

WELS HYMNAL PROJECT REPORT

February 2016

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Pastor Jon Zabell, Project Chairman

A hymnal project is a synod-wide effort, and that makes it beneficial on a number of levels. This is a time for us as a synod to review our current hymnal and to give thanks for the gifts we have. It's a time to think about future generations and the heritage we will pass along to them. It's a time to work together and talk together about the most important thing we do together in the name of Jesus our Savior: worship. We recognize that a synod's hymnal isn't the only resource for worship that a local congregation has at its disposal, but it is a resource that carries the weight of synod-wide dialog, committee discussion, and careful study in light of God's Word. That promises to make this new hymnal a unique and valuable resource for God's people gathered around God's means of grace.

When the Joint Hymnal Committee was finishing its work on our 1993 hymnal *Christian Worship* (CW), its members generally agreed that the fifty-two-year lifespan of our previous hymnal, *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH), had been too long. Thirty years seemed closer to the desirable lifespan of a hymnal, and the idea was to publish a hymnal supplement when we were halfway there. In 2008 WELS congregations welcomed the release of *Christian Worship Supplement* (CWS). Already then, the Commission on Worship was promoting the supplement as a bridge to the next hymnal. As congregations around the synod made use of CWS's lectionary, psalms, rites and hymns in worship, they would be helping the next hymnal committee know which of those elements deserved a more permanent place in the worship life of the church.

In 2011, the synod in convention adopted a long range plan which included this goal under strategies for congregation and district ministry: "establish a committee to publish a new hymnal by the 500th anniversary of the first Lutheran hymnal (1524)." The Commission on Worship began preliminary work on the project's aim, scope, and timeline, and in 2012 the Conference of Presidents called Rev. Michael Schultz to serve as project director. Soon afterward, the administrative structure for the project began taking shape.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Names of committee members are listed here, with an asterisk (*) marking the chair of each committee.

Bryan Gerlach, Michael Marquardt, Michael Schultz, Daniel Sims, James Tiefel, and Jon Zabell* have been appointed as at-large members of the Executive Committee (XC).

Seven subcommittees are in place, with the chairman of each serving on the XC:

Psalms Committee

Samuel Hacker, Amy Hansel, Grace Hennig, Paul Prange*, Adrian Smith, Bill Tackmier, Dale Witte, Daniel Witte

Hymns Committee

Jeremy Bakken, Kevin Bode, Sara Buelow, Aaron Christie*, Mark Davidson, Brian Doebler, Benj Lawrenz, Holly Ledvina, Jeremy Mattek, Ruth Mattek, Phil Moldenhauer, Joel Otto

Rites Committee

John Bortulin, Timothy Buelow, Joel Gawrisch, James Hoogervorst, Wayne Laitinen, Jon Micheel*, Johnold Strey, James Tiefel

Communications Committee

Jonathan Bauer*, Steve Bauer, Daniel Bondow, Linnea Koeppel, Amanda Kohlmetz, Mike Marquardt, Sarah Mayer, Jonathan Niemi, Mark Schutz

Occasional Services Committee

Phil Arnold, Steve Bode, Aaron Glaeske, Keith Wessel*

Scripture Committee

Steven Lange, Daniel Leyrer, Tyler Piel, Jonathan Scharf, Jonathan Schroeder*, Earle Treptow, John Vieths,

Technology Committee

Caleb Bassett*, Dave Gruen, Paul Lemke, Jonathan Pasbrig, Martin Spriggs, Don Vossler, Ian Welch, Matt Weseloh

In addition to the members of these seven subcommittees, the Executive Committee is assisted by a group of people who are responsible for producing the supplementary material currently found in *Christian Worship: Handbook* and *Christian Worship: Manual*. They include Mark Tiefel, Philip Casmer, Justin Cloute, Noah Headrick, Johann Caauwe, and Benjamin Tomczak.

