. Scott Klemsz at CTSNews. *For the Life of the World* is mailed to all pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the United States and Canada and to anyone interested in the work of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

FEATURES

2 From the President

4 The Cute, the Cool, and the Catechized

By Dr. Gene E. Veith, Professor of Humanities, Concordia University, Mequon, Wis.

Even within regular-sized, one-worship-service congregations, there is generational segregation. Lutheran casualties of the worship wars might be surprised to hear that liturgical worship is now being hailed as the style of both the present and the future.

6 Are Today's Ears Hearing the Timeless Message?: Law and Gospel for Every Generation

By the Rev. Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

God's message is for all times, for all people. The Church's task is to proclaim that message to the world. Is the Word actually being received by all generations?

8 Holding Dear Herman

By the Rev. D. Richard Stuckwisch, Jr., Pastor of Emmaus Lutheran Church, South Bend, Ind.

This sermon was prepared for a funeral of an infant who passed away the night following his birth.

11 Yours, Mine or Ours: Teenagers' Perceptions of Church Music

By Dr. Barbara J. Resch, Coordinator of Music Education, Indiana University—Purdue University Fort Wayne, and Director of Children's Choir, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Planners of youth gatherings and youth services typically assume that teenagers will be most open to the hearing of God's Word when it is carried by the styles of rock and popular music. There are several concerns with this approach to choosing music for worship, not the least of which is that it may be based upon a false assumption about teens' relationship to the music they consider "theirs."

14 In the Field

By Pam Knepper


Featuring the Rev. Martin Stahl, Regional Chaplain for Navy Region Southwest, San Diego, Calif.

My college-bound daughter received an enticing ad for hard rock and alternative music that urged her to “take your own music off to college with you—buy one CD and get eleven free!” Although in this case the recording company was off the mark on what this particular young woman’s “own music” was, it was well aware that a symptom of the passage through adolescence is the identification with a peer group and its chosen musical styles—and those styles are typically rock and pop music. Research as well as experience with teenagers remind us that this preference for popular music spans the range of social, intellectual, and demographic characteristics of adolescents, and is recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of adolescence.

Keying into this musical preference, the planners of church youth gatherings

There are several concerns with this approach to choosing music for worship, not the least of which is that it may be based upon a false assumption about teens’ relationship to the music they consider “theirs.” *My Music*¹ is a collection of interviews with people from age four to 83, including teenagers, asking them to talk about the music that is valued by them. In virtually every case, the music that meant the most to people had some extra-musical connection, a social, emotional, or spiritual link that had created a personal affiliation with that music and placed it within a particular personal context: music my fiancé and I danced to, music my mother sang to me, music my friends and I listen to together. This additional layer of connective tissue seems to place music irrevocably within the contexts in which it “belongs.”

My research on teenagers and their attitudes about the kind of music that they think belongs in church² turned up some interesting insights into what forges this musical connection for high school students. In a survey of nearly 500 teenagers from four regions of the country, both statistical data and informal conversations



Yours, Mine, or Ours: Teenagers' Perceptions of Church Music

and youth services typically assume that teenagers will be most open to hearing and singing God’s Word when it is carried by these favorite musical styles of rock and popular music. Choosing music that is stylistically derivative, indistinguishable from secular popular music except for its religious lyrics, these worship planners predict that junior high and high school students will be lured to such a church service if the kind of music they love to listen to in the car is carried into the sanctuary. Once there, they will be caught up in the proclamation because the words are being brought to their hearts by a kind of music that sounds familiar, like “their own music.”

reflected the significance of having firsthand experience with music within a particular context. What teenagers generally perceived as appropriate church music was the very music they were hearing in church—the church they considered their own, not their friends’ church or churches portrayed in the movies.

The research study involved the playing of 40 recorded excerpts of church music, representing the historical and stylistic range of music that is being heard in American churches today. The students were asked to indicate, anonymously and in writing, not how much they liked the music, but how appropriate they thought

By Dr. Barbara J. Resch

it would be for a church service. I said something like “Imagine yourself sitting in church; if you heard this music, would it seem right, or out of place?” Since more than 32 religious groups were represented, including the mainline denominations, world religions, cults, and many non-denominational groups, the image of “church service” varied greatly among the respondents, and each group seemed to have its own sense of what was fitting for that time and place.

