



## Worship Coordinators Carry Christ to the Heart

By Debra Price

With emphasis on Reformation 500, the 2017 National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts brought hundreds together to focus on Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Scripture Alone. Exuberant worship used various instruments—the bright sound of the trumpet, the lustrous tones of the violin and (one of my new favorites) the loud clank of the tire wheel during Dan Forrest's setting of "A Mighty Fortress"<sup>1</sup>. Each service was meticulously planned to center around the theme of the service, yet everything was put in place to focus on Christ Alone.

Attendees received a worship folder—really a 218-page booklet with all the services and much more. For each service it included a description "About the Service"—useful information to focus the mind and give background knowledge on what was about to be experienced. The "worship folders" had everything necessary to participate in worship, including spoken responses and melody lines to sing. They included lists of service participants: pastors, organists/pianists, directors, and a long roster of instrumentalists. They also included acknowledgments and licenses for copyrighted selections.

Hmm.... How was all of that so brilliantly **coordinated**? What an incredibly well-done task! Behind the scenes, service orders were planned, hymn and psalm variations were chosen, music was sent to instrumentalists, practiced, and put together in rehearsals. The glorious sounds of the worship conference came from well-prepared instrumentalists, trained choral voices, and hundreds of worshipers in the assembly. The personnel to put together a conference with services of this magnitude included a dedicated planning committee to oversee the intricate details of the service plans.

Could a service like this happen in your church this weekend? While not on this level, God has blessed every congregation with resources for enriching worship. God has given unique gifts and talents to every member of the body of Christ. Are we using all of them to the best of our ability to his glory? Are we doing everything we can to prepare for worship as we would for other important events in our lives—a birthday party, a graduation

### Please share!

Pastors, please share this issue with church musicians or point them to the online version at [worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-practical-series](http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-practical-series). If you are a church musician (whether you have the title of coordinator or not), this article describes your passion and mission. See also an earlier series on planning: [worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/wtl-worship-planning](http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/wtl-worship-planning)

celebration, or even company coming over for dinner? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. And everything you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17).

At some WELS congregations, a person is called or hired to coordinate worship. Together with the pastor, the worship coordinator helps select the service orders, schedule choirs/instrumentalists, and submit license information. Worship

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coordinators spend time behind the scenes to make worship the best that it can be. At the worship conference three worship coordinators were chosen to lead a presentation on their work. While their congregations' characteristics may vary from yours, the goals can be the same.

## Worship is enriched through musical proclamation of the Word

Martin Luther wrote, "When God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together."<sup>2</sup> Worship in every WELS church is centered entirely on the Word of God. However, in an hour-long service, how much of the Word is retained, set to memory, and applied to the worshiper's life? In an ideal situation, worshipers would take home the readings and hymns and study them devotionally throughout the week. But, that's most likely not the case. Members are sometimes sidetracked in worship, thinking of the last phrase that was spoken or distracted by an unfamiliar melody. Beautiful sections of Scripture sometimes don't receive the focused attention that they deserve. The words of a hymn can flow by without enough thought about meaning or with scant musical variation to highlight meaning.

For instance, I have sung "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (CW 125) and thought, "What a nice Lenten hymn," as all four stanzas were sung at the same volume and registration. But could something be done to encourage worshipers to look at the cross on or behind the altar? Could "forbid it, Lord, that I should boast" be sung softly from a humble heart that knows it doesn't deserve to be in the Lord's presence? Is there a reed stop on the organ to emphasize the agony, suffering, and affliction produced by the nails and crown of thorns? What if every worshiper sang at full volume the phrase "demands my soul, my life, my all"?

Attention to creative or expressive musical nuances in worship has one simple goal: "The primary objective of music is to carry Christ to the heart.... God placed a beautiful rainbow into the sky as a lasting testimony to his faithfulness. So also Christian artists use color, highlight, and texture to solidify in the heart the message of God's grace. The Creator has also enabled Christian musicians to join to basic musical sounds rhythm, dynamics, tempo, timbre, pitch, and style so they may touch the heart as they proclaim the gospel."<sup>3</sup>

## Planning allows integration of musical selections with readings and themes

In a helpful article summarizing the benefits of a music coordinator, Pastor Phil Casmer wrote: "We know that nothing we do this side of heaven will be as glorious as what we'll experience there where God is with his people—present in glory realized. And yet, we also know that we are given the wonderful opportunity to receive the encouragement of his Word and to bless his name in worship every week. It may be that a music coordinator is

