



Worship the Lord

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

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Our series on planning continues with encouragements for long-range planning. While musical instruments are the particular focus of this month's articles, long-range planning is valuable for any aspect of worship.

Mark Bitter serves Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, The Woodlands, TX. This exploratory mission began in 1990 and now averages 150 people in worship. Mark has also served a mission parish in New Orleans, LA, and as Dean of Students at Northwestern Prep. He is chairman of the Commission on Worship.

Make Long-Range Worship Plans *By Mark Bitter*

Unless your church property is already built out, there is likely a site map of your property somewhere in the facility. Maybe it's on a bulletin board in a hallway. Maybe it's scrolled up in a filing cabinet. But a Future Planning Committee once planned what your church site will look like five years from now, ten years from now, twenty. "Here's where the Family Center will go. Here's where the new church will sit. There's the spot for the gym."

If your congregation has a mission/vision statement, the vision part projects what the congregation's ministry will look like, let's say, in the year 2015. How many members? What ministry programs? Will there be an elementary school? What education programs will there be for singles, teens, young families, seniors? What will the staff consist of?

Does your congregation have a future plan for worship? Is it on paper? Here's how some of it might look.

1. Choirs
 - a. begin a youth choir in 2006
 - b. begin a children's choir in 2007
 - c. begin a handbell choir in 2009
2. Instruments
 - a. add a synthesizer in 2005
 - b. add percussion in 2006
 - c. add guitars in 2006
 - d. replace the organ in 2010
3. Sanctuary
 - a. purchase a processional cross in 2007
 - b. replace paraments in 2008
 - c. replace candelabra in 2010

4. Staff
 - a. appoint a part-time instrument coordinator in 2006
 - b. call a part-time Minister of Music in 2009
5. Worship Education
 - a. elders in 2006
 - b. church council in 2007
 - c. Sunday School teachers and musicians in 2008
 - d. some adult Bible class option every two years

Plan your work, and then work your plan. Stick with it. Keep the targets in front of you, and work towards them. Granted, you don't know who will be in your congregation and what gifts they will have in the year 2010. But plan. And see what the Lord does.

I began an exploratory mission in 1990. Anybody who's worked with the mission board knows what OPA forms are: Operating-Planning-Accounting. I used to spit each year as we'd have to come up with the number of members we projected we would have three years from now, four years from now, five. "I don't have a clue. This is guess work." But we put down numbers. And guess what! Just about every year the numbers were almost exactly what we had projected they would be years earlier. I thought, "Why didn't we shoot higher?"

In 1999 we put percussion instruments on the long-range worship plan for the year 2006. Apparently, the Lord didn't want us to wait that long. In the summer of 2004 a couple



told me they wanted to give a special thank offering to the Lord of five thousand dollars. What did the church need? I gave them a list of about ten items, including playground equipment, landscaping improvements, LAPPY songbooks, etc. Also on the list were percussion instruments. The donors' sixth-grade son, Joe, had just started percussion lessons. So that's what they chose.

Now we have timpani, conga drums, wind chimes, maracas, triangle, tambourine. The timpani roll along with the organ, as worshipers sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" during the opening hymn on the Festival of the

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Holy Trinity. The suspended cymbal rolls and then crashes when the congregation gets to the word "Cherubim." The congas add a syncopated beat as we sing "The Honduran Alleluia" in response to the second lesson. The maracas and tambourine join in on the second verse. When the congregation sings the psalm refrain, "Surely it is God who saves me," the wind chimes sound. What a boost those instruments have given to enrich the worship of our people. I'm certain that we wouldn't have these instruments today, if years ago we had not put them in our long-range plan.



Also, give some thought to the musicians you will have in the future. It's no secret that there's a musician shortage in the church across all denominations, especially organists. What might your congregation do now to ensure that you will have musicians in the future? Does your elementary school have a keyboard program? If you don't have an LES, would your congregation consider inviting a piano teacher to come to your church one or two days a week? Members and neighbors then pay the teacher for piano lessons for their children on the church's piano.

**Things might not always go according to your plan.
We may plan, but the Lord is the one who blesses.**

Many parents want their children to learn to play the piano. But it doesn't happen because they never get around to doing it. Wouldn't it be helpful if the church made it easy and convenient for them? And the church will have more keyboard artists in the future. Everybody wins. Do some planning for future musicians in your church. Granted, the children will grow up someday, go off to college, and maybe move out of the area. But still, you have trained a musician to serve the Lord in another congregation.

Things might not always go according to your plan. We may plan, but the Lord is the one who blesses. In Romans 1 St. Paul told the Christians in the capital city that he had "planned many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now." Plans he made in the past didn't come to fruition. Ultimately, the Lord is in control, of course. But Paul *did* plan his ministry.

"If you fail to plan, you plan to ____." That's truer in the corporate world than in the church. After all, we have the Lord of the universe as our CEO. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples." Sounds to me like a program for success. As he uses us to carry out his plans, make some long-range plans for your future worship.

Yes, No, Not Yet

Just as with prayer, God's answer to our planning might be "No" or "Not yet." Planning is important, but God's blessing on our plan is what really matters. Still, "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas 5:16). We plan and set goals and pray. God blesses our plans and answers our prayers. The answer might be "Not yet," or it might be "Sooner than you think!"

In 1982 a new church was dedicated in Citrus Heights, CA. It was a stretch to build as large as they did. Even after growing by an average of 50 members per year for almost 20 years, some thought the new plan too ambitious. To save money they shortened the planned nave by 20 feet. That decision soon proved unfortunate when the sanctuary was too small for peak attendances already in the late 1980s.

In planning for the future one decision received a surprise early blessing. The parish was committed to excellent worship, including excellent acoustics. A dramatic early design was scrapped when the acoustical consultant pointed out flaws. The new design included high side walls and a ceiling so high that there was ample space even above the balcony — an achievement less common in newer construction, it seems. Excellent acoustics were first for congregational singing but also for a future goal.

The balcony was supported by a steel I-beam not because such support was necessary for existing balcony loads but because of a long-term goal: a pipe organ. Shortly after the church was finished, an elderly couple provided funds for a pipe organ. No one knew that this frugal, retired, blue collar couple had such resources. Parish leaders had prayed, "Some day, Lord?" God's answer was, "Sooner than you think!" In less than three years after building the church, a new pipe organ was dedicated.

In May of this year I visited Faith Lutheran Church in Sharpsburg, GA (south of Atlanta). This beautiful new church is the first sanctuary for a mission parish that began as a restart exploratory in 1999. At 4,000 square feet, the nave is far larger than common for a parish only six years old. But that's not surprising since average attendance in the first months of 2005 is 145.

Years ago a new church with a CEF loan wouldn't have been allowed a balcony. But, as Pastor Jon Schroeder put it, the balcony is some of the cheapest square footage in the entire facility; it already has walls and ceiling!

The Sharpsburg balcony is supported by a steel I-beam. Right now MIDI gear and electronic keyboards find their place in the balcony. Do you think they'll have a pipe organ some day?

by Bryan Gerlach



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2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
Phone: 414/256-3265 FAX: 414/256-3899
<www.wels.net/worship>

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