

WELS Commission on Worship

2023 Supplemental BORAM Report

worship.welsrc.net

Our Calling

The Commission on Worship (C/W) exists to help parishes in their central activity of worship that glorifies God and strengthens his people. Music and liturgy consume much of the commission's time, but "worship" includes far more: an interest in the style, the forms, and the setting of worship; in preaching; in liturgical orders and rites; in church music for the congregation, choir, soloists, and instruments; in architecture and ecclesiastical arts.

Worship is the heart of all parish life, the time when the greatest number of members gathers to proclaim the gospel and receive God's life-giving power in Word and sacrament. Worship is also a congregation's key point of contact with guests.

If you have never explored the work of the Commission on Worship, you can review its scope by reviewing content at the Congregational Services website as well as the older Commission on Worship website (above), which still contains the greatest amount of Worship content.

Our Current Situation

Hymnal Project

Most members of the C/W in recent years were preoccupied with the WELS hymnal project and its several ancillary volumes. This massive project receives only brief mention here since many details about the new hymnal "suite of resources" are available at christianworship.com. This website also gives details about video and other resources designed to help individuals and congregations explore and introduce the new hymnal. These resources were planned for congregations that have already decided to purchase the new hymnal, for those still exploring, and for those who do not expect to begin the process until sometime in the future. Additional resources are available at welscongregationservices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources.



NPH began taking pre-orders in early 2021. Congregations that placed orders before the middle of June received hymnals in fall. In the summer of 2021, the Hymnal Introduction Program in cooperation with *The Foundation* from Congregational Services, released various resources to assist with long range worship planning. These included the new lectionary, hymn suggestions, and plans for both a cautious and a more ambitious introduction of new musical materials. The goal with

these plans was to allow each congregation to decide how and when to best use new materials without overtaxing worshipers or accompanists.

The new hymnal suite of resources is available here: online.nph.net/church-supplies/categories/hymnals-songbooks/christian-worship-suite. In addition to the pew editions of the hymnal and psalter, with their six accompaniment volumes, another 11 items are available with three more still pending. It is worth noting that, compared to release of the 1993 hymnal, far more content was released in the first 18 months. We express hearty thanks to all involved in this massive project from the project director Michael Schultz to the almost 100 volunteers to the staff at NPH. Soli Deo gloria!

Congregations that have not yet adopted CW21 may still use the new lectionary along with CW93. The new lectionary is available in the free test drive version of CW Service Builder (builder.christianworship.com) and for purchase from Logos (logos.com/product/209642/christian-worship-three-year-lectionary – only \$3.99). Since the Gospel readings in the new lectionary are almost always identical to the old, you can still use “Planning Christian Worship” (worship.welsrc.net) for hymn suggestions if you’re still using CW93. Just watch for any hymns that focus on a First or Second Reading that might have changed in CW21.

As of the end of March 2023, NPH estimates that about 850 WELS congregations have adopted the new hymnal, and about 550 congregations have subscribed to the *Service Builder* program. For a variety of reasons, adoption of the new hymnal was not expected to be as rapid as adoption of the 1993 hymnal. But thus far adoption of both the hymnal and *Service Builder* are well above projections.

A soft launch of *Musician’s Resource* (MR) took place in 2022. MR provides choral alternates, lead sheets, modulations, and instrumental packs (SATB voices of pew edition settings in a variety of transpositions for instruments). MR resources are digital resources (downloadable PDFs); customers will need to be logged into an account to purchase. This initial release focused on public domain materials, providing a wide variety of musical scores. New materials are added regularly at: online.nph.net/musicians-resource. Read the FAQs to learn more about MR.

MR also provides choral parts for select psalms. A number of psalms in the psalter indicate choral parts in the accompaniment edition but *not* in the psalter pew edition. For these, NPH is working to secure rights to offer legally reproducible copies through *Musician’s Resource* (rather than the illegal copying of accompaniment edition pages to distribute to vocalists). Permissions have been secured for the GIA © psalms, which constitute the bulk that fall into this category. The following became available in late 2022, with more added as permissions are secured.

23B, 24G, 24H, 33C, 46E, 63A, 85B, 96C, 116C, 118E, 136A, 146B

As of early April 2023, more than 950 MR resources are available with more added regularly. Many of these can serve congregations using CW93 as well as those using the new hymnal. The largest categories are almost 500 Instrumental Doubling Packs, over 100 Modulations, more than 90 Choral Alternates, 70+ Lead Sheets, over 40 Liturgical Ensemble, and 100+ Instrumental Descants.

Christian Worship: Playlist, an add-on module to the *Service Builder* program is slated to become available in mid-2023. For the latest information, see: online.nph.net/servicebuilder.

Congregational Services Resource Center

In addition to new hymnal content at christianworship.com, other resources are available at welscongregationalervices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources. These include several video presentations and study packages, introductory scripts, a hymnal dedication rite, and hymn sing and concert videos.

Some of the newer resources are:

- “Just starting to explore the new hymnal?” – available under More Resources at welscongregationalervices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources. This can be especially helpful for a congregation or individual just now starting to explore the new hymnal suite of resources.
- Service Builder orientation videos – available at the website above. These complement the earlier and longer webinars available at online.nph.net/servicebuilder. The eighth video in the series offers a broad overview of the most pressing issues concerning digital copyright. Who is the target audience? Those who plan worship and those who manage copyright compliance: pastors, primary musicians, choir directors, and secretaries or office volunteers. The video offers a helpful summary of the issues at hand and suggestions on how best to address them with wisdom and virtue.
- Congregations that have recently decided to acquire the new hymnal suite may be interested in [“Donations for hymnal acquisition.”](#) This is a model to adapt according to congregation size.

An ongoing feature that began in February of 2022 is “Hymnal Highlights.” These provide suggestions to worship planners and musicians along with commentary and recordings of new hymns that congregations may share by email or social media. The goal is to boost familiarity with and appreciation of the new hymns. The hymns selected are chosen from suggestions in the worship plan available at *The Foundation*. Those interested in receiving new Highlights by email may sign up at welscongregationalervices.net/subscriptions.

During Lent 2022 the C/W office partnered with WELS Communications to feature videos based on “The Seven Words” (CW 436). All seven videos plus two versions of all stanzas in sequence are available here forwardinchrist.net/videos (as well as WELS Facebook).



A Look Ahead

In addition to ongoing resources related to release of the new WELS hymnal, future C/W activity includes:

As noted in BORAM, the next National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts will be held in July of 2024. The site and exact dates are not yet firm by the deadline for this report. For more up to date information, see worship.welsrc.net.

Strategic planning for how the C/W can best serve the synod now that the hymnal project is largely completed.

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