



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 Jon Zabell has served churches in Omaha, NE, and Green Bay, WI. He is a member of the Commission on Worship and chaired the committee that prepared resources to introduce *Christian Worship Supplement*.

How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways!

By Jon Zabell

There's *me time*, and then there's *group time*. New preschoolers often struggle to understand the difference. Four-year-olds who are accustomed to being in the spotlight at home suddenly have to be content to share it when they're in school. For some of them, it's too much to take. Walk past the open door of a preschool classroom at the start of the school year, and you might catch the sounds of a tiny temper tantrum coming from inside. "Me first" comes naturally to the toddler's old Adam!

In time, most of us learn how to work and play nicely with others. But our flesh always hates getting nudged out of the spotlight. If all that the second table of the law said was "Love your neighbor," maybe we could do it. But the Lord says, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Your sinful *self* doesn't want to hear that, and neither does mine. The flesh of the individual always and only wants *group time* to be *me time*. It doesn't matter whether it's a group of relatives, co-workers or friends, and it doesn't matter what type of personality you are. By nature, each individual in the group wants to be the tail that wags the dog.

Selfishness is nothing new, but there was a time when people at least *pretended* to pursue humility. People of today are proud to be proud. Vanity has become a virtue. Look at the brand names that have become American institutions. You can check your MySpace and Facebook accounts using an iPhone. The whole world seems to be proclaiming it from the rooftops: "*How do I love me? Let me count the ways!*"

When you consider the narcissism surrounding us and swirling within us by nature, it's easy to see why even Christians struggle to understand that worship is something more – much more – than *me time*. Sinful pride is not the exclusive trademark of any particular style of worship. The sinful flesh of every musician wants to treat Sunday morning like it's an episode of *American Idol*. Preachers want it to be *America's Got Talent*. People in the pew think they should have the right to change channels. And preschoolers aren't the only ones who know how to throw a tantrum. Personal preferences often trump time-honored traditions for no other reason than "I like it better that way." That's not a big deal when ordering a drive-through meal. But it's a potential minefield as pastors try to lead hundreds of people, each with thousands of personal preferences and opinions.

As unloving and shameful as this "*me first*" thinking is, it's equally unloving and shameful for worship leaders to cave under the pressures that this kind of thinking creates. The same love

Love

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WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

Love

Evangelism

Culture



that requires leaders to take everyone's situation into consideration also requires us gently to say "no" when the tail is trying to wag the dog. We should never be afraid to offer loving correction.

A local heterodox pastor recently preached this message from his church's sign: *No judgment; just Jesus*. A loving congregation, to many in our culture, means a place where everyone is accepted. Everybody gets what he or she wants. It looks like *group time*, but it's really *me time* in disguise. This is a caricature of the kind of love Jesus preaches.

Love is sacrifice. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). So also, love for the people of our congregation often means sacrificing *self* for the good of the group.

It's true, corporate worship is also for the individual. We distribute communion one person at a time, after all. The forgiveness Jesus won is for each one of us. But love for the group also means teaching the group to think like a group. "(Jesus) must become greater, and I must become less," said John the Baptist (John 3:30). How can we help our people think along the same lines? How can we help them understand that worship time is *group time*?

Lutherans have a leg up in this regard. Our denomination has a founding father who didn't want to be known as a founding father. Martin Luther was at great pains to make clear that his teaching was what the church had always taught. It's not that he didn't do anything *new* in worship: he cleansed the work-righteous, convoluted communion liturgy the church had been using. But for Luther *new* wasn't the point. Worship reform wasn't about novelty because it wasn't about him. His version of reform was to keep every *good* thing that the church had been doing for centuries and to get rid of the rest. His goal was to proclaim Christ. He was also teaching his listeners to think like a group, a group whose membership stretched back over a thousand years.

Through patient teaching and by careful example, we too can help our people understand the difference between *me time* and *group time* when they come to worship each week. By the forms of worship we promote and use, we can demonstrate that our *group* extends not only beyond the individual, but also beyond our local congregation and even beyond our synod. Our worship can express our connection to the Holy Christian Church.