PROJECT MISSION STATEMENT

Early on in the project's development, the members of the Executive Committee developed and adopted a project mission statement. That mission statement is as follows:

1. *This hymnal will confess Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, who comes to us in the means of grace.*
2. *This hymnal will provide materials that enable believers to use the means of grace in public worship and other devotional settings.*
3. *This hymnal will be faithful to the scriptures and to the witness of the scriptures in the Lutheran Confessions.*
4. *This hymnal will respect and draw from the historic worship voice of the Christian Church and from our Lutheran heritage.*
5. *This hymnal will include texts and music of excellent quality from past and present sources.*
6. *This hymnal will be produced with thorough study of the character of worship in WELS and the prayer that it may be used joyfully by the people and congregations of our synod.*
7. *This hymnal will be accompanied by print and electronic resources intended to meet the needs of various worship settings in WELS.*

HYMNODY COMMITTEE

Pastor Aaron Christie, Chairman

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Hymnody Committee (HC) is responsible for what one would expect: the roughly 650 hymns found between the covers of the new hymnal. Our work, supervised by the Executive Committee, includes both the texts and music of the hymns. We are working hard to provide a body of hymnody for our synod that is centered in Christ, rooted in the means of grace, decidedly Lutheran in tradition, yet providing ample room for the best that the Church at-large has to offer.

One would expect the HC to work on the hymns of the so-called "pew edition" hymnal. However, the scope of the HC's task is wider than that. The HC also has its sights set on providing a vast array of musical resources for each hymn, available apart from the pew edition. The HC will play a major role in producing resources that could include alternate accompaniments, settings in lower keys, descants, and other instrumental parts not included in the pew edition. In short, the HC is responsible for all things textual and musical in relation to hymns in our next hymnal. We are working hard to make the Church's hymnic treasures as usable as possible by as many of our parishes and schools as possible.

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

Some Old, Some New

We envision a book of approximately 650 hymns. Our new book will follow CW's lead in bringing forward about two-thirds of the hymns from CW and CWS into the new book. This leaves about one-third of the book for new hymns. Some of these "new" hymns will be from centuries or decades past. Others of these hymns will be brand new - gleaned from materials which authors and composers have more recently released. When it comes to what's new in this hymnal, our concern is not chronology, but quality.

How does a hymn earn a place in the new hymnal? What criteria is the HC using to determine if a hymn is worthy of inclusion? One of the first documents the HC produced was a list of hymn criteria. That document states:

Hymns considered for inclusion should...

1. *be Christocentric.*
2. *be in harmony with the scriptural faith as confessed in the Lutheran Book of Concord.*
3. *be rooted in the Church year with its emphases on the life of Christ and the Christian's life in Christ.*
4. *be drawn from classic Lutheran sources and deliberately inclusive of the Church's broader song (including so-called International or Global music).*
5. *be superlative examples of their genre in regards to both textual content and musical craft.*
6. *be accessible and meaningful for God's people at worship in both public and private settings.*
7. *be useful for those who preach and teach the faith.*
8. *be parts of a corpus that will find wide acceptance by the vast majority of our fellowship.*

These principles are easy enough to articulate. Using them to evaluate each hymn is a little more difficult. What if, for example, a hymn is deep theologically and excellent musically (criterion #5), but is genuinely difficult to sing (criterion #6)? The HC is dedicated to taking each hymn on a case by case basis. The HC is also dedicated to making sure that the hymnal as a whole meets these criteria even if every hymn does not meet all of them equally.

Reviewing and Revising

In addition to searching for the best of what isn't currently in CW and CWS, the HC is also responsible for reviewing the hymns currently in those volumes that will carry over to the next hymnal. The HC has some developed some philosophical guidelines pertaining to that part of its work.

We are generally content to keep the number of stanzas found in *Christian Worship*. However, when excellent content leads us to consider including additional stanzas, we will be open to doing so.

One frequent request has been that hymn keys be further lowered to aid singing. The HC is willing to consider lowering keys on occasion, especially if the upper range of the melody is deemed consistently too high.

That being said, we are cautious about lowering keys too frequently. A hymn's key is part of what creates its overall "feel." Think of a home builder. When putting in molding, he knows that oak and maple are two very different materials. When putting in flooring, he knows that laminate tile is very different from ceramic. We want to make sure that a hymn's trim and flooring fit well with what the hymn is trying to communicate. For example, some have commented that CW uses the key of F-major rather frequently, resulting in a less-than-desirable "sameness" throughout the hymnal. We want to be sensitive to such issues when working with the key of each hymn.

