



Dear Friends in Christ,

The Insanity of God: a Story of Faith Resurrected is Nik Ripken's story of his search for answers after his faith in the Gospel of Jesus was battered by his experiences serving in war-torn, famine-plagued Somalia in the 1990s. His search led him around the world to visit Christians who have survived and even thrived under persecution.



I have read several inspiring books on Christians facing persecution. We can learn a lot about following Jesus from our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church. One new thing I learned in Ripken's book is the importance of music to persecuted Christians. Several powerful stories talked about the power of "heart songs" for Christians facing persecution.

Music does play a powerful part in the lives of Christians. We don't sing because God needs to be entertained. We don't sing to entertain each other. We sing because we need to give voice to our faith and our prayers and we find that music helps us to do that with heart and soul and mind. Singing is good for the soul. It is also very good for the body as a low-impact cardiac exercise. I have read that singers live longer on average than non-singers.

The Lutheran tradition has always encouraged congregational singing. We sing hymns of praise and passion. We sing hymns of faith, hope, and love. We sing hymns of repentance and renewal. And we sing hymns that express the joy and sorrow of our hearts to God and to one another. We try to sing the kind of songs that have enough depth to carry a Christian through even the hardest of days.

Immanuel has a strong tradition of music. We want to continue that tradition of sharing the uplifting and enriching gift of music to one another. We are grateful to the folks who have answered the call to lead us forward in the sharing of gifts of music in our congregation in the coming year. There are plenty of changes to our music program, but our goal is the same: to provide opportunities for our members to find the joy of sharing in the gift of music.

If you could sit where I do on Sunday morning, you would hear the beautiful sound of a congregation blending their voices in song. It is truly a beautiful gift. I love to hear you all sing. If I could have anything I wanted in our congregation, I would wish for a quartet of song leaders who could lead congregational singing and provide some occasional harmonies. It could really improve our TV and internet recordings.

I am grateful to the vocal choir and the bell choir and the youth praise band. I look forward to your offerings of musical gifts in our worship gatherings. Practice schedules are still being developed at this time, but call the church office for practice times if you are interested in trying out one of our musical groups. And anyone who wants to share a musical gift in worship is encouraged to do so by signing up in the church for a Sunday or a Saturday service.

Yours in Christ,

Phil Nielsen