

2018 Report to the Twelve Districts – supplemental online report

WELS Commission on Worship

<http://worship.welsrc.net/>

Our Calling

The Commission on Worship (C/W) exists to help parishes in their central activity of worship that glorifies God and strengthens his people. Music and liturgy consume much of the commission's time, but "worship" includes far more: an interest in the style, the forms, and the setting of worship; in preaching; in liturgical orders and rites; in church music for the congregation, choir, soloists and instruments; in architecture and ecclesiastical arts.

Worship is the heart of all parish life, the time when the greatest number of members gathers to proclaim the gospel and receive God's life-giving power in Word and sacrament.

If you are a delegate and have never explored the work of the Commission on Worship, you can get a good idea its scope by reviewing content at the new Congregational Services Website as well as the older Commission on Worship Website (above), which still contains the greatest amount of content.

Excellence in Worship

The Congregational Services report emphasizes the following as one CS goal:

Congregational Services has prioritized programs that have as their goal "opening the front door" (adding new members through outreach) and "shutting the back door" (preventing members from leaving their congregation and synod).

A major component of "member satisfaction" and "visitor impact" is excellence in worship. Excellence does not mean difficulty beyond the reach of average parishes. The following points were made in a welcome letter to attendees at the 2017 WELS national worship conference:

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!

And WELS President Mark Schroeder, in his conference welcome letter, wrote:

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.

Hymnal Project

While there are many ways to encourage and pursue worship excellence, most members of the C/W in recent years have been preoccupied with the forthcoming new WELS hymnal, serving on various hymnal project committees. See a separate online report for hymnal project details. Additional information is here: www.welshymnal.com.

After agreeing with Northwestern Publishing House on an earlier release (Advent, 2021 instead of 2024), workflow increased significantly for the Executive Committee and for seven subcommittees. Since May of 2016 when meeting frequency increase, the hymnal project has become the primary focus for the C/W and the Worship office, along with the 2017 national worship conference and various consulting opportunities.

The National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts

With over 1000 attendees, the national worship conference is the largest worship conference among North American Lutheran church bodies (including events sponsored by the pan-Lutheran Association of Lutheran Church Musicians), even though WELS is one of the smaller Lutheran synods. The 2017 triennial conference, with strong emphasis on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, was June 13-16, at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis.



Worship conference opening concert, high school honor choir in foreground. Additional photos are included at the end of this report.

Worship conferences contribute to WELS efforts at continuing education and pursuit of excellence. Several of the typically 60 presentations relate to the intersection of worship and outreach. Many presentations advance the education and expertise of those who serve us in worship, both called workers and lay leaders. Some topics focus on themes meant to strengthen our unity as expressed in worship. All enable us better to proclaim “Christ’s Love, Our Calling” to both the found and the lost.

Double CD of 2017 worship conference highlights

A double CD of musical highlights is available from Northwestern Publishing House. The title, “A Mighty Fortress,” is no surprise in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The conference featured five settings of the great Reformation hymn. Three are included in the CDs. Selections from the 35 tracks range from soft solo piano to full orchestra, choir, and a “congregation” of 1400. Included are tracks featuring Canticum Novum, Children’s Choir, High School Honor Choir, Festival Choir, recitals, and newly commissioned selections.

Stock number: 388157 (CW38-8157).

<http://online.nph.net/music-video/cds/wels-worship-conference.html>



This is a limited edition release. Order soon to assure availability. A limited number of CDs from past earlier conferences is also available, most at reduced prices.

Worship conference resources

Those who didn’t attend the conference can still benefit from many of its resources. Various items are available for free download (<https://worship.welsrc.net/worship-conference-2017/>): workshop handouts, service folders, repertoire lists, presentation files (both PowerPoint and PDF versions), and photos.

The plenary address by hymnal project director Michael Schultz was “A Reformation Perspective on Worship.”

2021 Worship Conference

This conference has been held every three years since 1996. But we are skipping 2020 for a variety of reasons, mainly to better take advantage of new hymnal resources and to link the summer conference with the fall release of the new hymnal. In addition, 2021 avoids competition with some other national WELS events in 2020.

