

Yay singing

Our small church doesn't have praise teams or a chorus with dozens of members. But we have something precious.

By [David Williams](#)

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One of the greatest pleasures in a very small congregation is the music.

I'd been having that conversation with other local pastors recently, about how absolutely vital it is to have a vibrant, lively music program as part of church life. It is a place of fundamental connection, of fellowship, of harmonies both spiritual and literal.

In a little church, that means something different than it might in a giant sprawling megachurch. We don't have four different cycling praise teams, each fronted by an earnest praise leader wearing a fashionably ironic T-shirt and pitching their latest album. We don't have a 200-member chorus, a small orchestra to back them, and a team of paid professional ringers that we bring in now and again.

There's nothing wrong with those things, but as a small church, that ain't what we do.

We have, instead, precisely what we need. Meaning, we're blessed with Monica, our talented and encouraging and generally awesome part-time music director, and a group of singers who love raising their voices in worship.

On the very Sunday after I'd talked with other pastors about just how vital music is to the spiritual health of a community, our gathered choir sang an anthem. It was a lovely piece, [Sicut Cervus](#), rich with the centuries old polyphony of the Italian Renaissance era. *As the deer longs for the flowing streams*, it went, that old psalm sung in Latin, which makes it sound like a spell you'd learn at Hogwarts. "Sicut

Cervus!" Ron Weasley would shout, and suddenly that Slytherin would be compelled to go off in search of a water fountain.

As I listened to the harmony and the interplay of our half dozen voices, I was struck by something. I could hear the people singing. Meaning, sure, yes, duh, I can still hear. But as the elegant dance of tones composed by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina played out its harmonies, I realized that I could hear each individual voice as a discrete part of the music.

Behind each part of the harmony, I could hear not just the parts but the souls singing them. Each voice, a person I've come to know as part of our little fellowship. Not just soprano and alto, tenor and baritone. Not sections, but the particular voice of a particular person, as unique to them as their face.

It was lovely music, certainly, but what made it richer and deeper—and more like worship—was that interplay between the music and the familiar tone and timbres of friends.

And as the voices stilled and the last note hung in the air, and we as Presbyterians wondered if we should clap or just serenely nod, the tiny voice of a tiny child came clear from the back of our tiny sanctuary.

"Yay," the little one said. "Yay singing!"

My thoughts exactly.

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