This *group time* aspect of corporate worship is important to remember when we consider how to make best use of the abilities God has given our people. Each of our congregations is a delightful potluck of talent, and each of our members brings his or her own unique gifts to the table (1 Corinthians 12). In his letter to the Romans, Paul says, "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship" (12:1). In a broad sense, we worship our Savior not only in church buildings, but also in offices and kitchens, on football fields, and on stages at concerts. What turns our everyday life into worship? Paul reminds us: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). As leaders we need to be tuned in to the God-given gifts of our people, so that we can encourage our brothers and sisters to use their gifts faithfully within their God-given vocations.

Personal preferences often trump time-honored traditions for no other reason than "I like it better that way."

However, when royal priests (1 Peter 2:9) of Christ gather together around God's Word and sacraments, the purpose of our worship must go beyond giving thanks and being faithful to our gifts. Now it's about God's Word, all of which testifies to the saving work of Jesus (John 5:39). It's about his sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, by which the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ through faith. From invocation to benediction, the purpose of this kind of worship – *public worship* – is to proclaim the saving work of Christ, so that God may be praised and his people may be fed.

Which kinds of gifts are appropriate here?

On the football field, a Christian quarterback worships God by using his athletic gift to the best of his ability. This is worship in its broad sense. But as wonderful as his gift may be, it won't help him or his fellow believers proclaim the gospel at worship. In humility and Christian love, he sets this particular gift aside. Let's say this quarterback has also been given a unique ability to encourage

others. Such a gift isn't nearly as amazing in the eyes of our world as is his athletic prowess. But in his conversations with his pastor and his fellow members, he gives consistent support and encouragement. Then, when they see him in church, they are reminded of his encouragements as together they proclaim the saving works of Christ. In worship, his gift of encouragement shines.

Probably no one is asking if he can use his athletic skills in worship. But what about a clarinet student who is just learning to play? What about an accordionist? What about a rock musician? What about a clown? What about a bagpiper? Each Christian can praise God with each talent he or she's been given. But there is a time and a place for everything, and there is a difference between private praise and public proclamation. There is a difference between the unique gifts of each member and gifts that the entire body needs. In sum: there is a difference between the doctrine of vocation and the theology of worship. When it comes to our worship, it's not enough to ask, "Will this talent praise God?" We need to ask: "Will it help to proclaim Christ's saving work?" "Will it edify God's people?" Wise leaders will remember the purpose of corporate worship and apply the principles they've learned to each situation. Loving leaders will teach their people that the kind of worship that happens in our weekly services isn't *me time*. It's *group time*.

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It starts with us. Love forbids us from assuming the worst about our brother's worship practices. Love encourages us to consult with neighboring congregations when trying something new. Love also requires us to speak gently with others about something we recognize as unwise. Love is a pastor, a worship leader, or a musician who is willing to listen to constructive criticism from brothers and sisters in Christ. Love wants the saving work of Jesus to be the theme and center of all worship. Paul writes, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16, NASB).

Finally, to think like a group is to remember who we are. Peter writes, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may proclaim the praises of him who brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). God has forgiven our ugly sinful pride. He has reconciled us to himself by the blood of Jesus Christ, and he has reconciled us to one another. We're not a group because we say we are. We're a group because God says we are, and he can't lie.

How good and pleasant it is when pastors, musicians, and people in our congregations are all saying, "Jesus must become greater and I must become less!" *How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!* (Psalm 133:1)

Freedom, Wisdom, Love

Though free, Luther saw commonality in worship forms to be beneficial for the good of the common people.

Now when your people are confused and offended by your lack of uniform order, you cannot plead, "Externals are free. Here in my own place I am going to do as I please." But you are bound to consider the effect of your attitude on others. By faith be free in your conscience toward God, but by love be bound to serve your neighbor's edification, as also St. Paul says, Romans 14 [15:2], "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him."

For we should not please ourselves, since Christ also pleased not himself, but us all.¹

The Lutheran church wrestled with freedom and wisdom in worship during the time leading up to the Formula of Concord. The basic confessional texts regarding freedom and wisdom in worship are found in Augustana VII, XV, XXVI, XXVIII with corresponding coverage in the Apology, along with Formula of Concord X. Without question, they remove the church's outward form of worship from the question of salvation. They keep it, however, firmly in the area of wisdom and love. ...

