



# 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. Bryan Gerlach has served as administrator for the Commission on Worship since 1995.

## Variety: Stewardship for Gospel Impact

By Bryan Gerlach

A caricature of liturgical worship sees it as the unimaginative following of an official order from a hymnal, with little variety. Maybe that's not so surprising considering our WELS roots. It may be difficult for some to imagine (but others can remember) when not a few parishes experienced only TLH pages 5 and 15. How much variety is that? Apart from the communion service, two melodies for *Create in Me* and the triple Hallelujah. Even with Matins and Vespers added, that's not much musical/liturgical worship bandwidth.

Compare that situation with the resources now available in official WELS publications since 1993.

CW unless noted CWS = Christian Worship Supplement (2008) CWOS = CW:Occasional Services (2004) CWNSS = CW:New Service Settings (2002)	Organ	Piano	Other instr.	Guitar	Comments
The Common Service	x	+			+ = works (but, if piano column, not pianistic)
Service of Word and Sacrament	x	+	x <sup>1</sup>		
Service of the Word	x	+			
Divine Service I (CWS, CWNSS)	x	x	x		Pianistic setting; also simplified setting
Divine Service II (CWS)	x	+	x		Many possibilities with metrical canticles <sup>2</sup>
Gathering Rites (CWS)	x	+	x		
Morning Praise	x	+			
Haugen Morning Praise (CWNSS)	+	x	x	x	Introduced at 1996 worship conference
Evening Prayer	x	+			
Compline I (CWNSS, CWOS)	x	+			
Compline II (CWNSS, CWOS)	x	x		x	
Hymns with guitar chords				x	CW – 12 of 623, CWS – 68 of 85

And resources from beyond WELS? Some parishes substitute responsorial psalms from various publishers for CW's simple psalm tones. NPH included the gathering rite "Remember Your Love" in the 2001 Lenten kit. Other gathering rites are widely used. The list of good worship variety from beyond WELS sources is long and getting longer.

Various elements of worship benefit from variety, such as different types of sermons. But since musical variety is one of the most pressing issues, this article focuses on musical variety.

continued on next page

Variety

### WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

Love

Evangelism

Culture



### Historical Perspective

During the 17th century over 150 settings of the liturgy were published for use by German Lutheran choirs.<sup>3</sup> In addition to new settings by Lutherans, other settings from the past and from other countries remained acceptable through the strength of tradition and because the texts were the common property of both Lutherans and Catholics. From published collections and inventories of music held by various churches, we gain an impression of vigorous and dynamic variety. An unwavering use of TLH 5/15 for two or three decades was not a 20th century application of historic Lutheran practice.

It seems inconceivable that some parishes experienced only TLH 5/15 for so long – inconceivable not as a criticism of our forefathers or because of any weakness inherent in liturgical worship but because such a pattern *now* seems to be an abuse of liturgical worship. Were decades of such consistency good stewardship of God's gifts?

Variety has a stewardship angle. But consider also some other angles. When liturgical worship demonstrates variety and vitality, more people will find it more satisfying. This satisfaction level can remove some of the pressure for worship choices judged to be less Lutheran. Thus a strategy for variety and creativity *within* Lutheran parameters does two things: it broadens current range of practice and promotes unity within that range.

An increased satisfaction level can have a positive gospel impact on outreach and member retention. This is not a sociological strategy to pursue for the sake of "success" but rather a factor that fortifies confidence in Lutheran worship. We make worship choices first on the basis of theology, not pragmatic sociology. Doing the best we can with our resources, we practice good worship stewardship and trust God for the impact he intends.

An accurate picture of worship variety in the 17th century is useful both as a model to inspire our efforts and as a corrective to the impression some may have that liturgical worship is "hymnal-only," with little variation. Some generalizations about historical WELS

worship patterns are fair: pietistic roots, pioneer beginnings, becoming liturgical, scant variety. Imagine worship in one of the mother churches of a Midwestern city formed not by our actual history from 1940-1980 but by something reflecting historic Lutheran principles *circa* 1640-1680. How might our circumstances today be different had we employed variety analogous to the 17th century?

- Broader consensus with less risk of worship tensions?
- Stronger member satisfaction and retention, and thus also outreach?
- Deeper ownership of how we worship?
- A Lutheran "immune system" better able to resist influences from other theologies?

### Too Much Variety

Too little variety can weaken the impact of worship, but so can too much. Craig Erickson writes about the "law of retroactive engagement," about memory and repetition. "Ritual thrives on repetition. Our cultural tendency to identify TV reruns with the off-season is deadly to worship. The experience of worship is deepened through repetition." Some other excerpts: "Access to inexpensive print media has resulted in a proliferation of celebrations that are ever-new, ever-adaptive, and ever-wordier.... Worshipers have been handed tomes that in some cases exceed their reading quotas for the week. The verbosity of such worship stifles the religious spirit.... An excess of individual creativity in worship inhibits participation.... Excessive personal creativity subjects a congregation to the tyranny of individualism, which is a thinly disguised form of clerical dominance...."<sup>4</sup>

While Erickson's concern is spoken texts, a similar caution is valid for musical variety. When the hymnal supplement project was nearing completion, a capable musician asked if we weren't beginning to offer congregations *too much* variety. Just as most parishes can't know all tunes in a hymnal, so we must be alert to excessive variety. Today's WELS worship resources show a vastly different approach than with TLH in 1975, but let's not lose the value of memorized familiarity in our pursuit of compelling variety.

