

Possible challenges

in teaching *Hymns for Life*

We pray that the following excerpts will support you as you advocate for this curriculum.

There are hymns already in the Christ-Light curriculum

We understand that many teachers have their “cycle” or “schedule” set in stone from year to year. Many hymns in this curriculum overlap with the Christ Light “Memory Treasures,” so a school could line up the Hymns for Life schedule with the Christ Light schedule. While Christ Light hymns may match the lesson theme better, they often only appear once without any other study, practice, or context. It’s impossible for students to truly have a relationship with this hymn. The *Hymns for Life* hymn will be sung all week, in chapel, in worship, and year after year, which leads to deeper learning and retention and connects your students with their school and church community.

I’m not musical

You were on our minds from the very beginning, and we love you! Xoxoxoxox 😊
Keep in mind, the number one goal of this curriculum is sharing the love of Jesus with your students! In the actual lesson plan, no musical background is needed. In the activities, even the most “challenging” musical activities are explained in a way you could model (and could even be led by a student). There are so many simple, yet effective musical activities. And if it truly proves challenging, there’s a plethora of other activities to use, too. Finally, no piano experience is needed to lead the hymn. Every hymn has a live children’s choir singing the hymn, a piano accompaniment track, and an organ accompaniment track.

It’s too much money

While the complete curriculum is a 3-year cycle (A,B,C), consider buying just one year at a time for a lower annual impact on the budget (K-8 - \$700). Perhaps identify a member or two in your congregation who appreciate our musical heritage. Explain the curriculum to them. They may very well financially support this entire curriculum. Finally, every school boasts about meeting the needs of every student and teaching the “whole” child. This is just one more offering that will help produce a strong, mature, Christian young man/woman and prepare them for their dying day.

I already have 4 days of religion classes and 1 day of school chapel. Why do I need another religion class?

It’s a valid question. Time is tight. Consider a food analogy. We know that it is good for your body to have a balanced diet. There’s no wisdom in consuming one part of the current food pyramid. Overloading on vegetables and fruits may seem prudent, but any doctor will tell you that you need a source of protein to maintain the health of your entire body. Instruction with a hymn is not instruction with a Bible story. (Side note: there is a certain head knowledge

associated with Christ-Light and Catechism instruction. One major goal of this curriculum is teaching students how to worship their Lord for the rest of their lives.) The gospel in a hymn is written so succinctly and so poetically. Hymns are poems. Poets are the most effective writers. They have mastered the art of figurative and sensory language. They know how to communicate a message in a way that speaks to the depths of your heart and soul and therefore, how to help you retain it for a long time and maintain your “health.”

As if the message wasn't effective enough, music has been attached to this message. The power of music doesn't need advocating! And so, whether it's teaching a Lutheran doctrine in Catechism or teaching about people who experience God's law and gospel in a Christ-Light lesson, in the light of the power of a hymn, one can argue that holes are present. Teaching hymns help fill these holes and round out your spiritual diet. Give your students a buffet of spiritual food, not just one or two entrees.

I don't have time in my week for this

We know very well time is tight in your 7 hour day. We know the pressures of performing well in the core classes: math, the language arts, and even the constant interest in all things technology. But, remember who we are: we are a Lutheran school and hymns have been sung in Lutheran schools from the very beginning. This summer, in his last report as District President, Pastor Jon Buchholz, impressed on us two details. Here is the first one:

“Why do you have a Lutheran elementary school?” and the most common answer I hear is, “To do outreach.” That's a nice thought, but I'll submit to you that the reason we have Lutheran schools is to offer a Lutheran education. We want children to sit at the feet of Jesus every day, and we want to strengthen them and their family's connection to the sacramental life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church....We have had schools in our district close because congregations incorrectly thought they weren't doing enough “outreach,” and consequently they lost the blessing of a Lutheran school in that congregation. Keep the primary focus of Lutheran schools on the blessing of Lutheran education, as part of carrying out the Bible's charge to bring up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

Do a hard and honest assessment of your time management. Do you need 60 minutes to teach your Bible story? 30 minutes for grammar? [insert any class]? Can you make use of the time from when they arrive to when class officially begins? Can you piggy-back this class with music class? Substitute this for all morning or all afternoon devotions? If you use this for devotions, it's ok if this doesn't directly “fit” your upcoming Bible story. Hymns are so good though that something can be taken from them that applies to the Bible story. It is ok if the hymn is taught over multiple days. This may actually be more effective because of the repeated exposure.

We don't sing these hymns in church

Perhaps you, your colleagues, or your members may feel this way about hymns included with this curriculum. Rest assured, these hymns are not simply picked because of a few personal opinions. Some of these hymns have stood the test of time, are sung throughout many denominations, and have such meaningful Gospel thoughts and attractive melodies to last for centuries. Instead of creating a hymnology schedule based on personal preferences, look to connect these hymns with your congregation's worship planner or pastor(s) so the entire congregation can benefit from the rich, Lutheran heritage that has been gifted to us.

“What if my school has good intentions but no follow-through?”

Revisit the conversation with leadership to clarify what roadblocks need to be overcome. Work to set a “SMART” goal with your leadership that includes specifics:

- When will we roll out this curriculum or expand it? School year 25-26?
- In which grades?
- Who will teach it and when?
- How much will be budgeted and where will that funding come from?
- How will we share the vision and orient teachers?

How do we get all the teachers on board?

The short answer is, you might not! While it is nice to have 100% support, it can be hard to get everyone to agree on a new idea and this is not always needed to move forward. It is the job of **school leadership** to make curricular decisions and present them compellingly to the staff. If individuals are especially negative or resistant, leadership can **follow-up privately**. Teachers may be facing burnout and stress that makes new ideas seem hard. This bigger problem needs to be addressed by leadership.

Ask for your principal to set aside **staff meeting time** to discuss the value of the curriculum and offer **teacher training**. People are more likely to support a curriculum they understand.

Technology can be a hurdle for some teachers, so consider **printing the curriculum** and putting it into a binder for teachers who prefer print materials.

“How do we address upper-grade departmentalization?”

Upper-grade teachers should **meet as a team** to talk through the possibilities.

In some schools, homeroom teachers start the day with students and open with **Word of God or Catechism class**. Hymnology could be covered in homerooms during this time. If you have a music specialist, it could be added to **music class**. Remember that in either of these cases, you will need to allocate **more class time** to cover this content so that the rest of the music/catechism curriculum is still covered. Hymnology could replace a homeroom **devotion**.

You could also have a **pastor or staff minister** come in to teach it as a stand-alone class.

The important thing is that all grades K-8 are studying and singing the same hymn all week.

Isn't a new theology curriculum coming out? Shouldn't we just wait for that?

Any future NPH products will coordinate and align with *Hymns for Life* and point teachers to this existing curriculum. An investment in this curriculum now will continue to serve your school well into the future.

How will the students learn the newer hymns?

The *Hymns for Life* curriculum covers 90 hymns, revisiting 12 core hymns every year. The committee selected hymns in a range of styles developed over the centuries and across cultures. The hymns were chosen because they clearly teach law and gospel, and most focus primarily on the central truths of the Christian faith.

While there is great variety in this curriculum, your school is not limited to singing only these hymns! Some schools introduce even more hymns by appointing a “**hymn of the month**” to be sung each week in chapel. Some appoint a “**hymn of the year**” that matches the school year's theme. You may appoint a hymn to be sung at **opening or closing daily devotions**. You could teach an all-school hymns for **Grandparents Day** or the **Christmas service**. The opportunities for creatively using hymnody in your school are endless!