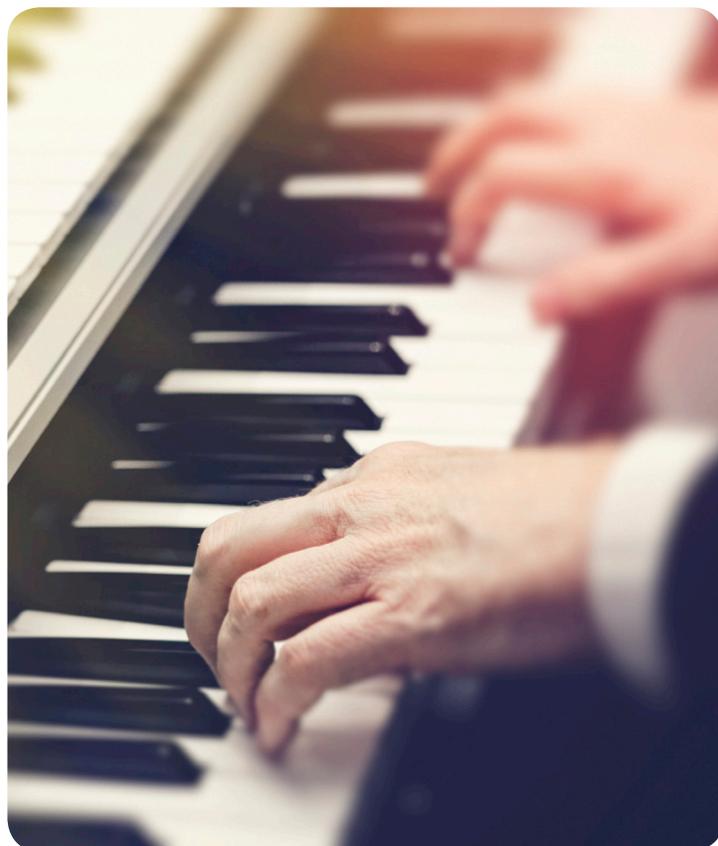
something that serves to help you do that. Yes or no, worship is a worthy place to focus our time and resources and energy, a worthy activity for our thought and attention."<sup>4</sup>

Pastor Casmer included some excellent points for consideration in his Q & A section at the end of the article. "Certainly there's something to be said for picking hymns on the basis of good text-study. At the same time, it's arguable that one could just as well have a sense of the thematic ideas of any Sunday in the Church Year and pick hymns to the same effect.... Chances are good that

### Examples of worship planning

Sample worship plans from various churches are available here: [worship.welsrc.net/downloads-worship/worship-planning](http://worship.welsrc.net/downloads-worship/worship-planning). These can be a starting point for creating a customized plan for any church not currently doing this type of longer range planning.

See also from the 2014 worship conference "Working Smarter at Worship" by Jon Bauer and Caleb Bassett: [bit.ly/workingsmarterhandout](http://bit.ly/workingsmarterhandout)





## Coordination promotes musical excellence in worship

What is musical excellence? I'd argue that it is simply giving God our best. "And shall man alone be still? Has he neither breath nor skill? No, the Church delights to raise psalms and hymns and songs of praise" (CW 222:4). "It is the church musician's duty before God to practice and perform with the best of his abilities. He ought to do nothing mechanically, by habit, lightly, or casually. Everything in the service ought to be done by decision, with thought and prayer."<sup>5</sup>

This does not mean only the most talented can serve in worship. Rather, whatever gifts have been given should be used to the best of one's ability. What musical gifts and talents has God given members of your congregation? Encourage members to wipe the dust off the instruments they learned as a child. Your flute players may not be able to play a challenging instrumental line of a choir anthem, but they can certainly praise God and enrich his people's worship by playing the melody of a hymn. For example, if you can raise "Lamb of God" (CWS 748) an octave, the C-C range with no sharps or flats may be a beautiful choice for a beginning flautist. And be ready to invest a bit of time to coach willing players who need some help on anything from reading rhythms to improved intonation.

organists would appreciate a few weeks' time to prepare hymns and other music rather than cramming it all in 24 hours before worship starts. Why not give it a try? ... A worship plan lets you think ahead and take time for good preparation. But it also gives you flexibility. If you've done good planning, small changes don't rock the ship as much because there's other preparation to rely on. Your organist might feel better about a last-minute hymn change when she's well-prepared for the other three. On the other hand, we pastors might also consider whether we sometimes make participants slaves to our whims by making worship prep a week-by-week exploration."

When worship is planned well, it is a team approach. Our church's planning begins with the pastor who brings worship planning pages to the Worship Committee. The committee looks at the theme of the services, the Scripture readings, sermon texts, hymn suggestions, and any special items that will be included in the services that weekend. Since directors have these pages well in advance, they can select choir anthems that closely match the sermon theme. They can plan liturgy and psalm variations along with special presentation of some hymns. A well-planned worship folder can assure that everyone involved with worship knows exactly what is happening when. The worship coordinator can place anthems in spots that provide an edifying service flow. All the tasks of the Worship Committee are founded on the goal to "carry Christ to the heart" with services planned as well as possible.

