

# WELS Commission on Worship

## 2024 Supplemental Report to the Twelve Districts

[worship.welsrc.net](http://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

Many details about the new hymnal "suite of resources" are available at [christianworship.com](http://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 [welscongregationalservices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources](http://welscongregationalservices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources).



The new hymnal suite of resources is available here: [online.nph.net/church-supplies/categories/hymnals-songbooks/christian-worship-suite](http://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 17 items are available with two 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](http://builder.christianworship.com)) and for purchase from Logos ([logos.com/product/209642/christian-worship-three-year-lectionary](http://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](http://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.

By March 2024, NPH estimates that almost 900 WELS congregations have adopted the new hymnal, and 621 congregations have subscribed to the *Service Builder* program along with 145 for the Playlist add-on. 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.

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. New materials are added regularly at: [online.nph.net/musicians-resource](http://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.

As of March 2024, more than 1100 MR resources are available with more added regularly.

### **Newest Resources**

*Christian Worship: Playlist*, an add-on module to the *Service Builder* program became available in 2023. This is the CW21 replacement for HymnSoft. For more information, see: [online.nph.net/servicebuilder](http://online.nph.net/servicebuilder).

The Service—Setting Five became available in the fall of 2023. More information and demo recordings are at [welscongregationalervices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources](http://welscongregationalervices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources).



Numerous choral pieces and keyboard collections to support the new hymnal, especially new tunes.

*Christian Worship: Easy Hymn Accompaniments—Chorale* (Mar ’23)

*Christian Worship: Easy Hymn Accompaniments—Piano* (Mar ’23)

*Christian Worship: Commentary on the Propers, Year B* (May ’23)

### **Congregational Services Resource Center**

In addition to new hymnal content at [christianworship.com](http://christianworship.com), other resources are available at [welscongregationalervices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources](http://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 resources useful for those who have only recently acquired the new hymnal or for those just beginning to explore are:

- “Just starting to explore the new hymnal?”—available under More Resources at [welscongregationservices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources](https://welscongregationservices.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](https://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.

## Personnel

At the 2023 synod convention Rev. Michael Schultz was elected as the new chair for the Commission on Worship. He replaced Rev. Jon Zabell who could no longer serve due to term limits. We give hearty thanks to God for Zabell’s service. From 2013 to 2023 he also served as chair of the WELS hymnal project.

In the summer of 2023 Bryan Gerlach announced his intent to retire partially by mid-2024 and fully after the 2024 national worship conference. He began his service as WELS’ first director of the C/W in 1996, which was also the first year of a WELS national worship conference.

With the encouragement of the Conference of Presidents and the concurrence of the C/W, a limited part-time call was issued to Rev. Paul Prange to serve as Interim Director of the C/W. While Gerlach is concluding his service with focus on the worship conference and C/W publications, Prange is focusing his initial work on the newer initiatives mentioned in the next section of this report.

## A Look Ahead

In cooperation with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, C/W will be developing materials for pastors who want to improve their preaching. This may include resources like refresher materials for those who have found themselves drifting when it comes to purpose statements, or good Lutheran video examples of alternate preaching styles.

In cooperation with Lutheran Schools, C/W plans to work with the content development team for the new theology curriculum, incorporating resources for teaching Lutheran hymnody at all age levels. This collaboration will begin in 2025. The hymnology instructional materials published by NPH are available to congregations and schools who want to include hymnody instruction even before development on the new theology instructional resources begin.

C/W plans to publish online Hymnal and Psalter Handbook resources, including the history and common usage of all hymns and psalm settings, and one-sentence descriptions of hymns for use in bulletins.

In cooperation with worship planners at WELS area Lutheran high schools, C/W plans to supply resources that will allow and encourage high schools to make the best use of the treasures old and new available in the new hymnal suite. Similarly, C/W will work with Home Mission personnel to discover which of the new hymnal resources work best in unique Home Mission settings.

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