



The Service

The Common Service has been the standard liturgical rite in Lutheran congregations in North America since the dawn of the 20th century. Relying on models from Lutheran history and the wider Christian Church, the Common Service offered an authentic form of the Christian liturgy as well as a complete set of introits, collects, and graduals. Often borrowing from the *Book of Common Prayer* (Church of England), the Common Service provided not only liturgical structure but also a worship language: the language of the King James Version. Along with worshipers in the LCMS and the ELS, WELS members became accustomed to a musical setting composed in 1901.

Every Lutheran hymnal published since 1888 has included a version of the Common Service, and it remains the standard for Lutheran liturgical worship. At the same time, however, every hymnal committee has analyzed the value of the Common Service to provide worship forms for new generation of worshipers. For example, the language of the service is no longer that of the KJV, and composers have produced new musical settings. *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* illustrates the results of that kind of analysis.

The WELS Hymnal Project has taken on the same task: to assess the standard Lutheran liturgical service and offer a version for 21st century worshipers. Several overriding principles emerged:

There is value in providing a standard liturgical rite so that worshipers can make it their own.

There is value in providing a variety of musical settings.

There is value in assessing liturgical revision in other confessional Lutheran churches to gain from their insights and experience.

The result of this study is a liturgical order entitled **The Service**. This rite is both a text—a set of words—and also a progression or order of these words; Absolution follows Confession, the Psalm of the Day follows the First Reading, etc.

As one might expect, The Service shares similarities with the orders in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Christian Worship*. As it assessed these rites for worship today, however, the committee authorized several modifications.

Lord, Have Mercy (Kyrie) takes on a form which is not connected to Confession/Absolution (CW p. 15) but follows the more historic and widespread pattern as a responsive prayer for our Lord's many mercies.

The Nicene Creed follows the sermon and enables worshipers to confess their faith in the Word proclaimed in the day's Proper (i.e. Prayer of the Day, readings, psalm, Verse of the Day, Hymn of the Day, sermon).

The Service retains the historic texts of Glory to God (Gloria in Excelsis) and Holy, Holy, Holy (Sanctus) which had been changed in CW's Service of Word and Sacrament (p. 26).

For historic and practical considerations, The Service reverses the order of the Prayer of the Church and the Offering. Worshipers are seated during these longer prayers and during the offering in anticipation of the long stand in the Communion service.

The Communion liturgy includes the Lord's Prayer and a Prayer of Thanksgiving. WELS worshipers became familiar with these prayers as they used Divine Service II in *Christian Worship: Supplement*. Thanksgiving prayers were part of the earliest forms of the liturgy but were eliminated at the time of the Reformation because they had come to echo

false theology. As Jesus “gave thanks” when instituting the Sacrament, worshipers give thanks in these newly-composed prayers as they anticipate our Savior’s marvelous gift.

The new rite returns to a more historic version of the Christian/Lutheran service with the elimination of the Offertory (Create in Me) and Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis), both of which have liturgical origins no earlier than the 19th century but had been inserted by the framers of the original Common Service in 1888. The Song of Simeon retains its traditional place in evening worship.

Recent Lutheran hymnals have seen the wisdom of offering several musical settings to accompany the liturgical text. This is the plan also for the new WELS hymnal. Some musical settings will appear in the print edition of the hymnal; others will be available as digital resources. While the Kyrie is spoken in today’s service, it too will have musical options.

The theology of the Christian/Lutheran liturgy is established by the Scriptures. Liturgical forms and their progression are based on the experience of past believers and on the needs of worshipers today. May the Spirit bless our worship as we gather around Word and Sacrament offered in this rite, and may The Service provide a path for us to praise and proclaim the love of Jesus.

This article, by Prof. James P. Tiefel, originally appeared with a communion service at the 2017 WELS national worship conference.

Musical settings

The following musical settings are planned, pending copyright permissions. Three settings will appear in the pew edition:

- The Common Service (CW page 15): with 4-pt harmony restored for the canticles
- Marty Haugen: Creation setting
- Ricky Manalo: Spirit and Grace setting

For Haugen and Manalo there will be idiomatic options for both piano and organ (with optional additional instruments for both).

The pew edition also includes a Service Music section of 25 items with a variety of canticles and metrical versions.

Nineteen more canticles and metrical versions will be digital-only, available in *Christian Worship: Service Builder*.

Service Builder will also include several complete communion services.

- Kermit Moldenhauer: revision of Divine Service I from *CW: Supplement* with an option for a sung Kyrie.
- Early Lutheran composers: Deutsche Messe compilation of canticles. While these have been available simply as hymns in the past, *Service Builder* will provide worship folder drafts with these included.
- David Haas: Jesus the Compassion of God, or something similar.
- Metrical canticles, similar to Divine Service II from *CW: Supplement*, but some new texts. A variety of hymn tunes for each.
- A Spanish setting, not firm at this time.
- A “world music” option, not firm at this time.

Users of the *Service Builder* software will also be able to save within the program additional music graphics for other variety that is regularly used in a given congregation.



Outline and comments

Hymn	<i>CW: Accompaniment for Hymns</i> is a versatile resource (two volumes, 1500 pages) with many alternate accompaniments and settings for piano. The spiral-bound 8.5x11 format allows the music to stand open better than a hard-cover volume.
Invocation / Confession & Absolution	
Lord, Have Mercy (Kyrie)	Not penitential (during Confession) but a prayer for our Lord's many mercies in all of life. Option for sung or spoken dialogue with different music in each setting of The Service.
Glory to God (Gloria)	As noted above, musical options for two settings are included for both piano and organ.
Prayer of the Day	
First Reading	
Psalm	In addition to the selection of 63 psalms in the hymnal pew edition, a comprehensive psalter provides some 500 settings of the psalms in a wide variety of musical styles.
Second Reading	In the new lectionary all readings and the Psalm relate to the theme set by the Gospel.
Gospel Acclamation	In CW this is called Verse of the Day. Seasonal verses are included in the pew edition. See <i>CW: Preview</i> , page 11, or the online version. Proper appointed verses for each day are available in <i>Christian Worship: Service Builder</i> .
Gospel	
Hymn of the Day	
Sermon	
Creed	Always <i>follows</i> the sermon as a confession of faith in response to the entire Word section.
Prayer of the Church	Worshippers are seated during these longer prayers and during the offering in anticipation of the long stand in the Communion service.
Offering	
Preface	As with the Kyrie, option for sung or spoken dialogue with different music in each setting of The Service.
Holy, Holy, Holy (Sanctus)	
Prayer of Thanksgiving, Lord's Prayer	
Words of Institution	
O Christ, Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)	
Distribution	
Closing dialogue and prayer	Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures forever. Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (Then the closing prayer.)
Blessing	

This chart does not list every brief dialogue, like the salutation: The Lord be with you. / **And also with you.**

For more information, see *Christian Worship: Preview* pages 5-18 or the online version.