

## Hymnal Project

We are privileged and pleased to provide for district convention delegates and others this update on the WELS Hymnal Project.

Committees have been at work since 2013. All of the committee members have come to grips with the fact that the scope of our work is very broad. More and more with every passing month we understand why the hymnal committee that produced *Christian Worship* took eight to ten years to do its work. It matters a great deal that we compile the best worship resources possible. Doing so requires countless hours of research and work and tremendous attention to detail. Our focus continues to be on the scriptural integrity and Christ-centeredness of the resources we are seeking to provide, on both preserving and producing faith-strengthening materials for worshipers today and in generations to come. Our goal continues to be to bring forward texts and music which will serve people of all ages in a broad array of contexts, so that through Scripture and rites and hymns and psalms, God will be glorified and his people edified.

We have established the target date of Advent 2021 for the release of the majority of these resources. According to that timeline, our Executive Committee is planning to review and approve final content for all resources by December 2019. We realize that this is an ambitious schedule, especially since there are currently at least 17 print books that will ultimately be produced as part of our work, plus the digital products. We certainly look to the Lord to strengthen us and enable us to carry out the work according to this timeline.

Prior to the 2016 *Report to the Twelve Districts* we had taken four national surveys as part of our research. Subsequent to that report being given, we have in the past two years been field testing materials from all of the committees responsible for producing content. The Psalmody Committee tested a number of new musical settings of psalms. The Hymnody Committee sent out dozens of musical files that supported half a dozen existing hymns, and later sought reactions to half a dozen new hymns. The Rites Committee tested "The Service," an updated Holy Communion service with two different musical settings. The Scripture Committee completed its extensive, year-long testing of all three of the lectionary years. While these field tests involved a substantial amount of work for committee members, we are at the same time extremely thankful to the pastors and members of congregations who were willing to make the local adjustments and do the work of trying out these materials. Without exception, the feedback we received was informative and helpful.

We have also recently concluded a nine-part series of articles on hymns in *Forward in Christ* magazine. That series was linked to a national survey regarding the "keep/cut" list of existing hymns. Both by the voting and by additional comments written in through the project website ([www.welshymnal.com](http://www.welshymnal.com)), we received the feedback which will help to ensure that we are not making decisions on our own but are being sensitive to hymns which people treasure. These survey results and comments will be factored into the continuing formulation of the final hymn list.

What follows is a brief update on other details of the work, new since the last report in 2016.

**Psalmody Committee (PC)** – The PC has compiled a first draft of “hymnal psalms,” those psalms (64 of them) which are appointed in the three-year lectionary and will be printed in the front part of the hymnal. The PC has since moved on to selecting the balance of musical settings for the rest of the 150 psalms. These will appear in a self-standing psalter – a book that contains the full text of all 150 psalms, multiple musical settings of each psalm, as well as a psalm prayer and notes (such as Luther quotes) for each psalm. Psalms settings in both the hymnal and psalter will reflect a broad variety of musical styles in comparison to the single style used in CW.

**Hymnody Committee (HC)** – Having finished its first pass of reviewing and selecting the existing *Christian Worship* and *CW: Supplement* hymns which will appear in the next book, the HC has been reviewing thousands of new (or “new to us”) hymns, has selected hundreds of hymns for further review, and has processed dozens of hymns through three levels of review for possible inclusion in the new book. This pipeline of new hymns is running each week and will run until approximately the spring of 2019. The last part of the 2

019 calendar year will involve the complex, multi-committee work of balancing the hymns by category and genre and other factors to arrive at a final hymn list. The goal for harmonizations is that the hymnal be a “singers’ book.” This will result, in comparison to CW, in more settings that can be sung in harmony and easier settings. A subcommittee has also drafted a new Hymn of the Day list. This is a pre-selected hymn which congregations may use each week and be confident that it is rich in gospel content and fits well with the readings of the day.

**Rites Committee (RC)** – Since the liturgical services are used so regularly in many congregations, it is critical that every detail of these services be closely analyzed and carefully crafted. This is another part of the intensive detail of the project. The RC will soon have a first draft of the rites that will appear in the front part of the hymnal. This includes worship services with which WELS members are familiar: three Holy Communion services, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of Day, and various other rites and devotions. Additional musical variety for these services will be available in digital resources. As soon as those services have been finalized, the RC will work on seasonal services (such as Holy Week services) and collections of prayers. The RC found it necessary to start a subcommittee to work on *The Agenda*, the book in which appear special rites such as ordination of a pastor, reception of new members, or a groundbreaking ceremony. The Agenda committee is working side by side with the RC to have all of these rites ready for release in 2021.

