



Practical Ideas for Lutheran Worship

This publication has covered many themes since its inception in 2003. Those themes can be grouped in two main categories: 1) theological-historical-theoretical, and 2) practical. We hope that readers have appreciated this approach and the balance of articles.

While pastors are the standard intended audience, many of the articles are valuable for others in the congregation. This will be especially true of the new series that begins with this issue. Pastors are encouraged to pass on the printed copy or to point people to the online version.

In the March 2014 WELS Connection video, which featured the 2014 national worship conference, Pastor Dan Sims commented on a trend he has sensed. He said that there has been a resurgence in WELS in the last decade of trying to do Lutheran worship really well. It is the hope of the Commission on Worship and the writers we engage that this series will assist you and others in your congregation toward that goal.

Bryan Gerlach



New Tricks for an Old Dog

By Robert Johannes

In retrospect, I can't believe how long I held on to my old notion that I had to be in control of hymn selection for every service in the church year (with the exception, perhaps, of the children's service on Christmas Eve)! And realize, please, that I am musically illiterate—I can't read a note! I should have had a clue that I was in over my head when the organist at my last parish asked me, so kindly, about one of the hymns I had chosen: "That third hymn, pastor. You chose that one for the words, right?" But thank God that life is long and that he gave me another chapter in his book to get more serious about worship planning and using all the talents he has given to his church on earth. And it has been a pleasant chapter in my ministry.

I came to my present call about 14 years ago. My previous congregations were 100-200 members and were well served by one or two organists/pianists, one of whom also served as choir director. When I came to my present call, I was now serving almost 600 souls, an elementary school, and working with three organists, a choir director, a handbell director, and other very talented musicians. But somehow, I still felt it was my duty, as pastor, to choose the hymns for every worship service. (From

"Why don't you let the organists pick the hymns?"

talking to other pastors of my general vintage, it does seem that this is the commonly held belief; it's the pastor's duty to be certain that the proper hymns are chosen for each Sunday and, especially, each sermon.) Sometime in my first years here I was explaining to my councilmen my duties in worship planning, and, without hesitation, they simply asked, "Why don't you let the organists pick the hymns?"

That simple question led to the formation of our Worship Committee, a worship calendar, greater and more thoughtful

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variety in worship, and, of course, more opportunities for more people to use their gifts to serve the Lord and his church.

Our Worship Committee consists of the pastor, organists, choir and handbell directors, and the worship elder from our church council. The committee meets formally three times per year to review the worship calendar, to plan new music and liturgies, and to set longer term goals. The committee members touch base almost weekly to work out worship details.

Our worship calendar is a simple thing which I put together, usually in long hand. Although it doesn't quite conform to the church year, it seems most convenient to plan January through April (approximately Epiphany through Easter), May through August (we have a summer worship schedule), and September through December (the beginning of the school year through Christmas). Four months at a time is not as daunting as trying to plan for an entire year, but it still leaves plenty of time for most of the planning that my musicians wish to do—especially for holidays. Our worship calendar lists date and day of the church year, lessons, theme of the day, hymn of the day, and order of service. It leaves plenty of room for special music and hymns, which will be filled in by our musicians.

Four months at a time is not as daunting as trying to plan for an entire year.

The indispensable tool for this whole process is *Planning Christian Worship*, which is available as a free download from connect.wels.net/worship. If you're not familiar with this resource, it includes all the propers for a given Sunday, the theme of the day, hymn of the day, summaries of the lessons, and an extensive list of suggested hymns which match the theme of the Sunday and the lessons. All

Some other valuable planning charts are available from The Institute for Worship and Outreach, worshipandoutreach.org.

Not every congregation is blessed with veteran musicians familiar with a Lutheran heritage of hymns and worship. In such a case, whether or not they will assist the pastor in selecting hymns, consider options for enriching their understanding of Lutheran worship principles. Discuss together select chapters of Christian Worship Manual, select issues of Worship the Lord, or other helpful material. This is "training for ministry" that may allow more people to be involved and that may free the pastor for other priorities.

of my musicians have access to *Planning Christian Worship*, either on-line or hard copy, and they use it. They read through the lessons and summaries and choose the hymns in keeping with the theme. An added bonus is that each of our three organists chooses hymns in a slightly different fashion. One organist loves traditional Lutheran chorales. One loves to introduce new hymns. The third organist has been accompanying our worship for over 60 years, and she says, "I know the hymns the congregation likes to sing." All three study the themes for the day and chose hymns that are very appropriate, but with amazing variety! Do I ever modify their hymn selections? Rarely. And if there's a hymn I really need to have in the worship service, I'm always free to write it into the worship calendar.

