

Perspectives on Church Music

By Carl Schalk

SINGING THE LORD'S PRAYER

While the regular repetition of parts of the liturgy week after week may not necessarily breed contempt, it may well lead ultimately to indifference. In reciting the Lord's Prayer every week in Sunday worship, in addition to using it in a variety of other ways, as a handy convenience to conclude meetings – "Let's stand and close with the Lords' Prayer" – it is easy to see how it can become routine, something one rattles off without thinking.

How does one go about making its frequent use more meaningful? Part of the answer lies in the pace with which we speak this prayer. By my estimate it takes the average congregation about 30 seconds. How can that time be slowed down to allow time for the text to "breathe," time to allow us to think about what we are saying without rushing from one petition to the next?

Two possibilities suggest themselves. The first involves the person leading the prayer. The leader can set the pace and can choose a more deliberate pace, allowing time to ponder, even briefly, what one is saying.

The second possibility is more promising. Sing the Lord's Prayer!

Some recent Lutheran service books have included a setting of the Lord's Prayer that has been passed on through centuries of the church's prayer life. It is to be sung in the same way that other parts of the liturgy are to be sung: in unison and without accompaniment. It is a quiet and meditative melody which proceeds at a pace so that the singer can think about what he or she is praying.

Our Fa-ther in heav - en, hal - lowed be your name,
your king - dom come, your will be done, on earth as in
heav - en. Give us to - day our dai - ly bread.
For - give us our sins as we for - give those who sin a - gainst us.
Save us from the time of tri - al and de - liv - er us from e - vil.
For the king - dom, the pow'r, and the glo - ry are
yours, now and for - ev - er. A - men

Decide to use this prayer for, for example, an entire season such as Advent or Lent. It can be especially appropriate in evening services. Practice it with the choir so there is a body of singers who already are familiar and comfortable with tune and can lead the congregation. Persist in using it until the congregation is comfortable with it and can sing it with ease.

Any congregation that learns to sing the Lord's Prayer by memory will have added to its memory banks a tune that will serve it well.

Don't settle for anything less. It will be a worthy addition to your congregation's musical repertoire – and to its prayer life.