Where the range of certain hymns is a bit of a challenge to some, we hope singers will be willing to continue to challenge their vocal range (a healthy exercise), and that congregations and schools will continue to be committed to supplying the instruction, instruments, and acoustics that help them do so.

One area where the HC is a little more minded to make some changes is in simplifying the harmonic language of the new hymnal. Some have stated it this way: "The pew edition should be a singer's book more than a keyboardist's book." We envision the pew edition containing harmonies that are more rudimentary. We plan on supplying alternate, richer harmonies apart from the pew edition.

Other revisions will make this new hymnal more of a singer's book. Instead of many alto and tenor notes being held while the melody and bass parts move, alto and tenor notes will generally be repeated. This should support four-part singing where it makes musical sense. We are also doing our best to align melody shapes and rhythms with usage in the wider Church so that alternate musical resources become more readily available and better match what our people have before them.

PSALMODY COMMITTEE

Pastor Paul Prange, Chairman

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

One of most significant contributions *Christian Worship* made to worship life in our synod was the introduction of singing psalms as part of every service. An entire generation of worshipers has now grown up expecting to find an appointed psalm inserted between the first and second lessons in the service. Believers of every generation benefit from hearing and learning these divinely-inspired hymns, which sing both of the fallen human condition and its only cure, Jesus Christ.

A generation later, it was assumed that psalms would continue to play an important role in the worship life of our church body. The hymnal project's Psalmody Committee (PC) has been entrusted with that component of our next hymnal. We hope to continue and even expand the opportunities congregations have to make use of psalms in worship. Our job is to provide musical settings for the psalms appointed for the various Sundays and festivals of the Church Year.

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

Pew Edition

As is the case with *Christian Worship*, you can expect to find a selection of psalms printed in the main "pew edition" of the next hymnal. A congregation will have the option of turning to that section and singing those psalms directly from the book.

With the psalms printed in the pew edition, you can expect to find a little more variety of musical style than is currently in *Christian Worship*. However, for all the psalms printed in the pew edition, it is our intent that most congregations will be able to sing each psalm in its entirety.

Standalone Psalter

The PC also plans to make available a resource that our current line of worship products does not include, namely, a standalone psalter. We envision a softcover book that would be a bit smaller than a regular hymnal. Congregations that have both hymnals and supplements in their pew racks now would find it easy to transition to having a hymnal and a psalter there if they desired to make use of this additional volume.

A standalone psalter will enable us to provide the text and musical settings for all 150 of the Bible's psalms. In the psalter, the full text of each psalm will be printed. This text will also be pointed so that it can be sung with any psalm tone or simply read aloud. Following this printed text will be the musical setting found in the pew edition, if there is one. Finally, additional musical settings of many of the psalms will also be printed.

Printing a standalone psalter will enable us to offer an even wider variety of musical settings for the psalms. Unlike the pew edition, not every single setting in the psalter will be able to be sung entirely by the congregation but will instead sometimes require the assistance of a choir or cantor.

In addition to its use in public worship, we envision this psalter being a blessing for personal worship. Individuals who want to pray through the psalms for their personal devotions might enjoy using the psalter, since it will contain all 150 psalms and have suggestions for personal devotional use.

Digital Files

In addition to these two printed resources, congregations that print the full order of service each week will be able to obtain necessary digital files (text and music graphics) apart from the pew edition and psalter.

rites committee

Pastor Jon Micheel, Chairman

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

In the worship life of the Christian Church, rites are nothing more than paths that guide us where we want to go. Every time we gather in Jesus' name, we want to move together toward some common goals: we want to proclaim God's love, to praise his name, to encourage fellow Christians, and to communicate clearly to those who don't yet know our Savior. We look for routes to guide us toward those goals, rites that will help us listen, speak, and sing. And each time we worship we're mindful of the fact that we're moving a few steps closer to our heavenly home. The rites we use bring us the fuel we need for the journey: the promises of our God, delivered to us through his Word and Sacraments. The Rites Committee (RC) of the hymnal project is responsible for the orders of service that will be found in the pew edition of the new hymnal.