“As much as it is good to have variety ... and fresh things, there is still something neat about being able to worship with your eyes closed. We want to strike a balance between that comfort and familiarity and some good resources that are solidly Lutheran, with excellent texts that proclaim the gospel with depth and substance. This book [CWS] helps us do that” (FIC 12-1-2007).

## Challenges

“Where do I get the resources I need?” This article doesn’t provide a short list; it’s part of a series: “words to wrestle with.” The starting point is not the short list, but a conceptual/theological framework and a consensus that lead to adjusting priorities and budgeting resources of money, people, and time.

**Teach worship principles.** The “Evangelical” subculture in America doesn’t know these principles. The default position for some is passive and unengaged. A tempting solution is to provide “enough variety,” hoping that this will engage the passive. But with no change to their inner assumptions, some will still be left trying to worship with Lutheran *forms* but without solid Lutheran *convictions*. “The service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God.... The highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness.”<sup>5</sup> How well do the people you serve understand this?

**Cycle in, cycle out.** Schools of Worship Enrichment have included this worship folder note.

A setting of Morning Praise, largely by Marty Haugen, was introduced to WELS at the first national worship conference in 1996 and published in CWNSS in 2002. Parishes that have used it for several years may find that the standard liturgical songs do not have the “shelf life” of some other liturgical settings. This is not surprising with music that is easy to learn. The potential for continued use of this service is enhanced when different psalms and canticle settings are used within the familiar structure and liturgical dialogue.

If you’ve used this service for several years, it’s probably time to cycle in some new variety. Psalm 63 and the *Te Deum* can return in a year or so. Temporary resources – those with limited shelf life – can bring an enriching dimension to worship as long as they’re not used past their expiration date.

**A different vision, a level playing field.** The most dicey variety questions concern “contemporary” worship. While freely granting Christian liberty in this arena, let’s explore this question: What are the better options for the vast majority of WELS parishes?

Since there are many styles of music appropriate for worship, it’s unfortunate when some talk about “traditional” and “contemporary” as if there are only two options available. Churches that have pursued greater variety may in *some* services use only piano (with optional guitar, hand percussion, wind instruments) while relying on the organ in *other* services. Or they regularly make greater use of piano and other instruments in a service that still uses the organ for some songs. For example, the piano plays during the offering or

communion distribution and accompanies choir or soloist and some hymns or psalms.

There is a common phenomenon among some churches eager for variety or change: they devise a new/contemporary/blended worship strategy and pour tons of creative energy into that service – while leaving the “traditional” service to languish in the uncreative patterns that contributed to a desire for something new.

In some denominations one can find congregations with a contemporary service led by a dedicated “praise band” of several competent musicians, highly motivated, practicing diligently. Then at the “traditional” service there is the lone organist who, according to an all-too-common expectation for that role, plays relatively simple (uninteresting) music. And she plays alone, without any other instruments.

How would people perceive the “traditional” service if the same number of highly motivated musicians as found in the “praise band” contributed their skills on a regular basis? Imagine such a service with: a qualified organist; regular use of song leader or choir; trumpet descants on some hymns; occasional brass quartet; piano, flutes, guitar, and hand percussion on the psalm and another hymn; and other combinations of various instruments regularly accompanying choir selections and playing service music.

A lot of work? Sure. But God’s praise and his people certainly deserve it!<sup>6</sup>

**See supplemental content online** for additional challenges. Here’s an excerpt concerning song lyrics, a critique from outside WELS:

We congratulate God on how well God is meeting our needs. When we say, “You’re such a good God,” it sometimes sounds like comforting words spoken to a pet.... Our songs often congratulate ourselves on how well we respond to God’s grace. Have you noticed how much we sing about how loud or passionately we sing? (Brian McLaren, *Leadership*)

What is good variety? Considering all the options available, what are the better choices? This question is beyond the scope of one article. It is answered by looking in a balanced way at all twelve “worship words to wrestle with.” God bless our efforts to do so, for the found and for the lost.

<sup>1</sup> *Service of Word and Sacrament: Festival Setting*, NPH OL-286037. Brass, percussion, optional C or B-flat instruments. Use just the top part if a full quartet is not available. Brass parts, reduced to a keyboard score, may be played on an electronic keyboard or synthesizer.

<sup>2</sup> The Electronic Pew Edition includes: Gloria – 14 different melody line TIFF files; Sanctus – seven; Nunc dimittis – eight. See page 26 in the Accompaniment Edition for a list as well as other ideas for using these canticles.

<sup>3</sup> Mostly *missa breve*: Kyrie and Gloria, in Latin as preferred in the cities, but German settings were also used. Other liturgical songs were often hymnic versions. It is, of course, easier for choir rather than congregation to provide musical variety.