To give you an idea how our Worship Committee works, here are just a few of the items we discussed at our April meeting:

- I presented the worship calendar along with the pages from *Planning Christian Worship* describing the flow of the Sunday themes during the Pentecost season.
- Our choir director presented two hymns (one new and one unfamiliar) which the choir will be teaching to the congregation on Pentecost Sunday.
- We finalized a schedule for introducing Divine Service I and the gathering rites from *Christian Worship Supplement*. (One of our organists expressed the concern that, if she's playing background music during the confession and absolution, she cannot actually participate in those important parts of the gathering rite. A good point—so we will not use that background music.)¹ We also finalized a set rotation of orders of service for Sundays.
- We reviewed the highlights of our Lenten and Easter worship. Our choir and small groups have been busy introducing Divine Service I and new hymns from *Christian Worship Supplement*, and they seem to be well-received. Since our organists choose hymns, they also recruit other instrumentalists to accompany hymns and preludes when that's appropriate.² They did a good deal of that for Lent and Easter. What a joy!

It's been only a pleasure to plan worship as part of a team.

So, even if you're not an old dog like I am, even if you yourself have great musical gifts, why not make full use of all the gifts the Lord has given to his church? Why shoulder the weight of worship planning all by yourself? For me it's been only a pleasure to plan worship as part of a team, to listen to my fellow Christians who have musical gifts, and to have the joy of seeing and hearing so many serving the Lord.



Because of their value for this issue's theme, excerpts from two March 2005 WTL articles are reprinted below. Not every pastor will be interesting in training musicians to pick all of the hymns. Many pastors have exceptional musical gifts and a good grasp of old and new hymnody, as well as their congregation's comfort level with old and new. But, as the second excerpt points out, it's not "all or nothing."

Encouragements from a Musician for Pastors

Approaches to Planning Differ

By Andrea Valerio

Pastors approach planning differently. Some plan a week at a time or month by month; others plan quarterly; a few, to a music director's delight, lay out a basic weekly worship plan for an entire year. What is important is that pastors and musicians work together—in advance and with clear communication—to reach their fullest potential as worship planners. Carl Schalk underscores this point when he writes: "Whatever the vehicle for planning, pastor and church musician need to work carefully together. Only in that way will worship be the best we can offer and God's people be truly inspired and edified" (*Music in Lutheran Worship*, p. 14).

Most pastors are the primary worship planners in the congregations they serve, and musicians appreciate all that their pastors do to help them function to the best of their abilities. "[Church musicians] treasure pastors who look upon the time devoted to worship planning as a necessary, vital, and important part of their ministry. They treasure pastors who see the need to plan weeks, months, perhaps even a year ahead of time so that choirs, instrumentalists, and the congregation will have sufficient time to prepare to do their part most effectively. They treasure pastors who see team planning as an opportunity for greater richness and variety in worship, and not an impertinent or intimidating encroachment on 'their' domain." (Schalk, *The Pastor and the Church Musician*, p. 6)



*"Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous.
Sing to him a new song; play skillfully,
and shout for joy" (Psalm 33:1,3).*

Good planning helps musicians to play skillfully.

From this music director's perspective, it is especially helpful when pastors:

- Meet with the music director or a worship committee regularly to discuss music-related topics in the church.
- Ensure that the music director has access to *Planning Christian Worship*. This NPH resource provides the church season, lessons, Psalm, Prayer, and Verse of the Day, and hymn suggestions for each service.
- Call early attention to special services that are scheduled, and discuss with the music director in advance the intended format of worship.
- Share special orders of services before printing in bulletins, inviting suggestions for the music.
- Block out time to plan sermon themes and sermon hymns (preferably all hymns) weeks in advance.
- Schedule time to discuss upcoming services so there is adequate time to involve others and schedule rehearsals.
- Keep track of hymns used for worship, perhaps writing dates into a specific hymnal, to avoid overusing or under using hymns.
- Contact the music and/or choir director with information on new members who have musical gifts and interests.
- Develop special orders of services and search for innovative ideas.
- Welcome comments and suggestions regarding the use of music in worship.
- Share bulletin covers which coordinate with upcoming service themes.
- Share promotional information on conferences, workshops, seminars, and music reading sessions.



