

Worship the Lord

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NPH Is Your Partner

By Jeremy Bakken and David Porth

I have enjoyed a partnership between WELS Congregational Services (CS) and Northwestern Publishing House as we have rolled out synod-wide initiatives in recent years, like *C19* for Christmas. Feedback from pastors says these programs have been highly appreciated.

I've especially enjoyed partnership with NPH's Jeremy Bakken. He composed a new gathering rite for *C18*. He stocked a choral arrangement of Getty Music's "Oh, How Good It Is" for *Welcome Home*. After that program had passed, I asked for sales data on that piece. "260 copies sold to 21 purchasers, about 3% of WELS congregations with an active adult choir. And that was a good performer compared to other pieces in their first sales run."

Now I certainly don't suggest that every choir director should pick a recommended piece. The worship plans for CS programs aim to give many flexible options. And not every congregation participated in *Welcome Home*. But this anecdote and others suggest that our churches could improve their *walking together* partnership with NPH. This article shows why and how one church musician partners with NPH.

This article is not a NPH ad masquerading as a WTL article. It's a call to action to strengthen a ministry partnership that serves us all. My prayer is that this article will build understanding and awareness so that congregations will intentionally partner with NPH.

Bryan Gerlach
Director, Commission on Worship

This article is ... a call to action to strengthen a ministry partnership that serves us all.

From Jeremy

Why Northwestern Publishing House? Hopefully that question piques your curiosity. "Why NPH?" could be qualified in many ways. Why that name? Why that ministry? Why shop there? Which one will this article address? Read on.

Buy American

In today's consumer culture, what, where, and why we buy are topics on the minds of marketing researchers, retailers, and consumers. "You need this," expressed in any number of ways, identifies the what and the why according to the marketer or retailer. Once that seed is planted and accepted by consumers, *where* we buy it is the last step in the process. And that fact is not lost on marketers and retailers either. Once they've convinced us to buy, they hope that we will buy *from them*. Where we buy has its own why.

Amazon has wired us to believe that we should buy from them because we don't have to leave home and they deliver "free" in two days. (It's not free; it comes out of your Prime fee). Many a company has used guilt, pride, or patriotism to convince us to "Buy American." The customer gains an advantage or does some good by purchasing from said company. We neglect a greater good or meaningful identity if we don't. What and why we buy may be first on our minds, but where we buy isn't far behind.

The Bottom Line

What does this have to do with worship and gospel ministry? WELS has "a subsidiary corporation named Northwestern

Publishing House.” This publishing ministry must “function as a self-supporting, self-funded operation” (WELS Constitution and Bylaws, 7.00f). WELS’ ministry of the Word includes a ministry of the published Word. But NPH is not funded like other ministries of the synod, by gifts and offerings distributed from the synod’s operating budget. Rather, it has a business bottom line. Consider that again: *the publishing ministry of WELS is funded on a business model.*

The synod has a publishing ministry only if people buy materials from their synod publisher.

Here enters an interesting conundrum. The what, why, and where of NPH are of two natures: ministry *and* business. The what and why of ministry are not hard to understand: publishing biblically sound materials. The what and why of business are also not hard to understand; they are the same as the what and why of ministry. But where . . . *where* is the key. And it is the key to both facets of the nature of NPH. From a ministry standpoint, NPH is where you find biblically sound materials. That’s so important; every resource, every time—biblically sound. But from a business standpoint, *NPH will continue to be the place for biblically sound resources only if WELS people purchase resources from NPH.* Yes, NPH has a business bottom line. But *the* bottom line—the most important reality—is that the synod has a publishing ministry only if people buy materials from their synod publisher. Often. Consistently. *Intentionally.*

A Different Ballpark

NPH has a ministry partnership with WELS members but also a business-consumer relationship. Which one is more important—for NPH and for the members of WELS? When the only relationship is one of business-consumer, where we buy is based on factors like price, brand, and loyalty earned from the consumer. Where you buy groceries, clothes, cars, lightbulbs is based largely on a business-consumer relationship. “Give me the best price and high quality. Woo me into giving you my business. Make me the center of your universe, and I will patronize you.”



A business lives or dies on customer purchases. From a business standpoint, this is important to NPH as well. Your synod’s publisher wants to give you the best price it can. It wants to offer you quality. And because this publishing ministry is funded on a business model, the ministry lives or dies on ministry partners’ purchases.

But do you notice something about that last statement? We’re in a different ballpark. Though funded on a business model, *NPH is a ministry.* Though funded by sales, our customers are also *ministry partners.* And that casts a very different light on purchases from NPH. Now the “consumer” isn’t supporting a business so that its employees stay employed and its owners make a profit; the ministry partner “consumers” are ensuring that the ministry of the printed Word flourishes. Additionally, customer ministry partners are not just benefiting their own world; profits from their purchases go back into producing more resources that benefit others throughout the world. And this benefit is spiritual; it’s eternal. Yes, we’re definitely in a different ballpark when we view NPH not only as a business but more so as a ministry; when we view ourselves not as consumers, but as ministry partners.