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

One Main Rite: A Strong Framework

Sturdy, steel girders provide a strong framework for a large building. As God's people gather together, an order of service can serve a similar purpose. The order of service, the rite, can give structure to the interaction between God and his people. It directs us to the Scriptures, the living and active Word through which our Lord speaks to us. The rite helps us join together—all our diverse voices combining as one through the Spirit—to speak and sing, to pray and praise. It gives structure to our celebration of Holy Communion, directing us to lift up our hearts and remember our Savior's grace as we receive his body and blood. The main rite provides a sturdy framework for our time gathered together around Word and Sacrament.

The Rites Committee has been focusing its efforts thus far on the structure of the main order of service. Rather than several Communion services whose parts each flow in a different order (like CW's Common Service and Service of Word and Sacrament), we are proposing that one progression will be the standard. Our goal is to provide one, strong framework around which edifying and beautiful services can be built.

Our goal is certainly not to put a stop to all variety. No, we envision that this basic rite will be adorned in many different ways. For example, the canticles may be set to several different musical settings.

In time, we will also be presenting other orders of service: Morning Praise (Matins), Evening Prayer (Vespers), Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline). We have begun work on a “preaching service,” that is, a versatile Word-centered service that does not include Holy Communion.

There will be other opportunities for variety and freshness within this structure. But we are proposing that each setting of the main Communion service will follow the same basic pattern.

What’s New in the Main Rite

“So,” you may be asking, “what does this main service look like?” It looks familiar. It fits comfortably within the framework of the historic Liturgy of the Western Christian church, a pattern we recognize from the services in CW and CWS. In short, we are not proposing any radical changes to the main service.

There are a few texts that are new. For example, the Confession of Sins is newly composed, yet it reflects the same Scriptural truths that we regularly include in our confessions now. The prayer “Lord, Have Mercy,” the *Kyrie*, will include petitions that may be new to us. Actually, though, they’re petitions that go back over a millennium to the *Kyrie* in the Eastern church. We are also including some time-tested texts that have served Christians in the past and still serve us today.

We are proposing that some parts of the service be condensed, while other parts be expanded slightly. We saw opportunities to add something to the service to enrich people’s faith. One example of this is our proposal to include the Prayer of Thanksgiving, an element included in one of CWS’s services. We see great benefit in this prayer in which we remember what our God has done for us, recall the incomparable gifts he gives in his Supper, and, as the name of the prayer implies, say a special word of thanks for his saving work. Other examples of additions are a few appropriately placed Bible verses: a verse highlighting God’s gift of forgiveness comes before the Confession of Sins, and after Holy Communion comes a verse about one of the blessings of the Sacrament.

In other parts of the service we are proposing that things be condensed a little. We certainly are not aiming to remove beloved parts of the service just for the sake of time. Yet we have heard from some congregations, especially those with multiple services on a Sunday morning, that it’s helpful to keep the service concise. Keeping that in mind, we are suggesting that some songs of the service be optional. One example is the Song of Simeon after Holy Communion. Certainly this biblical song is very fitting after the Lord’s Supper. And the song, originally part of evening services, has long been used in Lutheran churches. Yet we recognize that the service can also be concluded in an edifying way with the use of other songs, like “Thank the Lord” in the Service

of Word and Sacrament. The Communion service can also be fittingly concluded in the way we are proposing: with responsive Bible verses, prayer, and the Lord's Blessing.

All the changes we're proposing—and again, they're not radical alterations—are being presented after much thoughtful study and discussion. We've approached each part of the main service from theological, historical, and pastoral perspectives. We've listened to your survey responses and read your comments. We pray that the results of our labor will be a blessing to the next generations of worshipers in our church body.

New Musical Settings

Our long term plan is to continue to make many of the familiar canticles in CW and CWS available for the benefit of those who wish to continue to use them. At the present time, new musical settings are being composed and submitted for consideration.

Our goal in exploring new musical settings is not to inundate congregations with a multitude of musical options. Many congregations need a long time to get acquainted with only one setting of the liturgy, and they are not seeking lots of new music to learn. Still, there are churches who desire the solid texts of the canticles set to fresh music. We hope to find a balance in the future as we present any new musical settings. In general, we want musical settings to be small in number and great in quality.