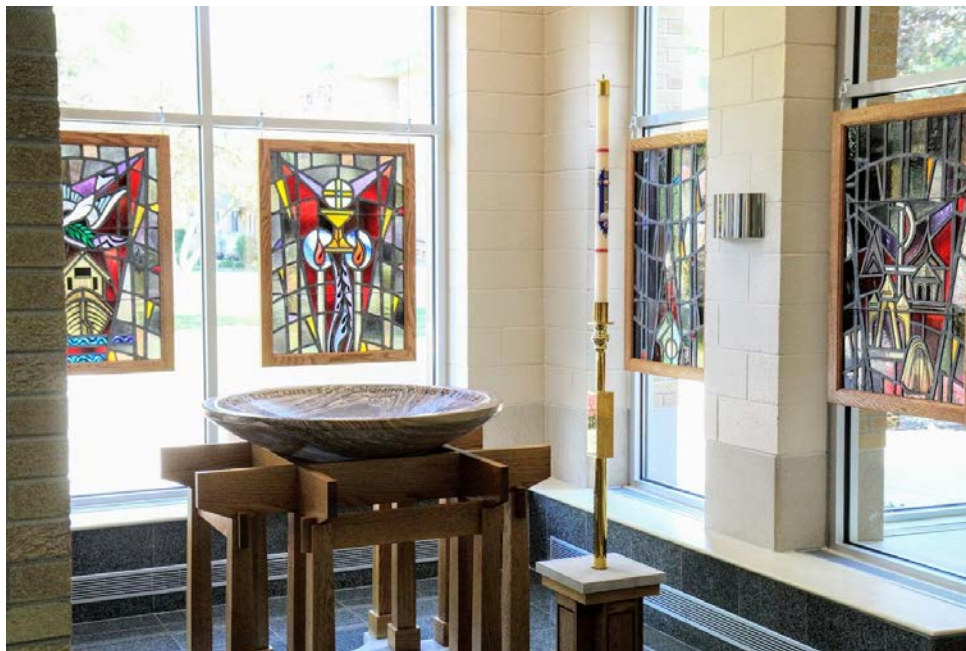
Worship the Lord Series

All back issues from the inception of this publication in 2003 are available online. Many of the topics discussed are timeless – valuable reading for church musicians and pastors, some useful for study by worship committees or boards of elders (those usually charged with responsibility for worship). In addition to PDF copies at the links below, articles since 2015 have been available also in a blog format, welcoming comments, at <https://wels.net/news-media/blogs/worship-blogs/>. Here two themes are highlighted.

Renovations

A nine-part series on renovations in churches large and small concluded in January, 2018. While each article deals with specific challenges in specific situations, the general principles are applicable to most any renovation project – as well as new construction.

<https://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-renovation-projects/>



A new baptistry at Luther Preparatory School features stained glass windows rescued from the pre-1995 chapel. See story at the link above. At right: close-up of the font.

See also an 11-part series on church architecture.

<https://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/wtl-church-architecture/>

Children in worship

A new four-part series begins in the summer of 2018. The author is Pastor Phil Huebner, Campus Pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran High School.



For additional information, contact Rev. Bryan Gerlach,
414-256-3265 or bryan.gerlach@wels.net.

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, reporter

Rev. Jon Zabell, chairman, Green Bay, WI

Rev. Jason Hacker, secretary, Waukesha, WI

Teacher Kevin Bode, Tempe, AZ

Rev. Aaron Christie, Waukesha, WI

Mr. Harvey Dunn, Loveland, CO

Mr. Craig Hirschmann, MLC, New Ulm, MN

Advisory:

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director

Mr. Jeremy Bakken, Northwestern Publishing House

Prof. Joel Otto, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Rev. Michael Schultz, Hymnal Project Director

*Photos, clockwise from right: Reformation service procession,
Reformation service communion, children's choir and high school
honor choir.*

