



# Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Articles on key worship concepts may be valuable for analysis in a pastors' study group, board of elders, or worship committee. As WELS parishes work with these concepts, our worship will be enriched for the sake of both members and guests. It will be faithful to Scripture, to our Lutheran heritage, and to our challenges and opportunities as 21st century followers of Jesus. Pastor Jonathan Schroeder serves Faith, Sharpsburg, GA. His duties beyond the parish are numerous: member of the Synodical Council, moderator of the Institute for Worship and Outreach, consultant for Schools of Outreach and for Schools of Worship Enrichment, editor/author for *Planning Christian Worship*, and more.

## Worship and Evangelism: Separate or Synergy

By Jonathan E. Schroeder

An inevitable fact of 21st century America is that public worship has become the primary point of first contact with the unchurched. It would be great if every prospect came to adult instruction class before attending worship – but that is not reality. Most often, a prospect's first interaction with a congregation's ministry will be at a Sunday morning service. What we do in worship directly impacts our mission of reaching the lost. Why, then, of all the worship words we wrestle with, does "Evangelism" often seem the most contentious?

Too often evangelism and nurture are pitted against each other in the realm of worship. Yes, evangelism could be an excuse for making worship changes that have little to do with the lost and lots to do with personal preference. And yes, denying evangelism any role in worship could lead to an ossified rite, unvaried forms, and inaccessible styles – all defended by sniffs of "Worship isn't the place for evangelism."

The reality, of course, is that worship can nourish the saints and reach the lost because worship and evangelism are joined in an indissoluble nexus by the central teaching of Scripture: the justification of sinners by the grace of God. Both the act of worship and the act of evangelism communicate the promise of God's radical act of grace in Christ. Worship and evangelism are bound together because both of them proclaim Jesus.

Recognizing the reality of our culture and the joint purpose of worship and evangelism means that worship can play an important role in a congregation's outreach plan, and evangelism can play an important role in worship. What does Lutheran worship that emphasizes evangelism look like? Consider these characteristics:

### Invitational

For most prospects, their first interaction with the Word of God in your congregation will be public worship. There is no problem with that – worship is a great place for prospects. In worship the unchurched will be afflicted by the law and comforted by the gospel; they will hear the praise of God's people that consists of proclaiming God's saving deeds; they will be surrounded by the shining light of Christian love to the praise of the Father. As God serves his people with the gospel, his Word is being shared with the prospect in worship, too. When the bride of Christ responds with words of praise and proclamation, it is a witness to all the lost or unchurched who are present.

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# Evangelism

### WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

Love

Evangelism

Culture



Make the most of it! Every week the congregation puts great time and effort into worship, so use the Sunday morning service as the ongoing point of invitation in your outreach program. Plan specific Sundays as target dates for large outreach events. Help your members invite family and friends. Prepare mailings and invitation cards. Talk to your neighbors and coworkers. Invitational worship plans on visitors, prays for visitors, and *prepares* for visitors.

In a number of studies, the large majority of unchurched people say they would likely attend church if someone asked them. Think about that! Worship is a fine place for the unchurched, because there is preached the Word of Christ: a hammer, a whisper, a working of the Spirit. Worship has exactly what the lost need: law and gospel, sin and grace, the death and resurrection of Christ. Invite them to it again and again. “Come and see!”

### Centered on the Gospel

Lutheran worship showcases the gospel, the Christocentric message of justification of the sinner by grace through faith, and reliance on the means of grace to plant faith and build faith. If we want worship that emphasizes evangelism, then we are looking to create a worship culture defined by the means of grace.

For centuries, the Lutheran church has found no better way to do that than through the liturgy. Liturgical worship need not be a slavish adherence to page 15, but can be vibrant worship with varied styles and forms and instruments that builds on the worship heritage of the Christian Church. It means marrying the best of the old worship treasures with the best of the new and emerging gifts of the worshipping Church. Liturgical worship serves evangelism not only because it centers on the gospel; it creates a culture of the means of grace in the public worship life of a congregation.

Many pastors have come before you. Walking on their well-worn path is not traditionalism, it is wisdom. In liturgical worship we have the living faith of the dead who have gone before us. Thousands of ministers of light have found these forms of great value in bringing Christ to people lost in darkness. Since the Word of God did not originate with us, there is wisdom in acting like we remember that fact.

When designing worship forms, there is a wide space between what is commanded and what is forbidden: everything between lies in the area of Christian freedom. Freedom in worship must be balanced by wisdom and love. Freedom that is not normed by love damages the body of Christ. Freedom that is not normed by wisdom fails in the stewardship of the means of grace. You may be free in making changes to worship practices. We will fight for your freedom to do just that. Do not, however, demand that we always call it wise.