**Communications Committee (CC)** – Some of the work of the CC has been mentioned in various items above such as all the various field testing efforts and the survey regarding the “keep/cut” list of hymns. With the bulk of survey work now complete, the CC will continue to operate the project website, will begin a new series of blog articles, and will continue to coordinate project updates at conferences and conventions. The CC also has a strong desire to stay in touch with schools and with the younger generation, as it has done in the past with the favorite hymn surveys which were taken among schools. To that end, the CC is making plans to have press releases on the *WELS Kids Connection* and through the WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools.

**Scripture Committee (SC)** – The SC had to do diligent work in the first months and years of the project so that the three-year lectionary could be completed. That allowed for the PC to work on and complete the hymnal psalms which are based on lectionary appointments. It also allowed the HC to work on its Hymn of the Day selections and it will be used to generate the lists of suggested hymns for each Sunday. A major part of worship planning from Sunday to Sunday is dependent on the church calendar and the lectionary, both of which the SC has now completed. The SC will review the language of the creeds and the Lord’s Prayer. The large remaining project for the SC is a series of books called Commentary on the Propers. Pastors familiar with “Planning Christian Worship” will truly appreciate this expanded commentary on the lectionary. It spells out the theme established by the Gospel and lays out the connectedness of the lessons for each Sunday.

**Technology Committee (TC)** – The three initiatives of the TC are still in place: 1) TC is working to develop a Service Builder product which includes all the digital assets of the hymnal project and allows the user to both plan worship and formulate high quality service folders ready for printing. This is a product which would definitely and dramatically decrease the amount of weekly time needed to generate excellent service folders. 2) Musicians’ Resource is an online e-commerce site for purchasing additional music (lead sheets, alternate accompaniments, descants, brass, etc.) for all of the hymns, psalms, and rites across the entire line of resources. A ten-member committee has just been formed to compile these musical files for the hymns. 3) TC will also be looking at working on a Personal App for phone or tablet. Individuals could use this hymnal resource devotionally to read or play or sing hymns and psalms, to convert hymnal texts into large print, or to preview items scheduled for upcoming worship. The possibilities for such a product, of course, are nearly limitless as technology continues to advance.

As print products move toward finalization and production, the above-mentioned digital products naturally follow behind the print materials. They will be developed closer to the end of the project so as to be sure to make use of the latest and best technology. A subcommittee of the TC is also responsible for the conceptual design and layout of all the print products. We anticipate having an extremely well-designed family of resources, whose legibility and user-friendliness are at the highest levels.

**Manuals** – Four manuals are being produced. Since these manuals are dependent on finished content which is just beginning to emerge, the work on these books has also just begun. The manuals will be aimed at four audiences: pastors, musicians, parish groups (such as altar guilds, elders, ushers), and lay people (devotions on worship).

**Handbook** – A hymnal handbook or companion is the volume which provides the background on hymns and the biographical information on authors, translators and composers. The information in *Christian Worship: Handbook* is being updated and will be made available in an online resource.

**Hymnal Introduction Program** – We are pleased that Rev. Adam Mueller of Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz., has accepted the chairmanship of the Hymnal Introduction Program. The introduction of the new hymnal will take place as a corps of trained presenters gathers with groups of congregations around the country to fully introduce the new hymnal line and the tools which will provide for the most beneficial use of these materials.

Members of the WELS hymnal project are very interested in providing for congregations of our church body a curated set of resources, i.e., materials that have been carefully reviewed for doctrinal soundness and musical excellence, materials which can be trusted and put to beneficial use. We look forward to the day in the not too distant future when a hymnal project update will have become a hymnal introduction program, the day when we will have these materials in hand and digitally available, the day when we can share with WELS members how these materials can serve them well in church, in school, and in the home, for decades to come.

Reporting for the WELS Hymnal Project,  
Rev. Michael D. Schultz, director

Rev. Jon Zabell, chairman  
Rev. Daniel Sims, secretary  
Rev. Caleb Bassett, Technology Committee  
Rev. Jonathan Bauer  
Rev. Aaron Christie, Hymnody Committee  
Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director of the Commission on Worship  
Teacher Michael Marquardt, Communications Committee  
Rev. Jonathan Micheel, Rites Committee  
Rev. Paul Prange, Psalmody Committee  
Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, Scripture Committee  
Prof. James Tiefel  
Rev. Keith Wessel, Agenda Book Committee