



Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

CONTEMPLATIVE WORSHIP IN A SMALL PARISH

“Isn’t Compline a service that only works in white collar congregations with white collar musicians and people who appreciate artsy things?” While most people agree that Compline (*Prayer at the Close of Day*) is a beautiful service, questions like this have come up at recent pastor conferences. To help answer these questions we turn to a small, rural, blue collar congregation in northern Michigan.

Brent Brutlag, pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Traverse City, Michigan, has used Compline occasionally

for three years. The worship setting has a typical chancel and nave, but for Compline they reconfigure the worship space as described below. In addition to using Compline for Advent and Lent, Brutlag has offered an occasional midweek evening service. Some of the ideas he describes can be used in a modified Evening Prayer service.

Brutlag’s article offers ideas for parishes that already know Compline and for those that don’t. If Compline is new to your parish, here’s a way to help people become familiar

with it. Teach selections to a core group of people at various meetings: boards, council, women’s group, even a Sunday morning Bible class. Those who have learned the service this way then lead others when Compline is first used for an actual service, perhaps for Advent later this year.

Bryan Gerlach

SLOW DOWN AND SAVOR THE GOODNESS OF OUR GOD

By Brent Brutlag

“Honey, I won’t be home until a little after 7:00 tonight.” “All right, but can you stop by the store and get some things? I’ll have to leave work early to take Johnny to soccer by 4:00, Jane to dance class by 4:30 and be at my aerobics by 5:00. Then I need to pick up Johnny and take him to karate, pick up Jane and take her to choir. By the time we get back it’s going to be after 8:00, and we don’t have anything in the fridge for dinner.” Sound familiar? It’s the typical family nightly routine. Where have gone the days when everybody met back at home for a nice evening meal, a family devotion, and good conversation? Reality says that for many people those days are long gone—even for my members in a small, rural parish.

In our busy society, whether it’s the doctor meeting with patients all day, the soccer mom driving her kids here, there and everywhere, or the factory laborer surrounded by the din of the shop and pressure to meet the quota, we all need to take time to slow down, to relax, and especially to contemplate the forgiveness won for us by our Savior. From art professors to carpenters, what believer wouldn’t appreciate this opportunity? What believer wouldn’t relish the chance,



after a busy and stressful day, to take a few moments and sit down at the table with his family and there be fed the life-giving meal of the gospel?

Doesn’t this meal deserve to be served in a better atmosphere than a fast-food restaurant? Is this the type of meal we want to gulp down in the car while driving? On the contrary, this is a special meal that we want to enjoy in a quiet, family atmosphere. This is a meal we want to slowly savor—enjoying every last morsel! But how can we do that in our busy

society? One way to help our members slow down and savor this meal is with contemplative worship.

Contemplative worship, as described in the introduction to this series, is “worship that is quieter, calmer, and slower-paced. This worship allows time to pause and reflect, time for wonder and awe. This worship doesn’t depend on an energetic leader or music for its appeal. Its power lies in a simple dialogue between God and his people with ample time for meditation.”

While all services centered on the means of grace have contemplative elements, one service is especially strong in this: *Prayer at the Close of Day* (CW: *New Service Settings*). *Prayer at the Close of Day* is designed to be meditative and quiet in nature. It is flexible enough to allow any number of options to aid in this goal. These options help the believer leave behind the frenzied distractions of a busy life and meditate on the peace and security of God’s forgiveness. For example: sometimes we use Compline with all the lights on, the pastor presiding from the chancel, and the liturgy and psalms responsively spoken rather than sung. Other times we use it with the lights dimmed, the presiding minister seated among the people in a presiding chair with a processional candle next to him, a small choir singing the liturgy and psalms, and the gentle melodies of the service played on a piano instead of an organ.

Another option is the seating arrangement of the congregation. Arranging seats into the shape of a “U,” or so that they face each other, reminds people of sitting around the family dinner table. The presiding minister sits at the “head of the table” as he serves his family the meal of the gospel. In our traditional church setting (separate chancel and nave) we accomplish this by setting up chairs between the chancel and first pew and then turning the chairs so that they all face the center aisle. People are then encouraged to sit in the chairs and only the front five or six pews to emphasize the family atmosphere. The goal of such a seating arrangement could even be accomplished outside the sanctuary, say in the fellowship hall following a pre-service meal. After the families have eaten and the plates are cleared, the service would begin. Musical accompaniment is optional in this setting. In fact a spoken version of Compline can be just as contemplative as a musical one—sometimes even more so.

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Whether you modify the seating or preside from a chair or adjust the lighting, the key to contemplative worship remains slowing down. The other changes are additional options that we have found helpful. Which options, if any, will be most useful for you? Only you will be able to decide; but the basic option of occasionally using *Prayer at the Close of Day* for evening services is beneficial—especially during the season of Advent, a time when everyone is extremely busy with secular activities. How many Advent sermons haven’t encouraged members to slow down and spend more time in contemplation and preparation for our coming Savior? If that is true, wouldn’t it be nice not just to *encourage* members to slow down and contemplate, but to actually help them do so with a contemplative service?

This year for midweek services, why not try something a little different? Here is an option for Midweek Advent services: 1) use *Prayer at the Close of Day* (adapted to your congregation), 2) select service themes for the series, 3) use three readings related to the service theme with a three to five minute law/gospel introduction for each reading, and then 4) observe one to three minutes of silence and meditation after each reading, perhaps followed by a hymn or selected stanzas. These options help support the meditative nature of the season by slowing things down and allowing members to come together at the family table to savor every last bite of the gospel.

Oh taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed are they who take refuge in him.

A midweek Advent series, giving additional services like the one on this page, is available at wels.net/worship. Also available is a sample Advent Compline worship folder from a WELS church in Oregon.

A CONTEMPLATIVE MIDWEEK ADVENT SERVICE

The content below occurs at the place of the Lesson.

Theme of the service:

YOUR DELIVERANCE IS NEAR

1st Reading: Isaiah 51:1-8

3-5 minute thematic sermonette: *The Lord said, “My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way.”*

1-3 minutes of silent meditation

1st Hymn: *Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes* (CW #12)



2nd Reading: Hebrews 10:19-25

3-5 minute thematic sermonette: *Jesus brought us near to God; let us draw near to him.*

1-3 minutes of silent meditation

2nd Hymn: *Jesus, Your Church with Longing Eyes* (CW #9)



3rd Reading: Luke 18:35-43

3-5 minute thematic sermonette: *When Jesus drew near, deliverance for body and soul was near.*

1-3 minutes of silent meditation

3rd Hymn: *The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us* (CW #10)

