

## **Views from the Pews - The Contribution of Church music and singing**

Never underestimate the long-term influence of Sunday School teaching and music. In our current climate of constant rain, I am reminded of a song I learnt in Salvation Army Sunday School (Dannevirke, Hawkes Bay). I was told that 'the wise man built his house upon the rock', and 'the foolish man built his house upon the sand', AND 'when the rains came tumbling down', the house upon the sand went CRASH! while the house upon the rocks 'stood firm'! At the time, it was an obvious lesson in safety and 'risk management', but more recently I have come to appreciate the usefulness of such advice re property values and personal well-being. Such is the long-term value of the songs we sang at Sunday School.

As adults we can also appreciate the huge amount of good advice and learning in hymns, prayers, psalms and other church music. Traditional hymns used in churches help the congregation to learn scripture – our Cathedral Church of St Peters Young Church singing Jesus Loves Me, or the Cathedral congregation singing Great Is Thy Faithfulness.

Indeed, congregational singing has a lot going for it! Through repetition, it allows us to better memorise scripture or prayers; for example, through music, our St Peters parishioners learnt the Lord's Prayer in Maori! Congregational singing also allows for joyfulness and thankfulness, especially important for many people who work in stressful and de-personalised environments. And along with other forms of singing, it is known to improve one's mood and reduce stress (through increases in the production of serotonin, oxytocin and other hormones).

Perhaps the greatest contribution singing in church makes is by bringing together our several generations, cultures and backgrounds of believers, and amazingly, have everyone 'singing from the same page'. Such an activity at St Peters, with a full church and an excellent choir, organist and musical director at the front, is a truly energising experience of 'community' or togetherness. Where singing scripture

helps us to find community in His Word – singing together with one voice, Unity in our Diversity. In the middle of the congregation, each worshipper finds togetherness – with all the people around them, singing together in worship.

*“Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world” (Martin Luther).*

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