



Worship the Lord

No.4, November 2003

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

LITURGY FOR THE LOST AND THE FOUND

With the goal of bringing clarity to discussions about worship in WELS, this newsletter has offered a practical definition of the liturgy: **The liturgy is an order of service formed in the Christian church of the West that consists of the Ordinary, the Proper, and the Meal.** Previous articles have proposed that the liturgy's primary objective is to proclaim the story of salvation. To do that the liturgy not only centers in Word and Sacraments but also uses prayer, praise, and confession as gospel proclamation. We've made the point that various artistic styles can carry the liturgy and that style isn't as important as the liturgy's gospel content. Finally, we've suggested that liturgical worship may be a wiser choice for Lutherans than the praise and worship formats common in some circles.

CAN THE LITURGY DO WHAT LUTHERANS WANT TO DO FOR THE LOST AND THE FOUND?

That was the question posed in the last issue of *Worship the Lord*. It's no secret that the liturgy is under scrutiny these days. Some suggest that a liturgical service be only one of several options congregations consider in their planning. Probably more than ever before, those who contend for the liturgy are asked to demonstrate that liturgical worship is able to offer what both seekers and members are looking for in worship.

The simple answer is yes. The liturgy does what we want to do for the lost and the found because it proclaims the gospel. There isn't a man among us who doesn't believe that the Holy Spirit works exclusively through the gospel to create, strengthen, and preserve faith. The liturgy becomes the Spirit's tool as it puts the means of grace into action in the Ordinary, Proper, and Meal.

The simple answer can also be simplistic however. The truth is that not all seekers or members walk through our church doors looking for the gospel. They may be looking for some spirituality they sense is missing in their lives, but they aren't at all convinced that everything they need is richly offered in Word and Sacrament. Not finding what they're looking for, they may be out the door as quickly as they entered. Furthermore, most of us will admit that worship in our own congregations doesn't always offer the gospel with consistent clarity. The liturgy's gospel content can be obscured by the sins and weaknesses of those who lead and participate in it.

We believe that the liturgy does what Lutherans want to do for the lost and the found because it highlights Word and Sacrament. But if liturgical worship is going to do what it intends to do, it has to deal with both flawed expectations and flawed participation. "Business as usual" has never been a good idea in worship planning, and it is an especially bad idea today.

CATECHESIS FOR THE LITURGY

WELS membership growth is flat. Some studies indicate that many of our losses are teens and young adults. Is liturgical worship the problem here, or have our young people come away from their religious education without a clear understanding of what to expect at public worship?

It's likely that our entire catechetical apparatus needs an infusion of worship education. Children and adults need to know biblical facts and stories; these prompt Christian faith and guide Christian life. But believers also need to know *what* they're doing at the Christian assembly and *why* they're doing it. We can hardly blame members for approaching public worship with flawed expectations if we've failed to mold their expectations in the first place.



Both sermon and Sacrament deliver the gospel.
2003 WELS convention opening service.

A means of grace mentality—a clear and deep understanding of how gospel and faith interact—deserves at least equal status with moral clarity on our list of desired educational outcomes. It is surely as important to know how faith *lives* as it is to know how faith *acts*.

We can't mold the expectations of those who come to worship from outside our congregations, and most pastors have seen guests leave worship puzzled by the liturgy. Exactly for that reason pastors and evangelism committees need to think about how worship fits into their congregation's overall evangelism strategy. For all of its gospel benefits, the liturgy won't be seen as having much value if people aren't looking for the gospel. Welcoming brochures, follow-up calls, Bible information classes, and everything else the congregation uses to attract the lost require an up-front confession not only of the gospel itself, but

also of the gospel's place in Christian witness. "We are a liturgical church" (explained, of course*) may be as important a statement as "We are a Bible-based church."

THE SERMON IN THE LITURGY

It cannot be repeated too often that the Sunday sermon is the most important thing a pastor does and that proclaiming specific law and specific gospel are the most important things a sermon does. It is simply incongruous that a sermon would stand between Word and Meal and lack the very thing Word and Meal offer. If the liturgy is to do what Lutherans want it to do, the sermon in the liturgy will be consistent with the liturgy's objective. As the sermon picks up the color and context of changing lectionary themes, preachers will avoid the trap of preaching the same old story in the same old way—often the source of deep dissatisfaction among worshipers.

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THE ARTS IN THE LITURGY

Studying worship patterns over the span of centuries reveals that Christians gathered on the Lord's Day and proclaimed the gospel through the medium of the fine arts. Martin Luther championed the use of the arts, especially music. Every WELS pastor who thinks about music in worship—and that includes most of us these days—will gain a good review of biblical principles as he reads the little pamphlet *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (Carl Schalk, editor; CPH, 1988).

Where did believers gain this sense of using the arts? Did they notice how effectively God used symbolic communication to underscore the most important themes of the Old Testament? Was there, even in the early church, an understanding of how the arts impact emotions? Luther certainly had a clear picture of the power of music. It seems plausible that the church formed its worship patterns to summarize and clarify the most important teachings of the Christian faith and to solidify and embed them in the human heart through music and the arts.



If such a perspective is valid, then this series of articles on liturgical worship requires one last installment: "The Liturgy and Its Music: Delight and Dilemma."

James Tiefel

* Sample worship folder note: The Lutheran church is a liturgical church. Lutherans believe that the gospel is not only good news that Jesus has saved sinners, but also a power God uses to create and strengthen faith in Jesus. Lutheran worship places the gospel in central focus in an order of service called the liturgy. In message and meal, in specially selected Bible readings, and in carefully crafted songs, prayers, and confessions, the liturgy points to Jesus as the Savior of all.

EASY VARIETY

Business as usual has never been a good idea in worship planning. So we often hear, "Give us good ideas, and make them easy!" Pastors' lives are filled with demands for their time, and yet many pastors want to give more time to worship planning. A wide variety of WELS parishes have appreciated one form of creative variety: the gathering rite. Gathering rites replace the opening of the service, up to the Prayer of the Day. These rites have several useful and flexible features:

- Variety to enhance a sense of the season
- Flexible accompaniments
- Texts that enhance thematic unity
- Refrains and responses that involve worshipers

The gathering rites used in WELS are published as choral/cantor music. This presents a challenge to those who have never experienced one of these rites. It's easier to see the logic and potential of a gathering rite in well-planned worship or in a worship folder designed for average worshipers. So we have provided worship folder layouts and much more. See the link at wels.net/worship.

Two Advent rites are currently posted. One, by James Chepponis, has circulated in WELS for several years. Another, by Carol Browning, was published in 2001. For each rite the website provides several items:

- Text files in Word (no retyping necessary!) and PDF formats, with the refrain already inserted
- PDF samples of the choir/cantor music for pastors and musicians to review
- Helpful reminders about planning and using a gathering rite
- Audio samples. But note the comments about flexible use of instruments. The recordings demonstrate only one way to render the music.

The files are in Word rather than RTF format because RTF files with embedded TIF graphics balloon to a size that doesn't work well on the Internet. If you can't read Word files, see the PDF version for a worship folder layout and more information.

The music graphic makes it easy to create worship folders; users do not have to photocopy the refrain and paste it into a worship folder. The music graphic can be sized to fit various worship folder formats.

Which Advent option should you start with? Chepponis, if you've never used it; it might be a little easier. Parents in parishes that have used this report young children singing the refrain while playing at home. Adults too have found the refrain memorable and the rite meaningful.

Bryan Gerlach

