

June 2017

## **A Heritage that is ours to have and to preserve**

The hymn is one that we have sung since our youth. “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage!” It should not be surprising that in this year of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, our synod has chosen “Our Great Heritage” as the theme of our synod convention in July and as the title of our synod’s new long range plan.

Certainly, we will focus on the great heritage of the truth of God’s Word and the pure gospel that God has preserved and passed down to us for five centuries. But another great heritage that we Lutherans will celebrate is our rich heritage of worship. Generations of Lutherans have been blessed by Martin Luther’s emphasis on preaching, on congregational participation in hymns, psalms, prayers, and confession. We have been blessed to see the value of liturgical worship—not liturgical worship that degenerates into rote repetition and stale traditions, but liturgical worship that lives and breathes spiritual blessings because it is focused on the life-giving gospel and the truths of God’s saving work.

It’s been said that one of the main reasons why people are tempted to move away from liturgical worship is because liturgical worship is often done poorly. That happens when worship takes place with little planning, thought, or creativity. We recognize the value and attractiveness of worship done well. That is why this conference has been planned, and that is why you have taken time from your busy schedule to attend.

I pray that this conference will help you and the people you serve to rediscover and recommit to that great heritage of Lutheran worship that God has preserved for his church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Rev. Mark Schroeder  
WELS President

June 2017

When he nailed the ninety-five theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Luther could never have guessed that Christians around the world would be celebrating the moment five hundred years later. He was shocked by the widespread attention the event received even in his own day. Only with the benefit of hindsight can we appreciate how God worked through Luther's theses to uncover the Gospel and to alter the trajectory of world history.

But Luther would not have been surprised at all to know that the divine basis for his theses would be celebrated far beyond the next five hundred years. He knew that God's Word would stand forever. Writing about God's Word in 1530, Luther said, "This indescribable blessing has been bestowed upon us as a gift of God's kindness and grace. This very same God will continue to be God and Creator after we are gone, as he has been before us, and to the end of the world he will always gather to himself a little flock and uphold it. He will not die with us nor cease to exist, as we of little faith imagine" (LW Vol. 43, p. 175).

Now here we are at the *2017 WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts*, each one of us living, breathing proof that God has kept his promise to sustain his Church through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. How can we remain silent about the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ? How can we be disinterested in a message which God has preserved not just for the past five hundred years but ever since the fall, a message which he will continue to preserve to the end of the world? And how can we doubt whether God can work great blessings through the humble work of our little synod here over the next few days?

So let trumpets sound! Let voices sing! Let God's Church here and everywhere use her best gifts in worship, and let no one doubt for a moment that God will bless the message he's given us to speak.

*I will not die, but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. Psalm 118:17*



Rev. Jon Zabell  
Chair, Commission on Worship

June 2017

Martin Luther: “One reads in the Bible that pious kings supported, maintained, and gave salaries to singers” (Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*, 25; CPH 1988). If only we had a pious king or other patron to support our worship music! If only we could approximate back home (even at only 30%) the kind of worship we experience at this conference!

No, those options are not available. So why we do what we do at this conference? A full orchestra? Really? How is that transferable to your church?

Over the years there has been some criticism – or at least questions – about the high musical caliber of conference worship. One criticism suggests that worship is so rich that only a handful of churches can hope to replicate it. Well, actually, no. No WELS church can replicate conference worship. No church has a full orchestra! Very few churches have a SATB choir of 30 voices, let alone over 100 (opening concert) or up to 80 for various services.

Maybe it’s obvious to most attendees, but we offer such rich worship simply because we are using the gifts God has given us. Musicians from far and wide gather to pool their talent to create the glorious sounds of conference worship. Some of these WELS musicians are professionals who play in noted orchestras, some are high caliber freelancers, some are devoted amateurs. We thank them for their impact and inspiration.

With such gifts available, why wouldn’t we make maximum use of the talents God has given? Martin Franzmann offers a spiritual insight.

“After all, a man can make music on a tin whistle to the glory of God, and God will be pleased to hear it” True, true, true—if God has given him nothing but a tin whistle; but God has given us so infinitely much more. When he has given us all the instruments under heaven with which to sing his praises, then the tin whistle is no longer humility but a perverse sort of pride.” From “Theology Must Sing,” in *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, CPH 1966, reprinted in 1994.

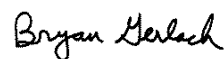
(One of Franzmann’s great texts appears with a “new” tune; see page 60.)

Still, we ask, “How does this affect what I do back home?” You will gain some practical ideas. You will be challenged by fresh insights. But perhaps for most of us the conference is a triennial battery charge – an inspirational encouragement to return to small and medium and large parishes (a distinct minority)...and do our best. As we ponder what “best” means, it’s good to remember two points.

**Excellence is not elitist.** The beautiful tone of children singing on pitch and with beautiful blend is impactful to anyone with ears to hear. The precision of Bach played well or a moving concertato communicates across generations.

**Excellence is not difficult.** But not everyone can play Bach. So note that some musical selections are actually quite simple (especially in some repertoire sessions). These can be achieved at the piano or with a handful of singers and high school instrumentalists. Excellence is not replicating an orchestra; it’s doing the best you can with the resources you have!

May this conference encourage each of you Reformation heirs to return home and proclaim the gospel in word, music, and art to the best of your ability – for the edification of those you serve and for the glory of our saving God!



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