



Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Worship benefits greatly from good communication and planning between musician and pastor. In this issue Andrea Valerio shares her encouragements. Since 2003 she has served under a half-time call (music director) at Christ Lutheran, Pewaukee, WI. She is a graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran College with a degree in Church Music. Not every church is blessed with such a part-time musician, but every parish can benefit from the ideas below.

Bryan Gerlach

Encouragements from a Musician for Pastors

By Andrea Valerio

The hymns for Sunday appear in an e-mail message on Wednesday morning. I immediately recognize a couple of the hymns by their numbers and reflect on the titles. Some wonderful instrumental music would compliment one of the selections, but it's too late to contact and meet with any other musicians. Reviewing the hymns, it's obvious that the texts do not match the expected worship theme. Oh no! The choir has practiced and is expecting to sing a seasonal selection when we'll be celebrating a mission festival!

Do you ever feel your stomach sink as you regretfully say, "If only we could have...."

So often worship planners find themselves steering right into a worship rut. This typically happens when worship is planned week by week, eliminating the possibility of creative ideas. "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; *worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness*" (1 Chronicles 16:29). God is worthy of our prioritized time and effort in planning worship. When we strive for excellence, we demonstrate that he deserves the best we have to offer.

Approaches to Planning Differ

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)

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.

The Outcome of Planning

"If only we could have..." Such regrets are resolved in this preferred scenario: We'll celebrate a mission festival on Sunday. I've reviewed the printed worship folder. The choir rehearsed on Tuesday and is prepared to sing a text-appropriate selection and a new psalm setting with the congregation. The trumpeter has practiced and is ready to play the sermon hymn descant. Pastor and I have met to discuss last-minute questions or concerns. There are no surprises!

I can't wait to worship the Lord on Sunday!

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."*

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.

* At 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*.

** See for example: Michael Horton, "Are Your Hymns Too Spiritual?" *Modern Reformation*, July/August 1995. This is also Appendix A in Horton's *In the Face of God* (Word, 1996).



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2929 N Mayfair R, Milwaukee WI
53222-4398

Phone: 414/256-3265
FAX: 414/256-3899

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