



Getting to Know the Hymnal Really Well

By Bryan Gerlach (Director, Commission on Worship)

It was an unusual couple that inquired about getting married at the church I served—St. Mark, Citrus Heights, CA, a beautiful newer church large enough for their guest list and conveniently located in suburban Sacramento. Farhad was Iranian. He had left the country for grad school before the 1978 revolution and could not return. Samira was the daughter of an Iranian woman and an American Air Force officer. One reason they picked my church was because she thought she had a Lutheran uncle somewhere in North Dakota.

Farhad was a theist without a religion since he had abandoned Islam. I offered the standard encouragement: we're eager to serve your spiritual needs not only on your wedding day but also before and after. That appealed to them. They signed up for the Bible Information Class and began attending worship. After they had been in worship two weeks in a row, I offered to meet with them to help them understand the logic and flow of worship. Farhad replied that it wouldn't be necessary because the service was clear enough.

That reply surprised me. I'm sure that there was much he needed to learn—especially the spiritual truths. But I believed him when he said the logic and flow were clear enough.

While there is benefit in making it effortless to follow liturgical worship, there's also benefit in helping people get to know the hymnal really well. A little effort toward this goal is a good thing. When I saw comments by Kirk Lahmann in the January *Forward in Christ* (p. 24), I asked him to expand on his thinking and rationale. If two Iranians could comfortably follow the order of service from the hymnal, longer-term Lutherans can as well.

Of course, many congregations will already have introduced the new hymnal by the time you read this article. Still, there are times when the Burlington strategy might serve such congregations: 1) when introducing a new setting of the communion service, or 2) on occasions when there is such little variety planned for the service (like an alternate psalm from the psalter) that the order of service is followed in a fairly straightforward manner.

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The viability of worshiping “just from the hymnal” is also a useful reminder for those congregations that do not want to obtain *Service Builder*. With changes in the copyright and permissions landscape over the last decade, the new hymnal project is not able to provide TIFF files as with CW93 and CWS apart from *Service Builder*. And it is not legal for someone to create their own graphics by scanning something in the hymnal. See more detailed comments in “Service Builder, personal scans, and copyrights” available under Resources at christianworship.com.

Navigating the Book

By Kirk Lahmann (Pastor at St. John, Burlington, WI)

Late 1993. Time for Sunday morning worship, using the brand-new *Christian Worship* hymnal. Sing the opening hymn. Now find page 12 for the baptism. When that's done, flip ahead to page 16 and merge into the Common Service at the “Gloria.” Find the First Lesson (and all the lessons) printed on the back of the simple “bulletin” handout. (Think letter paper, folded into a booklet: front page, pretty picture; back page, Scripture readings; middle pages, church announcements, and maybe hymn numbers.) Next, find Psalm 25 on page 74. Back to the bulletin for the Second Lesson; then return to page 18 for the Alleluias. Now things start to feel a little more familiar for a while, until after the Lord's Prayer. There's no Communion, so turn to page 25. But wait, there's a hymn. Sing that, now turn back to page 25 for the concluding liturgy. Finally, page ahead to the closing hymn.

Confusing? A little like one of those choose-your-own ending books? That's what it was like when the "new hymnal" came out in 1993.

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Actually, I didn't think it was all that hard. At 10 years old, it didn't take me very long to figure out how to navigate the book. I thought it was exciting for our church to be getting a new hymnal. But I remember some adults complaining about how confusing it was to navigate the book. Most of that was probably just a personal aversion to change. And plenty of people dearly loved the old blue hymnal. (Or was yours black? Or red? Our church had red.)

At almost 40 years old now, I'm young enough to have never led worship as a pastor with *The Lutheran Hymnal*, but I am old enough to remember the transition to *Christian Worship*. And I remember it well. Before the service started, my pastors would actually practice using the new hymnal with the congregation. Five minutes before the bells would ring, they would teach worshipers how to find and how to sing the psalm. Or the organist would play through "O Lord, Our Lord" or some other new liturgical music, and the congregation would practice singing it before worship. As a student in our Lutheran elementary school, I remember our teachers helping us learn the new hymnal. My class introduced the new "Magnificat" (pages 57-58) in a children's Christmas service. In school we often used the general and morning devotions (pages 150-152), as well as the personal prayers (pages 134-139). In catechism class our pastors walked us through the Communion preparation page (page 156).