Additional Rites

In addition to the main orders of service printed in the pew edition, congregations can expect additional orders of service and devotions, including the kind currently found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*. These rites will be developed by a separate Occasional Services Committee, which is chaired by Professor Keith Wessel. That committee has just recently begun its work.

SCRIPTURE COMMITTEE

Pastor Jonathan Schroeder, Chairman

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Scripture Committee (SC) of the Hymnal Project is responsible for developing the Church Year, the three-year, one-year, and daily lectionaries, the appointment of all readings for minor festivals and occasions, the Prayers of the Day, and a commentary on the propers. The SC will also review the texts for the creeds and the Lord's Prayer, and will oversee the use of Scripture throughout the project.

The SC spent its first two years studying, analyzing, and proposing a new three-year lectionary and revised Church Year. The committee prioritized these projects because much of the hymnal

project's work is defined by the lectionary and the Church Year. Our work on the one-year and daily lectionaries, the calendar of minor festivals and occasions, and the texts for the creeds and various prayers will intensify once the three-year lectionary and Church Year have been finalized.

The SC greatly appreciates the work of the people who have been involved in the three-year review project. They have provided a wealth of information on the use of the CW lectionary in WELS congregations. We look forward to receiving and reviewing continual feedback on our proposed revisions.

Jesus said, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13:52). It is a great privilege for us to dig through the Word of God on behalf of our synod, bringing out treasures new and old for the gathered guests.

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

The Church Year

The hymnal project cherishes the worship treasures passed down from our Christian forefathers. One gift from history for the worshiping congregation today is the Church Year. This series of seasons and Sundays developed during the first millennium of the New Testament Church and has been used by the Church across the world ever since. The Christian calendar leads Christ's bride through an annual journey that follows the great events in the life of Christ during the festival half of the year, from Advent to Pentecost. In the Season after Pentecost the Church focuses on the great teachings of Christ.

The SC will propose a Church Year that retains most of the familiar features of the calendar published in Christian Worship. The proposed changes are relatively few. Some changes will be nothing more than new terminology, like calling it the "Season after Pentecost" instead of the "Pentecost Season." Some alternative Sundays will be designated, such as the Sunday of the Passion (for use on the final Sunday in Lent).

The SC intends to propose a Church Year that reflects the historic practice of the Church, that largely corresponds with other major calendars, and that provides God's people with the patterns and rhythms, the Sundays and seasons, that form the context for their worship.

The Lectionary

A lectionary is a set of Scripture readings designated to be used on particular days. The blessing of lectionary-based worship lies in balance and breadth. Using a lectionary to determine the content of worship helps ensure that the congregation sees the great events in the life of Christ and hears the great teachings of Christ annually. Following a lectionary brings a wide variety of scriptural teachings before a congregation over the three-year cycle.

The great majority of WELS congregations (95%) currently plan their Sunday worship using the three-year lectionary that was published in *Christian Worship*. This lectionary appoints three readings and a psalm for every Sunday and festival of the Christian Year. The CW lectionary largely corresponded with the lectionaries used in other major denominations, most notably in the Gospel readings.

The SC will propose a new lectionary with the following features:

- It will largely retain the Gospels as they exist in the CW Lectionary. When possible, the Gospel will align with other major lectionaries to show our connection to the Holy Christian Church.
- The Gospel will establish the theme for the Sunday, and all of the readings will match that theme.
- The First Reading will be balanced between Old Testament prophecy and narrative. During the Easter season the book of Acts will also be used.
- Old Testament narratives will be used that commend themselves as preaching texts.
- The Second Reading will be thematic, not continual. Rather than a series of continual readings through an epistle over several Sundays, the Second Reading will match the theme for the Sunday.
- Three readings and a psalm will be provided for each Sunday. Alternate readings and alternate pericopes could be provided apart from the pew edition.
- It will provide a revised system for the Sundays after Pentecost (the date of Easter will impact the Sundays at the beginning of that period of the Church Year rather than the end) that will more closely correspond to other Lutheran lectionaries and attendant resources.

Commentary on the Propers

The SC plans to produce a commentary on the lectionary similar to the well-received *Planning Christian Worship 2*. The proposed commentary would offer an expanded treatment of the Sundays and festivals. It will provide a brief exegesis of the readings, thoughts on context of the Church Year, and hymn and psalm suggestions.

TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Pastor Caleb Bassett, Chairman

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Technology Committee (TC) of the WELS Hymnal Project is responsible for vision, planning, and oversight of the digital and technical delivery of the next WELS hymnal. More than simply providing tools to generate the hymnal in a digital format, the TC aims to equip congregations to improve the way they produce and distribute worship resources. We work to enhance the content of the hymnal through tasteful and useful design, delivery, and format.

The TC also provides internal assistance to the various individuals and committees that make up the WELS Hymnal Project. We provide technical and organizational expertise and advice to streamline our work processes. The TC also works closely with the Communications Committee (CC) to manage the project's public website.

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

The TC is guided by a working philosophy that in, the context of worship, technology must serve a ministerial role. In an introductory blog post, the TC Chairman wrote the following:

I'd like this project to be an opportunity to do some careful thinking, some detailed research, and even some philosophical musing about how we want to use technology to accomplish our goals. I want to take the lead on a thorough, scholarly approach to technology as a ministerial tool in service to the worship in our congregations. There's an assumption out there that all innovation is good innovation, that is, if something is new it is therefore better.

Note the emphasis on a “ministerial” approach to technology. We believe that a ministerial approach is humble, useful, tasteful, and simple. We want what we produce to meet those criteria above all else.

Much of what the TC envisions falls within the realm of “product development,” and as such we are not able to pre-announce any future products. There are two important reasons for this. First, from a business standpoint it is unwise to pre-announce products before they are ready for the public. In some cases, we are actually prohibited by contractual terms from making such announcements. Second, since technical development of future products will begin much later in the project it remains likely that major parts of our plans will change between now and that time. We cannot announce products that may not actually be produced. The TC is still very involved in *research* and is not yet onto *development*.

Nevertheless, readers of the WELS Hymnal Project blog and participants in our various surveys will likely be able to discern the general areas of emphasis we are pursuing. We see four major areas to move the state of the art forward in WELS.

1. Digital databasing of the hymnal content
2. Tools to aid in worship planning
3. Mobile applications for laypeople
4. Formats and protocols to assist worship musicians

Digital databasing of the hymnal content

We see the creation of a digital database of the hymnal primarily as an internal improvement that will bear fruit in other areas. By storing all the data related to a hymnal in a modern, cross-referenced, server-side database we enable the technical possibility for modern applications and services built on top of the hymnal data.

Tools to aid in worship planning

The TC considers worship planning to be a task where tasteful and useful technology can greatly enhance the worship at WELS congregations. The TC believes that if we as a synod are going to teach and encourage pastors to adorn the gospel with beauty and grace through the use of excellent liturgical materials, we should also provide excellent tools to assist them in the often complex and challenging process of worship planning.

To act on that conviction, the TC has been researching options for a system or application that would assist pastors and other worship planners to plan worship by using the aforementioned digital database of rites, hymns, psalms, and lectionary from the upcoming WELS hymnal. We are unable to field test any such application at this time since research is not yet complete. In the case of software development, such testing would start with a limited group of so-called “alpha testers,” after which it may progress to a broader “beta test.”

Mobile applications for laypeople

The TC believes that the WELS Hymnal Project should capitalize on the the widespread use of mobile applications on smartphones and tablets by building a mobile application for laypeople. There is evidence that the widespread use of such handheld screens may actually be increasing the number of people reading and studying the Bible on a regular basis. We see an opportunity to revitalize the use of the hymnal as a private and small group devotional resource by developing an application built to foster such devotional use. By integrating with the foundational digital database of the hymnal’s content, such an application can “repackage” the hymnal, so to speak, in a way better suited for private and small group use. We envision such an application being useful in these common settings:

- Around the dinner table with family
- As the focal point of private prayer and devotion
- In the classroom
- To open or close meetings
- In Bible study classes

Up to this point the TC has spent time researching existing hymnal applications to understand their strengths and weaknesses. So far we have determined that existing hymnal applications fail to offer much compelling innovation for the private and small-group use of a hymnal. We believe there is room to create something unique in this space.

So far this process of evaluation and analysis allows us to better understand the design challenge of a devotional hymnal application and write better product specifications to aid in future development, should such development take place.