### Excellence in worship

Perhaps for most of us the [national worship] conference is a triennial battery charge—an inspirational encouragement to return to small and medium and large parishes...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!

*From a welcome letter at the 2017 WELS worship conference. The full letter is available at the link in endnote 7.*

## Encouragement trains future generations of church musicians

Our Sunday school recently sang the first verse of “To God Be the Glory” (CW 399). Those words were taught to children to edify the service. However, one Kindergartener who sang for the service also sang those words to me on our way to school. She informed me that with the help of her Kindergarten teacher, the Sunday school kids would help the others in the class learn the words. Lutheran elementary schools, Sunday schools, and early childhood ministries have an incredible opportunity to teach children biblical truths through song, truths they will carry with them the rest of their lives.

Training musicians at a young age is close to my heart. My mom taught me how to play the piano and continually bought new music for me. My fourth-grade teacher encouraged me to play hymns for the class and to accompany the Junior Choir. She made it seem fun and not intimidating. My dad introduced me to the organ and said it would help if I’d play while he went to communion. Congregation members encouraged me to continue through their positive feedback, and I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to play for worship ever since.

Is there someone you can influence? You may never know who takes your words to heart. Yet, behind every musician, there is often someone who inspired the use of those musical gifts for God’s glory.

### Involving teens

True story, details altered. Maria and her family recently moved and transferred membership from a mid-size congregation. Gifted at playing the oboe, she had won a top rating at the statewide high school solo/ensemble event. What a surprise to discover that she had never been asked to play at her previous church! Two opportunities were missed: 1) to show that her musical contribution was valuable, and 2) to share her gift with others. Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:21.

## An overview of the position

What exactly does a worship coordinator do? The answer to that question is as varied as each congregation. At the 2017 worship conference, three coordinators put their ideas together to lead a roundtable discussion of the position. The three were Lisa Uttech (Christ the Lord, Brookfield, WI), Levi Nagel<sup>6</sup> (St John, S 68th St,

Milwaukee, WI) and Debbie Price (St Peter, Schofield, WI). An overview of their duties, schedules, and resources is available online.<sup>7</sup>

There is already someone at your church who does some of this work behind the scenes, whether it’s the pastor, church administrator, or someone else. But inaugurating the position of worship coordinator—with title, job description, and possibly a divine call—identifies that work as being important to your congregation and its mission. There is always room to grow. Look at what you already do and see where there is room for improvement. Could you add a worship education note to explain various elements of worship?<sup>8</sup> Would an instrumental or vocal arrangement help your congregation learn a new hymn? How frequently is there “special music” in your worship? A worship coordinator can help to increase this frequency, contributing more often the spiritual impact of God’s Word set to music—carrying Christ to the heart.

I pray the posted resources will benefit you and your congregation. My efforts may not compare to the talented individuals who plan the services of a national worship conference. But God puts us where we need to be to serve him and his people in that place. St. Paul teaches us, “He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

“Before You I Kneel (A Worker’s Prayer)” by Getty, Getty, Taylor, and Townend is a favorite prayer of mine as I begin my daily tasks. (Easy to find online.) Whether your congregation is large or small, all of us who plan worship have the glorious message of the gospel to share. May all the talents of God’s people be used to carry Christ to many hearts through music in our worship!

<sup>1</sup> This is included on the double CD of highlights from the worship conference: <http://online.nph.net/music-video/cds/wels-worship-conference.html>. Choral score: <http://online.nph.net/a-mighty-fortress-is-our-god-1.html>  
To view the conference’s opening festival concert or closing worship service, visit [livestream.com/welslive](http://livestream.com/welslive).

<sup>2</sup> *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 53, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Worship Manual*, p. 57

<sup>4</sup> *Worship the Lord*, no. 68, September 2014. Online at: [worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/wtl-practical-ideas-worship](http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/wtl-practical-ideas-worship)

<sup>5</sup> *Christian Worship Manual*, p. 61

<sup>6</sup> If you missed it, check out Levi Nagel’s WELS Connection video update: [wels.net/news-media/together](http://wels.net/news-media/together)

<sup>7</sup> Sermons, presentation handouts, worship service folders, music downloads, and more from the 2017 National Worship Conference are all available FOR FREE at: [worship.welsrc.net/worship-conference-2017](http://worship.welsrc.net/worship-conference-2017)—useful information for organists, keyboardists, elders, council, choir directors, teachers, as well as for a pastor’s own personal study and growth.

<sup>8</sup> See samples at [worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-folder-notes](http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-folder-notes)