### Accessible to the Unchurched

Worship certainly plays a prominent role in the Church’s outreach efforts; however, it cannot *be* the Church’s outreach effort. Being good stewards of the means of grace means that worship isn’t designed for the unchurched, but it is accessible to the unchurched. A simple way to ensure accessibility is a full service folder.

Liturgical worship is not too difficult for a first time visitor to follow. The way we’ve done liturgical worship, however, may be too difficult for people to follow. Print your services in their entirety (except for *Christian Worship* hymns). Any visitor can follow liturgical worship from page 1 to 2 to 3. Your prospects are unchurched; they are not illiterate. Printing your service also offers the chance to include service explanations that discuss the theme for worship, and footnotes regarding the texts or songs of the liturgy. Explain why we do what we do. Printing the entire service enables greater variety in worship without the confusion of multiple books or inserts.

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because both of them proclaim Jesus.

### Prioritizes Preaching

The hard work of inviting and preparing and welcoming prospects all comes to a head when the pastor gets into the pulpit as the messenger of God. When it comes to outreach or inreach, good preaching covers a multitude of shortcomings.

The reasons to prioritize preaching are myriad, but for the sake of evangelism, the sermon plays a much bigger role than anything else that happens on Sunday morning. The prospects have come to hear the message. The sermon means more to them than your worship style or your building or your greeter program. As the confessions say, “There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching” (Ap XXIV).

Some of the pastor’s most valuable outreach time is quality time spent working on an excellent sermon. The sermon will often be the most important twenty minutes of evangelism per week. Let me say that in a different way. If you want to give a boost to your outreach program, spend lots of time on your sermons. Excellent worship encourages your members to invite guests; excellent preaching does so even more.

### Sacramental

Lutheran worship is inherently sacramental because Christ’s Church is the church of Word and Sacrament – these are the only tools God has given us to open hearts and claim them for Christ. The Word and Sacraments are the means God has chosen for us to plant faith and build faith.

Since the goal of both worship and evangelism is to create and sustain faith, Lutheran worship will be inherently sacramental – because Word and Sacrament are the tools God has given us to do that. The missionary call “Repent” is always followed with “and be baptized.” The faith planted through Baptism or the Word, Christ wants to strengthen through a lifetime of feeding at the Supper. Any paradigm that removes the Sacraments from worship for the sake of evangelism loses one of its God-given tools to accomplish worship’s goal and purpose: the glory of God and the salvation of man.

## Addresses Children

Involving children in the main service is a boon for evangelism because it shows prospects that the church values children. It's also a boon for children, because it shows them that worship is for them, too.

Lutheran worship is child-friendly: the repetition of the Ordinary lets the very young children join in the worship of the body of Christ. A children's sermon as part of the service can underscore that worship is meant for every age group. It does not have to be an object lesson about yummy brownies. Use it to teach the Sacraments, the theme of the service, the symbols in the sanctuary, the simple truths of Scripture – not moralizing stories, not as an opportunity for comic relief. Instead, show the children Jesus.

A well-done children's sermon serves outreach because it is the gospel, and because it makes prospects and parents smile. Their children are important to them, and their children are important to Jesus. Shouldn't we let them know that they are important to the Church, too?

An added benefit of the children's sermon is its accessibility for the visitor. The prospect can see that formality in worship need not be cold, and dignity in worship need not seem loveless. They hear a short, Christ-centered message that they can't miss.



## Friendly

The marks of the Church are Word and Sacrament. Where you find them, you find the Church. The Christian has marks, too: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” When a church is friendly, welcoming to visitors, patient with prospects, and kind to its neighbors, the church gives evidence of the Christians who comprise it. The marks of the Christian can be used to bring the unchurched into contact with the marks of the Church. This is why Lutheran worship doesn't ignore the axiom that prospects are most likely to return to a friendly church.

Jesus said, “Let your light shine among men, that they may see your deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” We can't control the Holy Spirit's work of conversion; but if by our friendliness or kindness a person comes to church or comes back to church, we should by all means do our best to display those fruits of the Spirit – that shining light.

## Faithful Follow-up

One of the most important parts of worship happens after the Benediction: follow-up. If we are serious about reaching the lost, how can we fail to have a robust plan of personal visits in place? It is a crucial component because Lutherans know that God works through means. For the lost to be found, they must be in contact with the means of grace.

Worship visitor follow-up calls are the most important outreach visits you will make. The Holy Spirit has brought these people into your life and into your ministry and has left you an open door. Being good stewards of the means of grace means taking advantage of these opportunities before you.

The follow-up visit simply sends the shepherd out to the lost sheep with the intent of bringing them into the fold. God has given us only one means to do that: the gospel. The point of the pastoral call is to share the gospel message or invite them to come back to worship again where they will hear the gospel proclaimed.

