



Worship the Lord

No. 15, September 2005

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Our series on planning continues with an encouragement to involve more people in worship roles. Darin Menk's practical ideas will enrich the worship of any church, especially those with an elementary school. They can be implemented in more modest ways in smaller churches without schools. Some of the ideas invite pastors, musicians, and lay leaders to evaluate the priority time needed to plan and prepare worship.

Darin is Church and School Music Director (and teacher) at First German Lutheran Church, Manitowoc, WI. Previous service includes Siloah in Milwaukee and David's Star in Jackson, WI. He holds a master's degree in music education from UW-Milwaukee and is an active member of American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (AGEHR), Wisconsin Music Educators Association (WMEA), and the National Association for Music Education (MENC).

Bryan Gerlach

Careful Planning Brings Worship Blessings *By Darin Menk*

I've looked at my small garage door for a couple of years now. Each time I take a good look at it, I find myself saying, "I really should replace that door one of these days." Well, one of these days is finally here. Before I take out the old door though, I need to do some prep work.

One of the best ways to avoid problems is to plan ahead. I have to ask myself several questions: What type of door do I want? How much can I afford to spend? Should I attempt the project myself or just have someone else do it?

With those questions answered, I still have work to do. I need to find some help—a book at the library or a member of the congregation. These will be invaluable resources. I have to gather the suggested tools and supplies. Finally, I have to set aside the time to make this all happen.

Why should I spend all of this time planning? After all, the finished project is all that matters. That may be true. But wasted time, misused tools, and poor planning can result in wasted money, damaged tools, or possible injury.

Worship planning can be like a home improvement project. It requires careful consideration of the church's membership, the talent pool of the congregation, and the resources available. Questions about special services, themes, and the roles of members in

worship have to be answered. The service may go smoothly without planning, but many opportunities may have been missed.

One opportunity commonly missed is the role our children can play in worship. They need extra time to learn not only the words of a song, but also the proper use of their voices as well as the skills required for good singing. If some children will accompany a group, play pre-service or offering music, or even play hymns, they need time to practice. Advance planning gives them the extra time they need to make their playing successful.

So how can careful worship planning enable more people to be involved in the service? A worship committee is one way.

Many people are involved in planning worship. The church or school music director plays a primary role in making a worship committee successful. It is his responsibility to keep people from both church and school informed about what is happening. He is the key person for everyone to contact—one central place for information. He is also responsible for information presented to the congregation. He may use the church calendar, worship folder, or newsletter to explain worship related topics and plans for upcoming services.

The pastor is also an important member of a worship committee. He knows his membership very well. He knows what best



serves them. He helps choose service themes, hymns, lessons, and sometimes the overall format of the service.

The committee will include the head organist (or all organists), band and choir directors, and handbell or tonechime directors. It might include a representative from any group involved in worship: Sunday school, altar guild, banner committee, Council or Elders representative, Lutheran elementary school music director, and principal. Some of these people might meet only as needed rather than attend every meeting.

Each of these people brings information to the committee. The committee then has the opportunity to include everyone in the decision making. It provides accurate information directly to the people it affects. If a festival service theme is picked, the various choir directors know what it is and can then pick music to match the theme. These directors also know when they will play in the service and what role they will have in the overall flow of the service. Everyone knows what they are doing ahead of time.

With advance planning, teachers know early on what song the children will sing. They now have more time to prepare lesson ideas about that song. They can research the composer or poet. They can discuss the appointed Scripture lessons with the children so they better understand the connection among the readings, the song, and the flow of the service. They can better teach elements of music within the song because they have spent adequate time studying the score. They can instruct the children about better singing: how to project their sound without shouting, and how to sing words clearly. Piano students from the school can accompany songs because they had plenty of time to practice. All of this can happen because the teacher knew important details ahead of time.

Worship planning can be like a home improvement project. It requires careful consideration of the church's membership, the talent pool of the congregation, and the resources available.

Planning helps the altar guild and banner committee. Knowing that more people are expected for communion at a special festival service, they will have more communion supplies ready. They will also have enough people to clean up after the service. The banner committee will know which banner to put up. If one is not available, they might make one that matches the theme or festival. Extra planning might allow creating custom art to help proclaim the theme of the day. (For some creative ideas see photos from the July worship conference at wels.net/worship.)

Advance planning helps the organist to prepare special settings for the service. He or she might find instrumental parts for a hymn or solo settings for a singer, especially for the Hymn of the Day. A fanfare could be chosen to match the opening hymn.

The various choir directors are better able to choose music appropriate for a Sunday's Bible texts. A concertato could involve many musicians: band, adult choir, and children's choir. A special psalm setting with percussion and/or guitar could be used. A student could accompany the choir—an extra opportunity to use gifts for the Lord. The choir could sing the Verse of the Day or an a capella hymn stanza during one of the hymns for variety or emphasis.

Some of this might happen without careful planning. But will it be the best we can offer our Lord? Will it best proclaim the day's message to worshipers' heads and hearts? If we have instrumentalists who could play along with the organist but never get the chance, they aren't able to use all of their gifts in worship. If we have adults who would play with children in the handbell choir but aren't asked, will they be as active in the church as they could be? With careful planning, many people can use their gifts of singing, playing, conducting, ringing, sewing, cleaning, and accompanying for their Lord. Without planning, some people will be left out and the service will be missing something very important—their participation.



Teacher ideas:

How can I better plan for church singing?

- Identify series of readings your congregation is using this year (remember the series cycle changes at Advent) cf. *Christian Worship* pages 163-165
- Identify the dates your children sing in church
- Read the Bible readings, Hymn of the Day, Verse of the Day, and service theme
- Consider singing parts of the psalm, a special psalm setting, the Verse of the Day, a stanza of the Hymn of the Day, or one of the other hymns suggested in *Planning Christian Worship*.
- Use your music planning resources to choose a piece that closely matches the theme
- Write the theme of the service, Bible reading texts, and singing date on the choral piece of music as a ready reference for teaching ideas

Music director ideas:

How can I do better long-range planning?

- Label church festivals on a calendar
- Make a list of all singing groups, including small group possibilities (soloists, duets, trios, etc.)
- List service times on all possible singing dates
- Add typical dates and times for various singing groups
- Meet with pastor to find themes or other events coming up in the year
- Gather people involved to choose singing dates and other worship events
- Send copy of rough plan to everyone involved for any changes
- Make final copy and distribute to all members and church secretary

Worship committee ideas:

Who should be included in a worship committee?

- Pastor
- Choir directors (adult, children, handbell, tonechime)
- School/church music director
- Sunday school representative
- Lutheran elementary school music director
- Principal
- Head organist
- Band teacher/director
- Banner committee representative
- Altar guild committee representative
- Council or Elders representative