Statistical analysis of the rating scales summarized these responses. Emerging as the most powerful predictor of the judgment of appropriateness was familiarity and experience with the musical sound within the context of worship. The music heard in the church service became the music deemed appropriate for the church service. Students who heard or sang hymnic choral music in church considered that to be the model for church music. On the other hand, a small group of California teenagers commented that of the whole survey tape they had considered only two excerpts appropriate for church, because their church used only praise songs that everybody sang, and to “just listen” to anything else was foreign to their worship experience.

In addition, there was a general consensus that the sound considered most appropriate church music by this large and diverse group of students was a choral sound: vocal, not instrumental; corporate, not soloistic; with a text that was presented in a manner that was straightforward and understandable. The selection ranked most highly for worship appropriateness was an Anglican chant, a verse of Psalm 98 sung by an unaccompanied male choir in four part homophony. On the other hand, solos that sounded virtuosic and polyphonic choral with elaborate accompaniments were considered inappropriate. Most instrumental music, jazz, and Christian rock music were considered inappropriate for church by a great majority of the students.

While the students associated church

music with the sounds they had heard or performed in church, the study found that any musical style that was closely identified (based on their experience or their perception) with another social setting or with a particular age group was not considered appropriate church music. This included their own age group: the examples of Christian rock music I played for them were overwhelmingly considered inappropriate for church. The playing of much of the contemporary Christian music evoked rolling eyes and comments written in the margins of the survey forms: “This sounds like my parents’ music” and “This reminds me of Lawrence Welk.” A soft and slow “Agnus Dei” from a jazz Mass produced nervous laughs and further notes on the survey form: “I think these words are fine but this music is too sexy for church. Sounds like

Examples of Christian rock music I played for them were overwhelmingly considered inappropriate for church. The playing of much of the contemporary Christian music evoked rolling eyes and comments written in the margins of the survey forms: “This sounds like my parents’ music” and “This reminds me of Lawrence Welk.”

a nightclub act.” The brass choir introduction to a “Gloria” by a well-known contemporary composer for the church drew the reaction “Not for church! Sounds like a movie sound track!!!!” This sense of contextual appropriateness (“Sounds like . . .”) was borne out in an additional research study I conducted, in which every piece of potential church music played for the students was considered appropriate

for some context (concerts, leisure listening, background music for brunch, dancing) but far more refined distinctions were made concerning which pieces were appropriate for church services.

Apparently, then, these teenaged church-goers did not bring to the church service their own musical preferences as the “right” music for that occasion. Rather, their judgment of what was appropriate for worship was their response to the music that the church has already put in place, whatever that music may be. This conclusion surely reflects a philosophy that has been understood by the Church for centuries: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. This dictum (literally, the law of prayer, the law of belief) has been understood to mean that what people believe

influences the way they worship, and, conversely, the way they worship also influences what they believe. The implications of the survey are that existing church music practice also forms belief about appropriate church music practice, at least among young and impressionable worshippers.

This is not to say that the young people surveyed were rejecting Smashing Pumpkins in favor of traditional hymns in the other parts of their lives. In fact, discussions with the teenagers indicated that they had a strong allegiance and a clear sense of ownership about the place of rock and pop music in their social lives. Our conversations supported the written research that this familiarity becomes part of the personal identity of many teenagers. They knew what was currently popular and what they would listen to, and they considered it theirs. Furthermore, they resented and ridiculed adults who attempted to take over this style, or who mistakenly promoted a dated musical style as something that might be appealing to them. Many students appeared to make a distinction between their music—the music they liked to listen to in their free

time—and the music they encountered and accepted as part of other times and places in their lives, such as the church service.

An interesting exchange took place in a high school I visited in Nashville, Tennessee. The site of the city’s English as a Second Language program, this school’s ethnic and religious population was remarkably diverse. The spokesperson for a group of girls explained to me and the rest of the class that their church served up a variety of worship services: “I go to one service where there’s music I like, and my parents go to another service where they hear, you know, their music.” A young man called out from the back of the room “I like reggae; you gonna have a



service for me?” Another voice: “I like rap; you gonna have a service for me?” A third: “I like head-banger music . . .” There ensued a brief parody of liturgical head-banging accompanied by requests for additional popular styles, until the classroom teacher called a halt. The original speaker was clearly frustrated, and flung her parting shot in their direction: “Well, you can’t please everybody.”