These are the kind of calls you just make. Make them the first week prospects visit church. Don't phone ahead. Just go to their homes. If you call ahead to schedule a time, both you and they will find all sorts of conflicts; days will turn into weeks. Just go to their homes, knock on their doors, and thank them for being with you at worship and invite them back. Find out their spiritual background and look for an opportunity to share law and gospel. If they're not home, leave a note.

This is not complicated, but it is hard. You will have many reasons why you can't prioritize these calls. Your ministry will eat up as much time as you throw at it; the members of God's flock need to be fed and led; you have a whole schedule of meetings most nights of the week. And you're still called to be a husband and father. You will have a host of reasons. Will they be valid reasons or simply rationalizations we hide behind because we don't want to acknowledge the real reason we fail to do outreach calls: they are hard; you might be rejected; no one will really notice if you don't do them; it's easier to go to a meeting than be an ambassador of Christ to the lost.

Pastoral schedules may be full, but wouldn't the Ladies Aid give you a pass once in a while if you said you were going to tell the lost about Christ? Wouldn't the Property Board let you miss the lawnmower discussion to follow up on worship visitors? Wouldn't the Evangelism Committee be willing to cut back on meeting time so that you can evangelize? You may be rejected, but so was your Master, along with the prophets and the apostles. The calls may be hard, but God has promised his strength is made perfect in your weakness. The question isn't whether or not you have time, but whether or not you will prioritize the time to be an ambassador of Christ carrying the appeal of the Father: “Be reconciled to God.”

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# Deeper Insights

A more in-depth treatment of this issue's topic is in Schroeder's 2010 WLS symposium essay "Worship and Outreach: A Lutheran Paradigm" and two other 2010 essays on worship and outreach at [wlsce.net](http://wlsce.net). See also Jon Hein's symposium sermon: <http://preaching.wlsce.net/key-issue/1>.

The 2008 Symposium files include "The Church and Her Members," also by Hein. Here's an excerpt:

Let us also acknowledge that to the spiritually immature (which could be nonmembers or members) fruits of faith are often the first thing they look for as "the sign" that "this is where I need to be." It's similar to when I buy a used car. I know that the most important thing is that the engine is in good shape. Unfortunately, I have no clue what to look for under the hood! And so, I look at secondary things. Is it rusty? How did it run during the test drive? Etc. Given my limited knowledge of cars, it's all I have to go on. So also, for many, when assessing a church, they don't know what to look for "under the hood." They settle for kicking the tires a little. Therefore, to assess the presence of the Church or the health of a church, while you and I would not rely too heavily on apparent fruits of faith, let us recognize others do. Consequently, let it never be enough for us to say, "We have the Gospel in its truth and purity! That should be all that people care about." Sure. If they were spiritually mature. Since not all are, recognize the weight of Jesus' words. "Let your light shine before men."

## "The Lutheran Liturgy and Evangelism"

Fresh candidates coming out of ... seminaries in America face a serious decision as soon as they begin ministering to their new congregations: Do I bow to external pressures and institute seeker-sensitive worship services that are gutted of Word and Sacrament in order to "bring 'em in," or do I emphasize Word and Sacrament through the historic liturgy and run the risk of watching my congregation shrink? So writes the Rev. John Bombaro, drawing on the early days of his own ministry, in the September/October 2008 issue of *Modern Reformation*. Bombaro pastors a Lutheran church in San Diego and lectures in



theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego. While we may not necessarily agree that new WELS pastors are confronted with such a choice, we certainly may gain much encouragement from Bombaro's defense of the Lutheran liturgy as an evangelistic tool, and not just a nurturing tool....

It is not enough for Lutheran churches to say they *retain* Word and Sacrament in their teaching if they refuse to *emphasize* them in corporate worship. According to Bombaro, such concessions are made in the name of making public worship more attractive and relevant to the non-churched in the community. "Why retain unfashionable orthodoxy, especially its theology-laden

liturgy, when it comes to the contemporary mission?" he asks, verbalizing the question of many who believe Lutheran liturgical worship and outreach cannot co-exist. Bombaro eloquently argues for "theology-laden liturgy" as the best way to do outreach through worship....

Lutheran liturgical worship is not a style of worship. It is a theology of worship that maintains that God touches hearts through gospel proclamation in Word and Sacrament....

Daniel Leyrer. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 106.1 (Winter 2009). The full article is posted at <https://connect.wels.net/worship>.

## Worship Conference: July 19-22, 2011

Registration begins in March. Many details are posted at [www.wels.net/events](http://www.wels.net/events).

- Opportunities for singers and instrumentalists, high school honor choir, children's choir
- Fees – only ten dollars above 2008, an increase of only 3%
- Encouragement for congregations to send worship leaders
- Subsidy grants
- "What's new?"
- Continuing education credits or clock hours
- Comments from the 2008 conference and a Flickr slide show

To encourage someone to attend, send the link and your personal note. The honor choir includes public school and home school students.



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

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