We learned how to navigate the book. We learned that the hymnal is not just a book of hymns, but a collection of devotional resources. Yes, there were some growing pains, and even some complaints. But we learned how to navigate the book.

Now it's time to learn how to navigate another new book. With the new *Christian Worship* recently released, and congregations replacing the old red CWs with the new blue ones, it's time for pastors to teach worshipers how to utilize all the resources the new



hymnal provides, so that, whether in the sanctuary or in the home, we know how to navigate the book.

But how? What's the best way to learn how to make use of this new resource? Should we just print the entire order of worship in a service folder, like we've done for several years? That would keep things simple and would eliminate the need to flip back and forth through the book: from this page, to that hymn, back to this page. And should we keep printing all the hymns in the service folder, as our church has done since COVID started? That would basically eliminate the use of the hymnal in worship altogether. And if we don't even use the hymnal for worship, then why spend \$12,000 to stock the sanctuary with almost 500 books? And, most importantly, how will we ever learn how to navigate the book?

Certainly there are lots of good ways to introduce the new *Christian Worship* hymnal to WELS worshipers. But here's what my congregation is planning to do, with the goal of learning how to navigate the book.

Instead of printing full service folders, we will produce a simple worship outline. This outline will include the focus for the day, page references for the order of service, Scripture readings printed in full, and hymn numbers. It will be a simple, double-sided worship card, printed on cardstock, that will double as a bookmark, so that when you flip from the order of service to a hymn or psalm, you don't lose your place. Instead of a large service folder being the primary worship guide with the hymnal as only an assistant, now the hymnal will once again be the primary worship guide, and the worship card will be the assistant.

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There are, admittedly, down sides to this approach. Full service folders are awfully convenient! And they weigh less in frail hands. And they are customizable. And it sounds like there are many digital resources in the *Service Builder* app, like additional service settings and many psalm settings from the new psalter, that we won't be able to use when we print these worship cards.

But the main advantage to producing a simple worship outline, rather than using a full service folder, is this: we will learn how to navigate the book. We will hold the hymnal in our hands as we sing the opening hymn. Together we will turn to page 154 and walk through Setting One of The Service. The Scriptures will be right in front of us on the worship card. After the First Reading we will bookmark page 160, then flip back a few pages to the Psalm of the Day, then easily return for the Gospel Acclamation. Bookmarking will continue for the rest of the service's hymns. And we will learn how to navigate the book.

We will be patient with one another as we learn the new book. The pastors will give more thorough explanations on which page to turn to next and will give people more time to get there. Maybe before (or during) worship, we will practice singing a new psalm or

liturgical music setting. We will listen carefully and follow along with the notes in the hymnal as the organist plays (or the choir sings) the melody before we join to sing. But we will learn how to navigate the book.

We will give copies of the new hymnal to the children in our Lutheran school—many of whom have only ever known service folders for worship—and their teachers will help them learn the book. Maybe the students will sing the new “Magnificat” (page 219) for a children’s Christmas service. Maybe the teachers will lead their students in the Daily Devotions (pages 236-243) throughout the school day. In catechism class the pastors will direct their students to the Christian Questions (pages 295-296), walk them through the church year, and explain the lectionary (pages VII-XXVIII). And they will learn how to navigate the book.

And there may be some growing pains, even complaints. Change is hard, and many people have come to dearly love the red *Christian Worship*. The new hymnal is new to all of us, and it will take some time to get used to it. So we want to learn it together. We want to page through it together, follow the liturgy from it together, sing the hymns and the psalms from it together. We want to learn how to navigate the book.

For now, it’s time to embrace the wealth of devotional resources that the hardcover hymnal offers.

And we won’t use those worship cards forever. I’m sure we will return to printed service folders eventually. We don’t want to miss out on all the digital psalm settings from the psalter and the additional service settings that *Service Builder* offers. But we can grow into those over time. For now, it’s time to embrace the wealth of devotional resources that the hardcover hymnal offers. It’s time to teach our young children, our newer members, and our seasoned parishioners how to follow the liturgy in the hymnal. It’s time to learn how to use the new *Christian Worship* in our homes and in our public worship. It’s time to learn how to navigate the book.

Comfortably introducing new material

In the weeks when this article was being drafted and edited, a new hymn was sung for the first time. The accompaniment didn’t make it clear when to start. There was no soloist for stanza 1. An instrumental descant made it even more difficult for the non-music-reader to discern the melody. It went okay, but it could have gone even better.