Formats and protocols to assist worship musicians

Musicians may have noticed that the list of common settings for a hymnal application listed above does not include “on the music stand” or “at the piano bench.” This is not an omission but a conscious decision. While a hymnal application would probably work on the piano bench, we do not envision an application geared for the specific needs of church musicians but for laypeople. That does not mean, however, that the TC does not have the detailed needs of church musicians in mind—our committee includes three church musicians, each of whom is well-versed in digital technology and uses such technology frequently in his ministry and service.

These church musicians have reviewed dozens of existing applications and services and found that many products available today are very strong in terms of functionality and widespread adoption. Where “devotional use of a Lutheran hymnal” is a relatively niche task, “reading, annotating, and working with digital sheet music” is a much more common job. For that reason there are several outstanding applications, including mobile applications, to assist church musicians. The TC has concluded that there is no need to create a “WELS version” of such an application when existing applications do the job just as well or better than anything we could develop on our own.

The TC plans not to provide a specific application for musicians, but to offer formats and protocols to assist worship musicians in their service to the church. This means delivering the content of the hymnal in digital formats that work within the constraints of copyright law but also import nicely into the most common and useful third-party applications for musicians. We consider the generation of such digital assets to be part of the worship planning workflow that we hope to facilitate through a worship planning application (see above).

A new design

The TC includes a design working group which has been working to analyze a wide variety of well-designed hymnals from various traditions and denominations. The analysis of these hymnals has led to some preliminary work in achieving a new design for the look and functionality of the print and digital resources.

Achieving a consistent design across the wide variety of resources to be produced with the next WELS hymnal is a large undertaking. It is our hope that the new design we develop will bring beauty, legibility, and usability to the Christ-centered materials it serves.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Pastor Jonathan Bauer, Chairman

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

From the time the hymnal project started, the Communications Committee (CC) has been assisting the members of the project primarily by seeking to gather information and input from the congregations and schools of our church body. This research has taken a variety of forms, including: conducting four major surveys, collecting hymn usage data, and receiving and processing feedback through the project website.

A summary of what has been learned about worship in our church body so far was shared in the summer of 2015. That summary was published in *Forward in Christ* and in the 2015 Synod Convention's Book of Reports and Memorials. The feedback we've received thus far has been very valuable as the members of the project have begun their work, and we are very grateful for it.

As the hymnal project progresses, the CC's work will eventually transition away from our current focus on research. We are also responsible for utilizing the natural opportunity that a hymnal project presents to renew people's awareness and appreciation for Lutheran worship principles. As the publication approaches we will also work in tandem with the marketing department at Northwestern Publishing House to promote the new hymnal and its accompanying resources.

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

As the hymnal project approaches the halfway point, its members are pleased to be able to share with the synod this comprehensive update on our work. This update is being distributed to the called workers throughout our church body as well as through other official synodical channels. It is available in its entirety on our project website and will also be posted section by section on our website's blog.

Pastors and teachers are encouraged to share the report with those they serve through whatever channels are available to them. Feel free to use this as an opportunity to invite people to subscribe to have updates delivered to their inbox by registering their email address on our website (www.welshymnal.com).

We invite anyone's feedback on the information being distributed. That feedback is best offered through the contact form on our website (www.welshymnal.com/contact).

Field testing period

During the next year and a half, the CC will be busy assisting the other project subcommittees in putting some of their early materials in front of the congregations and schools of our church body for their use and review.

The materials that are distributed for testing will naturally lean heavily toward the components of the new hymnal that could potentially be new or revised. This shouldn't be construed as an indication of the makeup of the final product, plenty of which will be unchanged from the material found in our current resources.

It is our desire for every congregation and school to have the opportunity to provide ongoing feedback on the various materials being developed. However, for most of the field testing process, we will be seeking the assistance of various random samplings of congregations and schools. In order to receive accurate and helpful feedback, it is necessary to engage sample groups that are representative of the synod as a whole (e.g. from varying locations and of varying sizes). It is also necessary to receive feedback not only from those who would otherwise gladly volunteer it on their own but from those whose feedback needs to be sought.

We look forward to sharing updates and results of this field testing process. As the project continues to progress, we plan to release to the church body as a whole a set of materials representative of each committee's work to that point.