All or Nothing?

By Bryan Gerlach

“Plan a year in advance? That’s just not realistic.” Okay, then consider seasonal or quarterly planning. Whether you plan quarterly, seasonally (e.g., Easter through Trinity), or annually, here are some ideas to make your planning easier and more flexible. It doesn’t have to be all or nothing. It isn’t necessary to pick every sermon emphasis, hymn, or special worship feature for every service within your quarterly or annual plan.

- Pick only the first and last hymns, or the first two hymns. This gives musicians a chance to learn new music for prelude or postlude or to prepare the choir for some special involvement on a hymn.
- Pick all the hymns, but put an asterisk by the second or third. This indicates a hymn that the preacher may change a week or two before the service if he needs an alternate to work best with his sermon.
- Use the Hymn of the Day plan, and let the organist pick the first or last hymn based on criteria upon which you agree.

If you don’t use the Hymn of the Day list, review it for unfamiliar or difficult tunes. It won’t work to start using this list if it contains many unfamiliar tunes. So customize it. Select alternate hymns that represent some of the best hymns available, hymns that do an excellent job of reflecting the Sunday’s theme as proclaimed in the Gospel lesson. Work with your musician to create a customized Hymn of the Day list that you will use for the next three or more years. Plan to add a manageable number of less familiar hymns (maybe only two or three per year). Use choirs, soloists, and varied instruments to introduce unfamiliar tunes. This allows the congregation to hear the melody sung for them rather than struggling to sing it themselves. Use varied instruments to move the hymn from “routine or frustrating” to “compelling and engaging.”³

Even some tunes that are familiar to longtime members will benefit from this strategy of special musical attention. Longtime members may know and love them, but members new to a Lutheran church might not know and love them. An extra effort to present them with special musical variety will give these hymns a far greater chance of being appreciated by newer members.

Finally, here’s an appreciation gift idea for your church musician(s), at least for those who enjoy digging into the depths and riches of church music. In late 2004 CPH released a revised and enlarged edition of *Key Words in Church Music*. This 587-page volume expands on a book with the same title from 1978. A brief section on the Hymn of the Day is found alphabetically under De Tempore Hymn. Here’s an excerpt.

The late 20th century concept of the choral concertato is directly related to recovery of the Hymn of the Day. While many denominations now make use of these choral concertatos, it is significant that the chorale concertato, first introduced among American Lutherans with by Paul Bunjes’s setting of “A Mighty Fortress” for congregation, choir, and trumpets, was written to support the Hymn of the Day practice. ...

The history of the Hymn of the Day in America continues to be one of recovery more than perpetuation or continuity. A parish wanting to recover the Hymn of the Day needs to explore not only the repertoire but also other key concepts: hymnody as teacher, as doxological proclamation, as congregational memory bank, as planning tool for musicians. Recovery involves not merely a list (which is adaptable) but an outlook. Attention to recovery of a Hymn of the Day plan along with its conceptual and theological framework has coexisted in America with revolutionary worship change. Thus recent years have seen both the formal adoption of Hymn of the Day plans and also a growing body of literature urging that a heritage not be lost. One irony in the matrix of worship change and insights from a past heritage is that the chorales originally helped to cultivate a biblical/spiritual literacy. Now in a post-Christian era of growing biblical illiteracy, substantive teaching hymnody often struggles to find a place in the church.



- ¹ Those who designed the gathering rites made the “background music” optional. But they intended it as more than “background music.” In both the CWS rites and those from GIA, the music is meant to indicate the unity of the first portion of worship from the opening song or stanza through confession and absolution. Continuous music telegraphs that this is the “entrance” part of worship, preparatory for the word, sacrament, and sending portions. Ed.
- ² *Worship the Lord* issues 11-17 dealt with planning for worship. See #17, cultivating instrumentalists. Back issues are available online.
- ³ At connect.wels.net/worship are various Hymn of the Day charts that may be downloaded. Look under “Planning for Worship.” See also chapter 16 and pages 385ff in *Christian Worship: Manual*.