Though funded by sales, NPH customers are also ministry partners.

What Does This Mean?

It’s the Lutheran question, right? Let’s get to nuts and bolts . . . everyday purchase decisions about music and worship resources (and other ministry resources).

One of the best commissions from the 2017 WELS worship conference was “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” by John Behnke. It’s masterfully crafted, combining original but highly complementary material (both music and biblical text) with a cherished Luther hymn. It is accessible without being simplistic, artful without being esoteric. And it was published by Concordia Publishing House. *Solely from a business-consumer standpoint,* a WELS choir director could order directly from CPH—the order might arrive faster. Or they could order this and music from other publishers through a one-stop-shop reseller like J. W. Pepper—it’s convenient.

Or they could order from NPH. The price is the same, but it might take longer. And it might require placing multiple orders during the year. So if some of the business-consumer benefits don’t seem to be there, why purchase this title from NPH? *Enter the ministry partner aspect.* A portion of your purchase through NPH remains with NPH, supporting its publishing ministry. It helps NPH publish more of its own music titles, composed by our own WELS composers, designed with WELS worship doctrine and practice in mind. It helps NPH publish other worship materials, like hymnals and seasonal kits. It even helps publish broader ministry materials—devotionals; Bible commentaries; personal evangelism growth books; focused ministry resources for dealing with addiction, cancer, pornography, challenges to the Christian worldview.

My Ministry Partnership with NPH

From David

In my early years at Pilgrim, I worked with church leadership to establish a sufficient budget to support a growing and vibrant music ministry. I was very conscious about getting the most “bang for my buck,” so I’m definitely guilty of trying to shop smart by ordering directly from some other publisher or heading over to J.W. Pepper for the one-stop-shop experience that Jeremy referenced.

Fast forward a few years. Our congregation now has a supportive music budget. This, combined with a few members who work for NPH, got me thinking, “Why don’t I order all this music through NPH and support our synod’s publishing arm?” NPH and Pilgrim are *ministry* partners, so why not support NPH for providing excellent resources to use in both church and school?

I plan all my choral music during the summer months, so I am in no rush to receive it unless a last-minute change arises. Thus began a relationship with Jeremy and NPH. The “slower part” of the church year is ideal for advance planning. Work with your pastor(s) and other musicians to develop some sort of worship grid that allows everyone to be on the same page. The best worship takes place when planning is done in advance; not at the last second.¹

Jeremy and I have worked on various music projects for WELS which have led me to order both junior and adult choir music directly from NPH. Our choirs sing regularly for worship, so we need a healthy music library each year. NPH has always been extremely reliable and professional. Once the order has been fulfilled, I am able to go directly to CMM to pick up the music or have Jeremy bring it to Pilgrim when we have a recording session for the hymnology curriculum.

This article includes a link to a simple order form ([worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-hymnal-introduction-series/](http://welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-hymnal-introduction-series/)) that I have sent to Jeremy. Some choir directors

might see this as extra work. It really isn’t. You are already taking time to explore various websites to find music that you need. Why not take a few extra minutes to support NPH? The benefits of *walking together* certainly go far beyond a dollar amount.

Most of our congregations average less than 100 people in worship each weekend. This often means limited musical resources. So how does this article apply to small congregations? In addition to serving as choir director, I am also one of the congregation’s organists. I keep up with new releases from various publishers. **NPH does a marvelous job of filling orders for my personal keyboard library.** A similar order form like the one mentioned earlier could be used for adding new music to your personal or church collections. Note the list of publishers below and order new music from these publishers through NPH. Minimal effort and planning can allow any church musician to *walk together* with NPH.

If you serve in a setting where you play organ or piano for no compensation or honorarium, this article can serve as an encouragement for your congregation to provide a line item in the budget for purchasing new keyboard music. All too often I hear from church musicians who feel that their church doesn’t support their work. My encouragement to fellow musicians is to practice patience when working with church leadership. A congregation’s budget is pulled in many valuable directions. A healthy music budget is not going to happen overnight or during one or two budget meetings. Congregations need to know *why* a healthy music budget is important and *how* this budget is vital for ministry. Church leaders need to be educated by their musicians on the cost of choral octavos and piano/organ/instrumental resources. Solid communication will alleviate frustration and confusion when budget time comes.

May God continue to bless our congregations as we *walk together* in all aspects of ministry.

