

Report of the District Worship Committee

National Worship Conference

The eighth triennial WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts will be held June 13-16, 2017 at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The WELS worship conference is the largest Lutheran worship conference in North America, despite WELS being a much smaller church body than other Lutheran denominations that sponsor similar conferences. The 2017 conference will include a strong emphasis on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The conference is designed not only for congregational worship leaders, but anyone interested in the various aspects of worship. It will feature sessions on music, architecture, visual art, and liturgy, preaching, and the intersection of worship and outreach.

Besides the main conference in Kenosha, the Commission on Worship is strongly considering two satellite conferences, one of which would be in our district; the location is likely to be Concordia University in Irvine, California, in late June 2017. While attendance at the worship conference is strong and continues to increase, attendance from outlying districts has decreased in recent years. The Commission's hope is that these smaller, regional conferences would allow us to serve more people during the Reformation anniversary year.

School of Worship Enrichment

The School of Worship Enrichment (SoWE) is a weekend event that enables participating congregations to analyze existing worship practices and to plan strategies for beneficial innovation and renewal. Several congregations meet together at the host church. The customary two-day SoWE schedule includes lectures on the theology, purpose, and forms for worship, demonstration of musical samples for choirs and services, break-out groups for congregations' short-term planning, and participation in several model services. A one-day schedule is also available for situations where would make the two-day schedule difficult, although we recommend using the full two-day schedule whenever possible.

For some time, we have considered the Las Vegas area for the next SoWE in the district, but vacancies in the Las Vegas Circuit had put those plans on hold. With all vacancies now filled as of Call Day, the district worship committee will resume discussion with the circuit about a possible SoWE hosted by one of the Las Vegas area congregations.

Hymnology Curriculum

A new hymnology curriculum for Lutheran elementary schools is being prepared, chaired by Teacher Kevin Bode from our district. This is a standalone curriculum (independent from *Christlight*) with three levels: K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. Students will learn a core of 8-11 hymns every year, with options for another 20-23 hymns. Students who attend an LES from Kindergarten through eighth grade would learn approximately 85 hymns over their time in school from this curriculum. NPH will release year one of the three-year curriculum by June 2017.

Hymnal Project

In 2012, the Conference of Presidents called Pastor Michael Schultz to serve as the project director for the WELS Hymnal Project. Since that time, a 13-member executive committee and seven subcommittees have begun work on the next WELS hymnal.

- The **Hymnody Committee** will select the approximately 650 hymns that will be included under the covers of the next hymnal. Like its predecessor, *Christian Worship*, the new hymnal will strike a balance with about two-thirds of the hymns coming from the current hymnal and supplement.
- The **Psalmody Committee** will arrange for the psalms printed in the hymnal, and will also provide multiple musical arrangements of the same psalms in a standalone volume (psalter). The psalter will provide congregations with greater musical variety for the psalms within our own WELS resources.
- The **Rites Committee** is preparing the orders of service in the hymnal. At present, they have worked on the main communion rite (which will be available in multiple musical arrangements), Matins (Morning Praise), Vespers (Evening Prayer), and a new order called "Service of Prayer and Preaching."
- The **Occasional Services Committee** is responsible for services and rites that will not be found in the pew edition of the hymnal (e.g. installation rites, reception of new members).
- The **Scripture Committee** is crafting the lectionary that will guide the annual worship patterns of our congregations. While the next hymnal's lectionary will be similar to that in *Christian Worship*, two major improvements will be a deliberate attempt to have all three readings match thematically, and to adjust our calendar and lectionary system to resemble the systems used within the rest of Lutheranism and Christianity at large (e.g. the way the readings in the Pentecost season are handled).
- The **Technology Committee** is responsible for the digital content of the next hymnal. Their priorities include developing a digital database of hymnal content, worship planning tools, mobile apps that can assist one's devotional life, and content formats that will be used by musicians. The technology committee is also responsible for design and formatting matters in all of the project's resources.
- The **Communications Committee** has been gathering information and feedback throughout the WELS. As the project moves on, their work will transition from research to education and promotion.

You can discover more at the project's website, www.welshymnal.com. Registering on the website will allow interested people to receive timely updates, useful insights, and invitations to participate in the research and development of the new hymnal.

Practical Resources

The district website's worship page contains links to practical worship resources that pastors and others might find useful. Some recent additions include responsive opening dialogues that can be used for festival services, alternate confessions of faith drawn from Luther's Catechisms and the Lutheran Confessions, and several dozen Advent sermon series suggestions. The direct address for the District Worship Committee's page is www.azcadistrict.com/worship. Scroll down to the bottom of the page to find the practical resources.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Johnold Strey
St. Mark's Lutheran Church; Citrus Heights, CA
AZ-CA District Worship Coordinator