

Overview for Instructors

Leadership Program for Musicians, Inc.

Leadership of Congregational Song

Piano

This sheet is intended to be copied by a local LPM coordinator and given to the instructor with the course material.

Helpful things to understand The goal of this course is to give the congregation its voice through the assistance of the piano. This course is designed to explore the broad scope of Christian song using the books available to us from our churches as primary resources.

The curriculum recognizes that the context for many smaller parishes is such that a piano AND a competent pianist are more readily available than a higher-quality organ and organist. Often mere permission to a pianist to play piano rather than trying to play a less than adequate organ is all that is needed!

It is important to explore the different nature of a piano (as percussion) to an organ (as vocal instrument) throughout the course and how that has an effect on leading the congregation in song.

In many ways the piano track runs parallel to the organ track in *Leadership of Congregational Song*. Many of the sections are common. The piano course replaces the organ-specific portions with piano-specific curriculum.

It may be possible to combine the organ and piano sections using one faculty person: split the time available in the same ratio as the number of participants of each instrument. There is some material which is of great importance, yet specific to piano only (or conversely, organ only). If the organists and pianists are combined, care must be given to the areas that are quite unique to the piano, specifically:

Session 3: A call for variety at the piano

Session 4: Sustaining harmony—the arpeggio

Session 6: Hispanic hymns

Materials All participants will need the **hymnal of their own denomination** and are strongly encouraged to own a copy of the **hymnal of another denomination**. All participants need a copy of *Let the People Sing!* by David Cherwien.

Also see the bibliography for the *Leadership of Congregational Song*. Even books which appear specific to organists contain important basic information on subjects such as breath, tactus, etc., of hymn-playing.

Assignments Each session includes an assignment. An important part of the assignment is for the participant to prepare an accompaniment for use in class the next session. This is important because:

- (1) it allows the class to sing often, taking note of issues encountered as singers, and
- (2) it allows each person to lead the congregational song at the piano while people are singing.

Feel free to adjust the assignment list appropriately. There may be too much for each session's assignment list; in some cases, not enough. At least one hymn should be prepared by each participant for leading in the next session.

Hints for teaching Clarity is of utmost importance. Breath and tactus provide for reliable downbeats and clarity. This is best achieved by example, through the act of singing. It is vital to take the time needed to sing with participants leading, followed by discussion. Not so much critically evaluating the "playing," but rather the concepts encountered in the singing. *"Did you have enough time to breathe?" "Was the tactus reliable enough for you to sing confidently?"*

Improvisation beyond the notes of a four-part setting is often a part of piano accompaniment. It is important for the instructor to NOT do the playing. The participant must "find" their improvisational voice on his/her own. Resist the urge to play what you are trying to draw out of them! Make them do it! (It may be better than yours!)

The instructor will have to find the good balance between pushing improvisatory skills without losing clarity. If one were to err, it would be best to remain on the side of clarity rather than creativity which cannot be controlled, causing ambiguous leadership. Freedom and creativity are to be encouraged, but clarity rules!

Note that some of the sections on improvisation may be difficult for some participants or even classes. It would be better to spend more time with the other concepts to maintain clarity and develop the shear mechanics of leading congregational song rather than venture into areas which may not be successful. You know your participants: pace things accordingly and adjust.

It may also be helpful to remember that you are teaching them how to continue the learning process beyond their participation in LPM. If they have understood a concept, but haven't mastered it, it may be acceptable to move on. In many cases, it is intentional to have just scratched the surface. This is especially the case in learning musical styles of other cultures. Planting the seed may be all that is needed during this course of study.

It is possible that some participants may need private lessons. Some may not be able to complete the work at the end of one year. In many LPM programs, special arrangements have been made to provide additional help for those participants in a second year so that the course completion requirements may be attained.