¹ Find help for worship planning here <https://worship.welsrc.net/downloads-worship/worship-planning/>

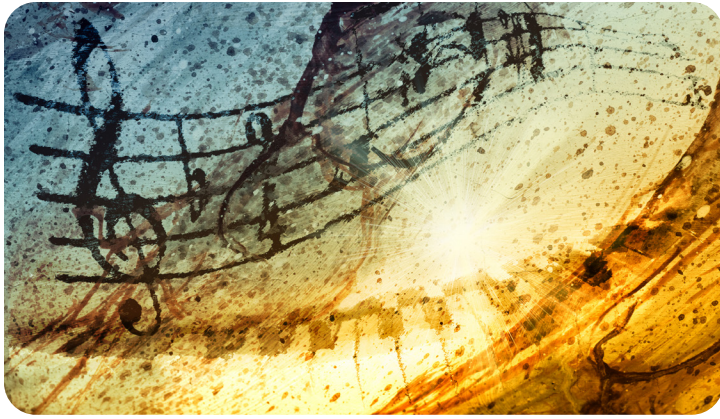
Wider selection and one-stop shopping at J. W. Pepper is a nice *consumer* benefit; supporting the work of your synod’s publishing ministry is of great *spiritual* benefit.

Consider a more intentional ministry partnership with your synod’s publisher. NPH is a reseller. We carry and are able to order music from the following publishers:

- Alfred Music
- Augsburg Fortress
- Beckenhorst Press
- Choristers Guild
- Concordia Publishing House
- Floeter Music

- GIA Publications
- Hal Leonard (and subsidiaries, like Shawnee Press)
- Hope Publishing
- Kjos
- Lorenz (and subsidiaries, like Word Music, Sacred Music Press)
- MorningStar Music

Whenever you find something from one of these publishers that you wish to purchase, order through NPH! It doesn’t even have to be listed on the NPH website. Simply call us (800.662.6022) or email us (orders@nph.wels.net), and we can special order the titles you want. Our retail price is the same as the source publisher. Planning ahead ensures that you can compensate for any extra



delivery time. Most importantly, a portion of your purchase supports the NPH publishing ministry—*your* publishing ministry as a member of WELS.

Some statistics may help to drive home this point. Regardless of whether the music was published by NPH or elsewhere, two statistics are striking. A 2018 survey conducted by NPH revealed that about 70% of WELS churches have an active church choir. But a review of five years of purchasing activity by WELS churches revealed that only about 20% purchased choral music from NPH. Again, what does this mean? To be sure, it is unreasonable to expect lock-step loyalty, to expect that every church will purchase their worship resources only and always from NPH. But is it reasonable to expect that a majority will? Think of how much more sacred music publishing ministry could be done if 60% of WELS churches with active choirs intentionally partnered with NPH for their choral music ministry by making their music purchases through NPH.

Is the business-consumer experience at NPH as good as elsewhere? Perhaps not. But here is a reality: When your synod publisher is first and foremost dedicated to materials built on sound doctrine, that means your denomination constitutes your primary supporters. Running a top-notch publishing house costs the same whether for 100 people or a million people. Historically, the WELS “customer base” has supported the baseline funding needed for its publishing ministry to be a premier publishing house. But there are some realities to be aware of. WELS is shrinking, which means fewer people partnering with NPH. The

digital age has affected NPH, making it much easier for WELSers to compare NPH to other publishers, and at times, to be disappointed with NPH or envious of what other publishers offer. Some have even become content with using other publishers’ materials, requiring vigilance for doctrinal error or (hopefully not) being content with “I guess it can be understood correctly.” These factors mean fewer people partnering with NPH.

Why do I share all this? Because I want you to know how deeply your publisher cares about our ministry relationship. We don’t want your *business*. We want your *support*, even as we exist to support you. We want your *partnership*, even as we exist to partner with you. We want ministry to flourish—your personal ministry, your local ministry, your synod’s publishing ministry. And we do that together—ministry partners via a business-consumer relationship.

What does this mean? NPH will continue to make available music and worship resources that are **biblically sound, excellently produced, and carefully curated**. Your synod publisher does this so that you have resources to use with confidence, ease, and joy. Joy not because you got the best deal or the fastest service (though we will strive for these), but joy because together we’re bringing the Word of God to a world that so desperately needs it.

Pastors, I encourage you to have a meeting with the musicians who serve your church. Send them a link to this article in advance. Then discuss the article—leading, we hope, to agreement: “This makes perfect sense. I’ll order as much as possible from NPH in the future.” David Porth is happy to answer questions from pastors or musicians: dporth@pilgrimcares.org. He can walk musicians through the process of developing a music budget.

Musicians, when you purchase musical resources from NPH—both items published by NPH and items from other publishers via special order—your *walking together* with others from over a thousand congregations will increase NPH’s ability to provide supporting products for everything from synodwide initiatives to resources that support a new hymnal. *BG*

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David teaches Grades 7-8 and is Music Director at Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Menomonee Falls, WI. A graduate of Martin Luther College, he also holds the Master of Church Music degree from Concordia University, Wisconsin. He has been ordering all choral and personal music through NPH for the last few years.