Pleasing everybody is not, of course, what happens when the Church gathers around the Word and Sacraments, and this conversation points out the futility of ever trying to appeal to the current musical tastes of a multi-generational assembly. Sociologists examining popular culture suggest that the popular music that becomes our life-long favorite is that which is “imprinted” in our early twenties.

Having passed through our twenties at a variety of times, an inter-generational congregation can yield a great diversity of favorite popular songs! A church music practice that reflects the musical taste of each segment of the congregation would have to be as varied as the FM radio dial: a little of everything, from reggae to Reger.

Among church-going students, there was a

remarkable respect for the diversity of the saints who gather together in corporate worship, and a willingness to suspend personal preference for the sake of the larger group. When I explained to one class that they were to listen to the survey tape and make a judgment of appropriateness, a boy asked “Do you mean appropriate for me or for the whole congregation?” Who knows what his responses would have been if he had made these judgments as a congregation of one, but it was enlightening that he understood that his personal perceptions might differ from those of the whole group to which he belonged. Several students spoke specifically about Christian rock music being offensive to some members of their churches; one said

“This would give my grandma cardiac arrest, so probably not!” Another girl wrote “For each piece I tried to picture the little old ladies in my church, and if I thought it would upset them, I said it was not appropriate. People shouldn’t get upset about that kind of thing in church.”

For many teens, the church service may be the only time they ever participate with both children and elderly people in a setting of equality. Typically, a 16-year-old boy and his 75-year-old grandmother don’t eat at the same restaurants, go to the same movies, or listen to the same radio station. But when they come to the Divine Service they confess their sins in unison and stand together singing their response of gratitude for the gifts, using words that are neither his nor hers, but the expression of a common and shared faith. The music carrying those words is neither “his music” nor hers, but an expression that is able to transcend both age and personality. The words, music, or both may be centuries old or may have been written for what Grandma still calls “the new hymnal.” When we come into the timelessness of God’s presence in the Divine Service, the dates of the hymns we sing and the ages of the singers are just another aspect of the temporal realm we leave behind.

The establishment of a hymnal practice that spans ages can help to build this common expression. Rather than developing children’s hymns for children’s services, often expressions that children grow out of as quickly as last year’s tennis shoes, teaching liturgical responses and hymn verses to young children helps them to grow into the extended family of God as it gathers to worship. Similarly, establishing a separate Youth Service with its own hymnic style and worship practice forces

an age-based separation at the very time when adults are most fearful that their teenagers will become alienated from the church. The turbulent years of adolescence may be the most crucial years of all for retaining the comfort and stability of our ritual behaviors, including a consistent liturgical and hymn-singing practice.

The 500 teenagers who participated in my research study have stated what many of us already know: that the Church’s song both reflects and forms what that Church

The Church’s song both reflects and forms what that Church believes. Importing a musical expression from a conflicting culture is dishonest and ineffectual. The music of the Church needs to carry its text clearly and understandably to all of its members. When it does not reflect the popular taste of any particular age group, and when it nurtures its own particular language, the Church’s expression becomes both diverse and inclusive, because it is unbounded by the considerations of age. It becomes “our music” early in life, draws on the richness of past centuries, becomes ever fuller with the discovery and endurance of new creative expressions, and then remains ours for a lifetime.

believes, that importing a musical expression into the Church from a conflicting culture is dishonest and ineffectual, and that the music of the Church needs to carry its text clearly and understandably to all of its members. When it does not reflect the popular taste of any particular age group, and when it nurtures its own particular language, the Church’s expression becomes both diverse and inclusive, because it is unbounded by the considerations of age. It becomes “our music” early in life, draws on the richness of past centuries, becomes ever fuller with the discovery and endurance of new creative expressions, and then remains ours for a lifetime.

Dr. Barbara Resch is Coordinator of Music Education at Indiana University—Purdue University Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Director of Children’s Choir, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church.

An earlier version of this article was published in the July 1998 issue of CrossAccent: Journal of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians and is reprinted here with the permission of the Association.

1. S. Crafts, D. Cavicchi, D. and C. Keil, *My Music. Music in Daily Life Project* (Hanover, N. H. : University Press of New England, 1993).
 2. Barbara J. Resch, “Adolescents’ Attitudes toward the Appropriateness of Religious Music” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1996).