<sup>4</sup> Erickson, Craig. *Participating in Worship*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. pp. 20, 111-112. The comment about TV reruns predates their wide availability on cable TV.

<sup>5</sup> Apology IV:310 (Tappert).

<sup>6</sup> WELS web Q&A.

# Merry Advent?

By Aaron Christie

The fall season has again filled our planners. The full menu of parish classes and activities are up and running. Sports practices and games gobble up our hours. With so much to do in the present, it becomes difficult to see past this Sunday let alone think about December. Precisely because we are so busy, I evangelically encourage you to carve out an hour or two to plan your celebration of Advent and Christmas. Theologically, the *Word become flesh* brings forth our best efforts to celebrate this profound event! Practically speaking, dozens of visitors will worship with us this December. What an opportunity to proclaim Christ through excellence in sermon, sight, and song.

## Some Things to Think About

Advent is a difficult season of the church year. The cries of the Baptist in the wilderness clash with the crooning of Bing Crosby on the air waves. Our materialistic age has moved its celebration of Christmas ever earlier, not out of a love for the baby King, but out of a love for bigger profits. We all want to get into the “spirit of the season,” but the “season” can leave some feeling exhausted and even depressed.

Advent can help. Advent is a season of repentance, quiet preparation, and anticipation. As you plan, you might want to consider one or more of the following ideas.

## Sounds

Consider “turning down” the music during Advent. In my parish, we don’t sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the organ isn’t quite as boisterous. Turning down the volume during Advent will amplify the JOY when it is time to sing “Joy to the World.”

During the Christmas season, consider carefully the “sound” of each service. In our parish, the early Christmas Eve service is grand and festive while the later Christmas Eve candle light service is quiet and meditative. Christmas Day is joyous and timeless. (“Of the Father’s Love Begotten” is chanted by a men’s choir.)

## Sights

Advent falls during the darkest time of the year. Consider turning down the sanctuary lights for midweek Advent services and turn up the use of candles. Three candles in crystal hurricane lamps stand in the center of our chancel. Try using votive candles creatively. Depending on your site’s layout, could *luminaria* light the way from parking lot to church doors?

As for decorating the church, it might invite controversy to wait until just before Christmas Eve to decorate for Christmas. So what about a gradual approach to Christmas decorating?

Advent 1: The Advent wreath appears along with blue paraments.

Advent 2: Candles and some evergreen garlands or wreaths are added.

Advent 3: Poinsettias make their appearance.

Advent 4: Add a manger scene minus the infant Christ.

Christmas Eve: Christmas trees, angels, white paraments, etc.

Christmas decorations remain up until the celebration of Epiphany on January 6.

## Services

For midweek Advent worship consider using the alternate *Service of Light* (CW p. 54). The *Service of Light* with its rich imagery of Christ as the Light of the world is perhaps preferable to *Prayer at the Close of Day* with its overtones of repentance and the sleep of death.

For the Sundays of Advent, a gathering rite may serve as an alternate beginning to each service. One popular option is *O Come, O Come Emmanuel: Gathering Rite* available at [giamusic.com](http://giamusic.com) (G-4639). Another is *Lead Us to Your Light* (G-5323). Samples are available at GIA and at the C/W site on Connect. Look in Service Folders under Quick Links. The C/W site includes a file with worship folder content (including TIFF melody graphics) thus making retyping unnecessary.

Make the lighting of the Advent wreath a part of the service. A responsive dialogue for each Sunday is in *CW: Occasional Services*, page 133. These sentences may replace the Song of Praise or the Verse of the Day. This short ritual highlights the theme of each Sunday and the meaning of the Advent wreath.

For brothers desiring to experiment with or reintroduce the practice of every Sunday communion, the short season of Advent with its focus on repentance and preparation is a good logical/theological place to begin (preceded by study and discussion).

The celebration of Christmas Day is sadly an afterthought in some people’s minds. Strongly consider celebrating Holy Communion on Christmas Day. (God in the *flesh* and *body* in the Sacrament make for a great homiletical application!) One might also substitute stanzas of familiar Christmas hymns for the songs of the liturgy. Stanza two of “What Child Is This?” can be a potent Christmas replacement for the *Agnus Dei*.

Epiphany falls on January 6. Christ shines forth as a light to the nations! Consider introducing an evening Epiphany service on January 6. Choirs and LES singers can recycle a “Wise Men” song from a Christmas service. Make it a candlelight service. Begin in the darkness with the *Service of Light*. Sing one of the great Epiphany “light” hymns by candle light. Close the service by relighting people’s candles and singing select stanzas from CW 83. “In the heav’nly country bright Need they no created light...” takes on a whole new significance.

## Don’t Forget the Supplement

This planning article does not give specific details on hymns, lessons, or instruments. The intent is to help brothers consider some of the larger planning issues of the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany cycle. But remember the wealth of resources in CWS and its various editions. A Guitar Edition covers most of the hymns. Many instrumental parts and alternate accompaniments are available on the Accompaniment Edition CD. MIDI files from the CD may be used to teach singers who do not read music.

May our dear Lord’s blessing rest on you as you plan to praise him this Christmas – and then do exactly that on December five-and-twenty!

