



Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

THE LITURGY AND ITS MUSIC: DELIGHT AND DILEMMA

Before it is anything else, the liturgy is the Word of God: five song texts, based on the Word, that summarize each week the plan of salvation (the Ordinary); texts taken directly from the Word that review each year the life of Jesus; and texts that add God's own Word of power and promise to the bread and the wine in Holy Communion. With these texts—this Word—believers proclaim the gospel. Through the gospel the Spirit creates, strengthens, preserves, and enlivens faith.

Why are so many liturgical texts set to music? It might seem better (and it would save pastors a lot of work!) to allow the Spirit to work without the distraction of music. Luther joined his insights into the Word to his knowledge of music and explained why music so often accompanies the Word:

Except for theology, there is no art that could be put on the same level with music since, except for theology, music alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely, a calm and joyful disposition. This is the reason why the prophets did not make use of any art except music; when setting forth their theology they did it not as geometry, not as arithmetic, not as astronomy, but as music, so that they held theology and music most tightly connected and proclaimed the truth through Psalms and songs (LW 49:427).

Luther recognized that music does for human psychology what the gospel does for Christian faith. The gospel proclaimed through the vehicle of music touches the entire human creature. The gospel and music, both gifts of God, become a divine dynamic duo that the Spirit uses to affect the whole man, his psychological and spiritual self. Luther wrote:

After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both words and music; namely, by proclaiming the Word of God through music and by providing sweet melodies with words (LW 53:319).

In his Christmas hymn, "From Heaven Above" Luther has the angelic messenger proclaim:

From heaven above to earth I come
To bear good news to every home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will *say and sing*.

The Church's delight, therefore, is to sing the good news about Christ. The pastor's delight is to select and supervise the music.

This is also his dilemma! The pastor knows that God deserves his best efforts. He also knows that people *expect* his best efforts. With their musical tastes molded by high technology, most North Americans come to worship with high musical expectations. Fast growing churches—even in WELS—usually offer notable music ministries. Several dozen articles far longer than this article would not cover the issues related to music in worship.

The liturgy presents special musical challenges. The great spiritual value that comes with the recurring texts of the Ordinary can be compromised when those texts are always sung with the same tune. The Ordinary begs for alternate musical settings and benefits from musical variety. The Church Year prioritizes music that complements specific themes. With the Word as its priority, Lutheran worship looks for music that allows the Word to be predominant; in



other words, music in the liturgy doesn't "take over."

Planning and preparing the music is time-consuming in any worship situation, but liturgical worship has its own set of music planning priorities.

Training Musicians – Worship benefits from pastors and musicians working together, giving quality and priority time to worship planning. For many pastors, finding a musician is a challenge all by itself. But even pastors blessed with several musicians often need to help some understand the unique implications and expectations of Lutheran worship. Both *Christian Worship Manual* and *Come Worship Christ* include resources for the on-site training of church musicians and teachers who are involved with music in the Lutheran Elementary School and the Sunday School. Regular sessions devoted to study (even with lifelong Lutheran musicians) will help musicians to make good choices that complement worship.

Selecting Instruments – Liturgical worship invites the people to participate; it also encourages a rehearsing ensemble (choir, cantor, soloist) to enrich worship's shared proclamation. Worship instruments, therefore, must be able to accompany both the full assembly and smaller groups. The organ has a long history of supporting

worship. The piano works well, too, although in larger buildings the piano has to generate enough volume to support a larger congregation. Many other instruments add their voices to Lutheran worship. Care must be taken with amplified instruments that their sound encourages the people's song without overwhelming it.

Designing Acoustics – Dry acoustics or lively? Minimal sound reverberation or maximum? Dry/minimal may work for worship music performed by an amplified ensemble, but lively/maximum is best when people participate in worship. When it comes to promoting lively acoustics, the pastor is often a “voice in the wilderness.” The maintenance people insist on carpeting. The budgeters are aghast at the thought of hardwood floors or a new church with a high ceiling. The sound system consultant wants no reverb time at all. The electronics salesman suggests that he can solve dry acoustics by adding more speakers. While this might help amplified singers and instruments, it won't work to “mike” the entire assembly. The pastor needs to be the champion of a worship space that enables and encourages people to sing the gospel with exuberance and joy.

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Selecting Music – The task of choosing music for worship is always challenging, although it becomes easier with tuned-in musicians, good instruments, and lively acoustics. The critical issue is knowing where to look. Save time by narrowing the field. Worship planners—both pastors and musicians—are wise to be in touch with three or four music publishers that produce music for liturgical worship. Unless they have a lot of time on their hands, they can ignore most of what comes in the mail. The Commission on Worship website offers many suggestions and samples for adding variety to the liturgy.

For pastors, selecting and supervising worship music is usually more difficult—and certainly more frustrating—than writing a sermon. But dilemma can turn into delight with the right musicians, the right instruments, the right acoustics, and the right

music. The effort it takes to achieve what is “right” is worth it...for the sake of the liturgy, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the people.

This article is the last in a series of five articles on the liturgy. The author prays the study has been helpful in leading pastors to think about the purpose, process, and promise of Christian worship and its servant, the Christian liturgy.

James Tiefel



“The Ordinary begs for alternate musical settings and benefits from musical variety.”

TEN YEARS OLD ALREADY

Last December someone reminded me that the introduction process for *Christian Worship* culminated in a synod-wide dedication of the new hymnal on Advent 1 in 1993. This anniversary provides a timely impetus for considering variety in the liturgy. The “new” hymnal is now a decade old and the songs of its page 15 liturgy are even older.

January 2004 marks a much shorter anniversary. *Christian Worship: New Service Settings* has been available now for one year. Interest in this publication is much higher than expected. The first printing of 500 accompaniment editions sold out already last November indicating that half of WELS parishes are exploring this new worship resource.

If your parish hasn't yet begun this exploration, see the many helpful resources available from the Worship website: wels.net/worship. Here you'll find details on the various editions, sample audio files, and free support files to download.

Even in a parish that doesn't plan to learn a new service, soloists or choirs (including children) can add variety to worship by substituting a new setting from CW:NSS or from many other sources. Consider having a choir or soloist sing the new Song to the Lamb with piano accompaniment and instrumental descant. Worshipers are seated and the distribution may begin during this song. Same text, same function; fresh impact and a message heightened by different music.

Other alternate canticles are featured on the Worship website. Several versions of the Song of Mary are posted including one intended for Good Friday from the forthcoming *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*. One of these can bring refreshing variety to Lenten Evening Prayer in a parish that has been singing the CW Song of Mary for the past ten years. Since the familiar is also good, consider using an alternate at two or three midweek services.

Song of Mary on Good Friday? “While [it] is often heard as a Song of Praise, the text is also a compelling theology of the cross at the foot of the cross. ‘He has shown the strength of his arm’ not by a show of might but by a victory at the cross” (from CWOS).

Bryan Gerlach

