



# Worship the Lord

No. 11, January 2005

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

## A SERIES ON WORSHIP PLANNING

“That was nice last Sunday when the organist played piano during communion. Should we do that more often?”

“It takes a lot of work to plan and rehearse instrumentalists? How can this happen more often without burning people out?”

“People really enjoyed the special worship Bible class series a few years ago. Should we do that again?”

“When will we ever get around to doing something about the bad acoustics in our church?”

“Our 50th anniversary is coming up in three years. Wouldn't this be a great time to renovate our chancel?”

“People really appreciated that gathering rite last year? Should we do these more often? When?”

Planning for worship involves far more than picking hymns and choir music [early enough!] for the coming season or year. Short range planning is important so that everyone can work together for the best possible worship. This planning involves many factors:

- Studying the lectionary
- Selecting hymns, psalms, and songs
- Planning special services and festivals

- Aiming for appropriate worship variety
- Recruiting musicians for special needs
- Involving the Lutheran school in Sunday worship

Long-range planning is also diverse but doesn't always get the attention it deserves. Consider these main areas for such planning:

- Prioritizing parish needs
- Worship committees (explore options, start one, improve it?)
- Worship education for various groups: Elders, Council, worship committee, musicians, members
- Conducting a worship self-study: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Professional growth for worship leaders and decision makers. Let members experience excellent worship, possibly at synodical, district, or circuit worship services. The next WELS national worship conference is July 18-21, 2005 in St. Peter, MN.
- Exploring needs and possibilities in key worship areas: staff, musicians, instruments, facilities, orders of service, choirs, future musicians.

There are three major components in a WELS School of Worship Enrichment: theological study of worship principles, practical experience of creative worship variety

and new resources, and a session on short- and long-range planning. If your parish is like many, you probably give attention to these three in this order of diminishing priority and attention:

- Worship variety and new resources (at least the musicians do)
- Theological study (our strength as a confessional church)
- Short- and long-range planning (long-range being the weakest link)

With this issue of *Worship the Lord*, we begin a series on worship planning. We hope that some of the ideas shared will be helpful for you. While pastors are the primary *Worship the Lord* audience, musicians and worship committee members might also benefit from reading these articles.

Joel Otto, the AZ-CA district worship coordinator, invites us to think about the stewardship dimension of worship planning. He has served as pastor at Reformation, San Diego, since 2001, after serving First German in Manitowoc, WI, and Good Shepherd in Midland, MI.

Bryan Gerlach



## Worship Planning—A Matter of Stewardship

By Joel Otto

“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” Maybe you have heard this maxim from financial planners and others in the business world. You'd better get on the ball with your financial planning, otherwise you won't be ready for retirement. Businesses have to plan so they will be ready to take advantage of market trends. Churches have to plan for future growth or maintenance to buildings.

Planning is important – whether it's business, personal, or church. We want to properly manage the resources at our disposal.

In church terminology, we're talking about stewardship. If planning and stewardship go together, then worship planning is also a matter of stewardship.

### Stewardship of the Means of Grace

The pastoral ministry can be boiled down to the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. While we might do these things in various locations like classrooms and hospital rooms, we reach the largest number of people in the weekly divine service. Nowhere else will we reach

half of our members at one time with the Word and Sacrament. Nowhere else will our people encounter “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Ro 1:16) on a more regular basis than in Sunday worship.

Through the means of grace, God is giving his best to us. Christ is comforting, strengthening, and encouraging his people through his Word of truth. Christ is coming to his people with the very body and blood he shed on the cross to forgive their sins. Every week in worship Christ is dispensing to his people the greatest gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Shouldn't we give our best when it comes to our stewardship of the means of grace? Since the gospel is not simply information, but God's power to change hearts and lives, we want to give our best effort at managing our use of the means of grace in the setting of public worship. The liturgy helps us do this. With its scriptural canticles, Christ-centered hymns, and focus on Word and Sacrament, using the historic liturgy helps us faithfully to use the means of grace every week.

Faithfulness in using the liturgy requires effort and planning on our part. Conveniently, the liturgy already gives us a plan. The Ordinary provides the structure. The Propers provide the theme for each Sunday. Spending time studying the lectionary will help us understand the ebb and flow of the seasons of the Christian Year. Scheduling meetings with organists and choir directors will ensure that music is appropriate for worship and fits the theme of the Sunday. Carefully planning the introduction of new hymns and new musical settings will maintain freshness in the proclamation and praise of God's people.

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### Stewardship of God's Gifts to His Church

God has blessed his Church with gifts to use in proclaiming his Word and praising his name. It requires planning to make use of the musical gifts in a congregation – gifts that might include trumpet, flute, guitar, or voice. Have you ever wistfully thought how great it would be to have the gospel proclamation of worship supported by such instrumentalists and soloists more often? But you didn't know what to give them to play or sing? Or you found yourself on Tuesday looking at a hymn and saying, “It would be great to have a trumpet play the descant or a soloist sing a couple of stanzas.”

Planning is needed so that God's gifted people can be afforded the opportunity to give God their best. Rare is the musician who can be given a piece of music on Saturday and play it well on Sunday. We need to plan ahead so that music can get in the hands of musicians and time can be arranged for rehearsals.

### Stewardship of Time

Maybe the talk of worship planning has you groaning, “How can I find time for another meeting?” Worship planning actually saves time in the long run because planning removes the stress of throwing things together at the last minute. My worst pastoral nightmare is being unprepared to preach on a Sunday morning. Thankfully, that nightmare has never been reality. My worst organist nightmare is similar, although it may be easier to sight-read your way through a service than it is to shake a sermon out of your sleeve. But the stress level is increased when people are not properly prepared, whether organists, choir directors, instrumentalists, or preachers. Our planning, therefore, ought to involve looking over the order of service, preparing the prayers, and practicing the lessons so that we can give our best to God. It may require taking time on Saturday to go over the service with the organist. But isn't this time well spent? We don't want our lack of planning to result in dullness or shoddy execution that detracts from the gospel. Instead, when we diligently plan worship, we can give God our best as we communicate to God's people in Word and Meal that God has given his best to them.

## PLANNING FOR CHRIST THE KING

In August when we were doing our advance planning for the remainder of the Church Year, I decided that I would like to do something special on Christ the King Sunday. We are blessed to have an excellent trumpet player as well as enough instrumentalists to have a brass quartet. So I planned to use the trumpets with “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” and have the quartet play portions of William Braun's brass arrangement of Service of Word and Sacrament\*. In addition, I mentioned to the choir director that we could use a GIA setting of Psalm 98 with the choir.

Three weeks before the service, I contacted the instrumentalists to make sure they would be available. I gave them the music about two weeks before. We scheduled two rehearsals. The choir practiced Psalm 98. The choir director arranged to have two guitarists accompany the psalm.

One addition came about two weeks before the service. A member of the choir suggested singing Carl Schalk's setting of “Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See” with a male quartet. We ordered the music, found our singers, and arranged two rehearsals.

The end result of all this planning was a service that had a feel of celebration and festivity as we ended the Church Year. It also employed a wide variety of musicians who had the opportunity to use their gifts in service to the Lord.

\* NPH 28N6037: This flexible resource provides choral and instrumental parts: descants, trumpets, oboes, or flutes or even a full brass ensemble with cymbals and timpani. A “keyboard reduction” of the brass parts allows an electronic keyboard or synthesizer to play brass parts.

