

Lutherans have been blessed with a rich heritage—an astounding array of spiritual treasures, passed down to us over the centuries by faithful Christians who have gone before us.

It's a *biblical* heritage that grounds our faith firmly on the words of Scripture and its central message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's a *confessional and theological* heritage that connects us seamlessly to faithful witnesses and confessors of the church throughout the ages.

And it's a *liturgical* heritage that values worship elements that are rooted in Scripture and that make the proclamation of the gospel central, not incidental, to worship. This heritage honors those aspects of Christian worship that have stood the test of time while also embracing every generation's new expressions of faith that are biblical and Christ-centered. That liturgical heritage is a priceless treasure not because it preserves the past but because it focuses on the proclamation of the gospel in all its beauty.

The blessings of such a heritage bring with them a solemn responsibility. Our heritage is one to be treasured for ourselves to be sure, but it is also one that we will want to pass along to the next generation of Lutheran Christians. By treasuring this heritage for ourselves, we keep the gospel of Jesus Christ as the focus of our worship and of our efforts to bring the good news of Christ crucified to a fallen world. By passing this heritage to the next generation, we take our place in a long line of faithful witnesses, as "one generation commends [God's] works to another" (Psalm 145:4).

Finally, it is the gospel alone that makes our worship compelling. It's compelling because it's centered in Christ, kneels in faith at the cross, and proclaims with joy a risen and victorious Savior.

It's my prayer that you and all the people you serve will be richly blessed by what you see, hear, and sing at this conference.



Rev. Mark Schroeder
WELS President

What is it that makes the worship of this conference so compelling? Is it the music? The art? The ceremony?

When Jesus called his disciples, there was no special rite of commissioning. When our Savior had a sermon to preach, he didn't look for a beautiful, hand-crafted pulpit or a majestic church building. At his death there were no choirs singing. Christ is the source and focus of all true worship, but he carried out his earthly ministry without music, art, or ceremony to accompany what he was doing. Then, when his time had come, when Jesus wanted his disciples to remember him and to carry his saving work to the world, consider what simple tools he gave them for the task at hand: bread and wine, water and the Word.

Jesus doesn't need the help of good artists or musicians to get his message across. In fact, it may seem as though glorious music and art must be out of sync with a Savior who hid and who hides his glory. It may seem as though our worship of Jesus should be less magnificent and more down to earth.

God's glory is indeed hidden from our eyes, but it's not as though he's trying to keep it secret. He's shown us exactly where to find it. He reveals the glory of our Savior's love in his Word.

So let the music be sublime. Let the art be magnificent. Let stately ceremony abound. Through music, art, and ceremony, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Here and everywhere, worship truly compels us when it draws faith's gaze to the glory of Jesus our Savior, hidden in his means of grace.

On behalf of the Commission on Worship, welcome to the 2014 National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts!



Jon Zabell, Chairman
WELS Commission on Worship

Fellow Levites:

Both President Schroeder and C/W Chairman Jon Zabell, in their introductory letters, have echoed the theme of this conference's plenary address: Compelling Worship.

I do so as well, but with a different angle.

Thank you, President Schroeder, for your clear affirmation: "the gospel alone makes our worship compelling."

Thank you, Pastor Zabell, for your emphasis on the simple and humble means of grace.

These are core values worth dying for! (Revelation 2:10)

But if the 'hidden' simplicity of bread and wine, water and Word are enough.... If it's true that "the gospel alone makes our worship compelling," then why all the extra effort? Why all the musical artistry? Why the sonic splendor? Why care about church architecture? Why more expense on "bricks and mortar" than the barest of shelter? Why strive to preach 'better'? Why the diverse ways to engage talents and adorn the simple gospel?

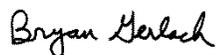
It's really a stewardship matter. The gospel is not made more efficacious by our efforts. But how could we, who treasure God's treasure, not muster the greatest of talent and artistry to trumpet (and paint, and sing, and preach) His message as powerfully as we can?

In God's Old Testament plan for doing this, He determined that one entire tribe of Israel, the Levites, would devote their entire lives to planning and executing worship. They didn't just concern themselves with sacrificing grain and animals. Some were musicians. (They were 'salaried' by the other tribes – even provided housing! Numbers 35.) When they weren't on duty in Jerusalem, what do you imagine they were doing?

Probably much the same that the musicians attending this conference do in the precious time that they allocate for preparing to lead worship: they honed their craft, they sharpened their technique, they let blossom their creativity. They devoted their musical skills to the worship of God, who so lovingly deserves our best efforts. The same is true of artists, preachers, and all others who serve us in worship.

It's really a stewardship matter. With implications for your personal efforts and for your congregation's planning and prioritizing.

May this conference encourage each of you 21st century Levites to return home and find ways to maximize your talents in service of the gospel!



Rev. Bryan Gerlach
Director, Commission on Worship
Chair, Worship Conference Committee