

## 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 are a delegate and have never explored the work of the Commission on Worship, you can get a good idea of its scope by reviewing content at the new Congregational Services web site as well as the older Commission on Worship web site (above), which still contains the greatest amount of Worship content.

## Our Current Situation

### Hymnal Project and other C/W work

Most members of the C/W in recent years have been preoccupied with the forthcoming new WELS hymnal and its comprehensive suite of resources. After agreeing with Northwestern Publishing House on an earlier release (Advent 2021 instead of 2024), workflow increased significantly for the Executive Committee and for seven subcommittees. Since May of 2016 when meeting frequency increased, the Hymnal Project has become the primary focus for the C/W and the Worship office.

### Hymnal Project details

The Executive Committee met for its twenty-second and final face-to-face meeting on November 5-7, 2019 to make final decisions about hymnal content. Since that time the focus of Hymnal Project work has shifted to 1) NPH production (copyediting, design/layout, and copyright permissions), and 2) the work of the Hymnal Introduction Program.

January of 2020 saw the launch of [christianworship.com](http://christianworship.com). The previous hymnal project web site, which featured much two-way communication between individuals and the project, was deactivated. Through the older web site the committee provided information through more than





120 articles written over the last six years, providing a window into the process of developing the hymnal. Much of this information covered the general thought process on how hymns were cut or selected. There was also a 9-part series in *Forward in Christ* explaining the hymn selection process.

The purpose of the new web site is no longer two-way communication but rather to share details about the suite of resources that comprise the Hymnal Project. This web site will add new content as it becomes available. For example, a budgeting spreadsheet was added in March, along with more topics under Frequently Asked Questions.

### Hymnal Introduction Program (HIP)

HIP efforts will provide 1) information before the hymnal resources are released and 2) introductory workshops in the fall of 2021. Copies of *Christian Worship: Preview* have been mailed to every congregation and school in quantities for leadership groups to review.

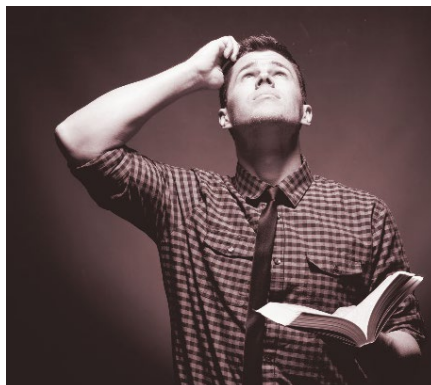
The HIP committee includes: Adam Mueller (chair), Bryan Gerlach (C/W Director), Jon Zabell (chair of both C/W and Hymnal Project), Michael Schultz (Hymnal Project Director), and Mark Buske (NPH).

### Newsletters

The commission publishes two bi-monthly newsletters: *Worship the Lord* (WTL) and *Preach the Word* (PTW). These newsletters are used also in Hong Kong, Ukraine, Sweden, Indonesia, and parts of Latin America. In addition, some non-WELS pastors make use of PTW.

Back issues of both newsletters are [available online](#), both in PDF format at the Worship web site (all back issues) and starting in 2015 also in a blog format, welcoming comments, at [blogs.wels.net/worship](http://blogs.wels.net/worship). PTW is also available on the seminary's Grow in Grace web site as an online searchable database. The past two years covered these topics.

- PTW: Pastor Nathan Nass encouraged pastors to preach simply and clearly for the benefit of all hearers. Dr. Michael Berg wrote a series about apologetics in preaching.
- WTL: David Hosbach offered guidance and solutions for room acoustics, sound systems, and hearing assistance. Dr. Phil Huebner wrote about "What do you do with children in worship?"



## Worship plans and new music

C/W in partnership with other Congregational Services units continues to provide resources for synodwide programs—a new effort from Congregational Services in recent years. Worship resources typically include a comprehensive worship plan, camera-ready worship folders, sermon ideas, and newly commissioned music for choir, children, or soloist. Programs over the last two years include:



- Mission and Ministry Sunday (Oct. 21, 2018).
- C18 and C19 (Christmas 2018 and 2019)
- E20 (Easter 2020)
- 10 for 10 (A stewardship emphasis that may be used at any time)
- Welcome Home (An emphasis on regaining straying members that may be used at any time)

## Worship modules

Two significant video-based training resources became available in early 2020 at the Congregational Services Resource Center, <https://welscongregationalservices.net/>.

