

Sing to the Lord New (Old) Songs

Sing to the Lord a new song...for great is the Lord and most worthy of praise (Psalm 96:1,4)

In the closing days of August, Rev. Dr. Terry Schultz from WELS Multi-Language Productions and Rev. Ben Foxen of the One Africa Team traveled to Uganda.

The goal? Fulfill a request made by our brothers and sisters in the Obadiah Lutheran Synod (OLS) to help them sing new songs with Christ-centered lyrics.



A Workshop for Creativity

Thanks to funding provided by MLP, we gathered about 20 musicians from the various districts of the OLS in one place for 5 days of training, encouragement, and hands-on work to compose and sing new songs. MLP also provided funds to purchase equipment that the OLS will use to train future musicians in their church body.

During this workshop, the assembled musical talent and creativity continually amazed us. In a short time, these men and women composed and recorded 68 new songs which showed incredible diversity. Since the composers came from different parts of the country, they composed songs in no less than 7 different languages. The musical styles differed, ranging from traditional Ugandan beats to more of a hip-hop style, to chant and chorales. It was eye-opening to witness how the people of OLS sought to incorporate all these different styles, showing that all of these musical styles are part of their cultural heritage.



The content of these songs also differed, some focusing on themes of praise and thanksgiving (among them my personally favorite melody, “Nebaza Musumba Wange,” or “I thank you, my Shepherd”); others focusing on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; others on sin and repentance; and others a recasting of the timeless songs of the liturgy.

Nebaza Musumba Wange (I thank you, my Shepherd)

Let All the People Sing

One of the goals of this workshop was to preserve any music that the musicians produced. So, a handheld recording device was used to capture the compositions as they were performed for the group, and handwritten lyrics were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Both were then transferred to microSD cards that church leaders could share with all the congregations of the OLS. In this way, the entire church will benefit from this workshop.



OLS leaders have plans to take this project further. They want these composers to continue producing new melodies and lyrics, focusing their talents on the various seasons of the church year. In time musicians might produce and record an entire OLS hymnbook. It's an ambitious project, but they have the talent to accomplish it.

Through it all, we rejoice in the amazing gifts that God has given to his people. God's people have always created new songs to praise and glorify our God and teach people about his amazing deeds and love. The OLS may be singing some new songs to the Lord now, but they're also singing the same old song that God's people have always sung—Christ for us, and Christ in us. All glory and praise be to his name, with whatever melody or language you sing!

Missionary Ben Foxen lives in Zambia

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