A good principle to follow is not “What can I get away with?” but “How many people can I bring along?” Even in a congregation with higher-than-average musical literacy (more people can quickly



learn a new tune), it’s best to use a soloist or choir on “stanzas one and three” or when first introducing a new liturgical canticle. Our concern is not only for the fast learners but also for those less able to enjoy their first exposure to something new.

The more we can diminish discomfort, the more every worshiper can concentrate on worship and benefit from the new music and the message proclaimed by new texts.

Pastor Adam Mueller, chair of the hymnal introduction committee comments: “Don’t eat the elephant in one bite, introduce carefully and with patience, use choirs and soloists, preview a new hymn in Bible class where you can also highlight some great thoughts in the text. Our excitement over shiny new materials needs to be tempered by pastoral concern for the person in the pew. We want to minimize frustrating people or leaving them behind.”

The Year C Planner was provided with careful pacing in mind, calling attention to hymns or canticles that benefit from extra introductory effort. It’s available at welscongregationalservices.net/the-foundation.

Avoiding a generic tempo

What is a generic tempo? Stated a bit simplistically, it’s treating quarter notes in every hymn as if they should be played at the same pace. But the pulse of a short common meter English hymn tune like ST. ANNE (820) is much slower than a 17th century German chorale like its neighbor, VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN (819). Their half notes are at 45 and 55 respectively.

This problem of singing some tunes too fast has been exacerbated by the idea that a hymn will be more appealing if played faster—more upbeat. It depends. Often the affect isn’t more upbeat but rather rushed or flippant. Hymn singing has been helped in this regard by modern hymn writers. While many modern hymns have an upbeat tempo, some have a slow and meditative tempo: “The Power of the Cross” (423), “Jesus, Ever-Abiding Friend” (536), “Lord, Have Mercy” (652), “Beneath the Cross” (710), “My Worth Is Not in What I Own” (753), “All Is Well” (802), “Now Calm Your

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Heart" (851). All of these might risk being played too fast without knowing the song or consulting the tempo indication. The same is true for the "Agnus Dei" in both Setting Two and Setting Three.

Organists and pianists can gain a sense of the intended tempo from two sources.

1. The accompaniment editions for services, hymns, and psalms include metronome markings. Use them! While it is true that a personal preference for a different tempo might be musically legitimate, it's also good to follow the composer's intent or a tempo that is somewhat standard.
2. Recorded examples can help musicians to become comfortable with the intended tempo. Many are available on YouTube. Recordings of the main songs from The Service, Setting Three are posted at welscongregationalservices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources.

Recorded examples can also help pastors who desire help with singing the "Kyrie" and Preface. See the following from Grace Milwaukee's YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/c/gracedowntownorg/featured. Find "Worship Services" halfway down the page under "Created Playlists."

- Setting Two, Nov. 28: "Kyrie" at 22:15, Preface at 58:30.
- Setting Three, Oct. 24: "Kyrie" at 16:30, Preface at 59:15.



Out of the Book

By Jon Zabell (Pastor at St. Paul, Green Bay, WI and chair of hymnal committee)

We began introducing the new hymnal on the first Sunday of Advent, 2021. It made our job of introduction easier to make use of our synod's suggested plan and introductory scripts for worship. Our usual practice at St. Paul is to print the whole service out in the bulletin each week except for the hymns and psalm. But we decided that for introductory purposes we would invite worshipers to follow the order of service out of the book, just for the first few weeks. Since it's a new hymnal, we wanted people paging through it, becoming familiar with everything between the covers. And it was a tangible way to demonstrate that we're connected. Bulletins vary from congregation to congregation, but the same new hymnal is being introduced around the synod.

How did it go? Judging by the volume of congregational speaking and singing, people followed along just fine. It helped that we used Setting One of The Service for four weeks in a row. Most of the music from that setting is a known quantity from The Common Service. Worshiping out of the book did mean a few minutes more preparation for the presider. Each week I needed to have my pages marked and ready ahead of time, and I tried to anticipate where people who were accustomed to having everything laid out for them might need a brief verbal cue, especially when moving from first reading to psalm and back to second reading. After the services, a number of people expressed their appreciation for the new book—its look, its pagination system, its content—the book they'd all been paging through together, from invocation through blessing. More important is what we were able to do together that is anything but new. Sins were confessed, the gospel was proclaimed, and prayers were offered in the name of Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.