In worship 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.²

Psalm index

A new resource shows when psalms from *CW: New Service Settings* and from *CW: Occasional Services* fit the CW and CWS lectionaries.

Under "General Resources" click on "Psalm Resources" at connect.wels.net/worship.

Worship Conference: July 19-22, 2011

The WELS national worship conference will take place in New Ulm, MN, featuring the new chapel at Martin Luther College and in St. Peter, MN, using the larger chapel at Gustavus Adolphus College for opening and closing events, and enjoying air conditioned dorm lodging. All events will be at MLC on Thursday, July 21.

To encourage your congregation to budget for this event, note the 2009 synod convention emphasis on continuing education and professional growth – not only for called workers but also for others who serve our churches, e.g. musicians. Registration fees have not been set, but planners are determined to keep costs close to last time. In the ranges below, the first figure is from 2008, the second a likely “not to exceed” figure.

On campus: 325-345 (all sessions, three nights lodging, three days of meals)

Commuting: 250-270

Registration begins in March 2011. Before that time some additional details are available at www.wels.net/events – and below.

What's new?

The conference planning committee has commissioned 17 new musical settings ranging from piano (Twila Paris' “Lamb of God,” CWS 748) to full orchestra (“Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds,” CW 512). This is far more ambitious than for any previous conference.

One focus of the conference is “passing the torch to the next generation.” This includes not only children but also those in our educational system (Lutheran elementary school through seminary). Several younger composers are represented in the commissions above.

For the first time, there will be a select children's choir of 40 voices conducted by Joshua Pedde, assistant director of the famed Indianapolis Children's Choir (and WELS member).

More presentations than in the past will focus on “the arts.”

Something for everyone

This conference is not only for musicians! Every presentation time slot includes options for pastors and for interested lay people. Worship – the highpoint of the conference for most – is for everyone.

Here is a *partial* list of presentations that pastors will find valuable.

Freshness and Variety in Proclaiming Law and Gospel – Richard Gurgel

MIDI MP3 and More – Michael Schultz

New Florida Church Design Witnesses to Members and Community – Philip Huebner

Benefits from a Music Coordinator – Philip Casmer

Good Worship Choices Flow from Good Worship Education – Jon Buchholz

Reflecting the ideals of the Institute for Worship and Outreach and the 2010 symposium at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the following presentations aim to help congregations improve in both worship and outreach.

Worship and Outreach in Charleston, SC – Jon Hein

“This presentation gives a detailed insider's view into one parish's way of emphasizing both outreach and worship. While every idea shared may not be transferrable, participants will gain insights that will enable them better to enrich both outreach and worship in their own parishes. A particular focus of this presentation is planning worship and outreach together.”

Worship and Outreach in Columbia, TN – Charles Westra

Similar to Hein's, but with a particular focus on persistent budgeting of the pastor's time for outreach.

Worship and Outreach in a Midwestern Parish – David Scharf

Similar to Hein's and Westra's, but with a particular focus on the importance of community identity and how worship reflects that identity.

Teaching Worship in the Mission Field – Jonathan Schroeder

High school honor choir

A special thrill of the conference is the high caliber of music shared by this 100+ voice choir. Planners strive to include young people from throughout the country, including those who do not attend a Lutheran high school. Pastors wanting to encourage a teen to apply can point them to a stellar example of honor choir skill from 2008: search YouTube for “WELS honor choir promised.”

Discounted CDs

Prices are reduced on six Commission on Worship CDs, both the highlights from past worship conferences and *Christian Worship Supplement: Hymn Sampler*. All of these except the 1996 worship conference CD are *double* CDs. Order from NPH: <http://online.nph.net>. Look under WELS Products / Worship / Recordings and Videos.

These recordings would make a nice Christmas gift for musicians who serve our churches.



¹ LW 53:45

² Schroeder, Jonathan. *Worship and Outreach: A Lutheran Paradigm*, pp9-10. 2010 WLS symposium. Available at www.wlsce.net.