- *Effective Service Playing: The Partnership between Organist and Congregation* offers coaching to organists, many of whom are somewhat or largely self-taught. This resource is an online masterclass for organists. This masterclass is like a group lesson that seeks to deepen knowledge of musical choices and to improve performers' ability to play in a way that best supports congregational singing.
- *Worship Led by a Modern Ensemble* demonstrates the potential for leading worship with an ensemble consisting of piano, guitar, and other instruments. The focus is on songs of the liturgy, psalms, and hymns. Some settings of the liturgy, slated for the new WELS hymnal, are crafted to work either with organ (and other instruments) or with a modern ensemble; the melodies remain the same while the musical accompaniment varies.



## A Look Ahead

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

### Hymnology

A committee has been working since 2012 on a hymnology curriculum. The mission is simple: “This curriculum will help teachers cultivate in their students a deeper appreciation for Christian

hymnody.” The curriculum has three objectives: show Christ, application, and develop a love to sing and perform these melodies. Over the past few years several anticipated release dates have been reported. When the development of this curriculum reached a point not far ahead of the development of the new WELS hymnal, a release date was set for summer 2020. Although an earlier release was the initial goal, the extra time ensures that this curriculum will seamlessly serve schools and congregations alongside the new WELS hymnal.

### **The National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts**

With over 1000 attendees, this conference is the largest worship conference among North American Lutheran church bodies, even though WELS is one of the smaller Lutheran synods. The next conference will take place the first week of August 2021 at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis., with strong emphasis on new hymnal resources. This later than usual week was selected for two reasons: 1) to find an available week where our conference is not in competition with other large groups on campus, and 2) to assure that some key Hymnal Project resources are available at the conference (e.g., pew edition, accompaniment editions). Lutheran Elementary School faculties will be encouraged to keep the week open for teachers who want to attend, recognizing that we introduce a new hymnal only once every two generations.

### **Commissioned music project**

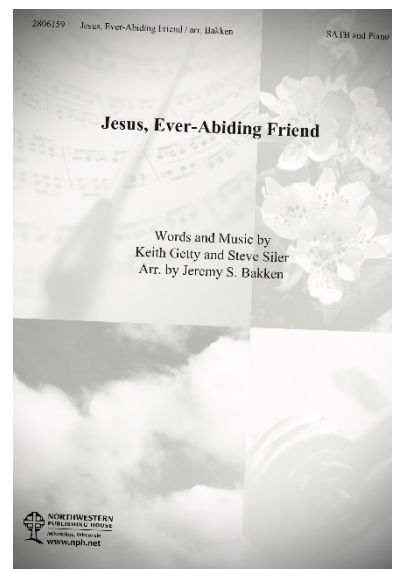
With the introduction of the new WELS hymnal, dozens of new hymns (or hymns relatively unfamiliar to WELS worshipers) will become available for integration into the worship life of WELS congregations. With all things new comes a learning curve. Many efforts will be made to traverse that curve with ease, so that congregations find these new hymns to be useful and edifying as quickly as possible, rather than challenging and burdensome to learn and appreciate.

One effective way to introduce a new hymn is as a choral or solo piece. This allows the average worshiper’s first experience with something new to have the “delight factor” of a moving choral performance rather than an uncomfortable effort at “trying a new hymn.” C/W and NPH are partnering with various choral groups (volunteer groups, high schools, colleges, seminary) to commission new music that enables the “delight factor.” Some new commissions will also be premiered at the national worship conference.

Any congregation marking a significant milestone (anniversary of the congregation, dedication of a new church, anniversary or retirement of a long-serving pastor or teacher) may inquire about participating in this project.

For additional information, contact Rev. Bryan Gerlach, 414-256-3265 or [bryan.gerlach@wels.net](mailto:bryan.gerlach@wels.net).

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