



## Earliest New Hymnal Adopters

By Bryan Gerlach

As I write this article in the last days of March, at least 50 congregations have already preordered the new hymnal (or decided to do so), sometimes also with a quantity of the psalter. In contrast, a few people have asked how they can be expected to consider purchasing something they haven't yet had a chance to thoroughly review. I'll speak to that a bit later. But first some thoughts about my assumptions and some comments from the earliest adopters.

### Not every congregation

Pressure and anticipation for a new hymnal in 2021 is simply not as high as it was in 1993. So leaders from both the hymnal project and NPH recognize that adoption will likely be at a different pace than the rapid and almost universal adoption of CW93 in the mid-1990s. And that's perfectly fine. No one is saying that all good synodical team players should quickly jump on board.

Further complicating decisions is a year of pandemic. So here, again, is a comment from the September 2020 WTL: "Hymnal project leaders recognize that not every congregation will want to or be able to adopt the new hymnal in 2021. Reasons include COVID uncertainties, tightened budgets, and uncertain futures. This article isn't meant to ignore those realities but only to encourage review and planning in whatever way seems appropriate."

### But as many as possible

Granting that not every congregation will adopt the new hymnal in 2021, there still is benefit in many doing so—benefit to the congregations, not merely to the success of the project.

A few years ago, the Commission on Worship and its consultants were busy with Schools of Worship Enrichment. Over 12 years we served 291 congregations, coast to coast, large and small, young and old, growing and declining. Those who served these weekend events noticed two contrasting challenges to implementing a vision of creative, flexible, and satisfying liturgical worship. The

obvious challenge came from some who wondered if we needed to abandon a liturgical format and heritage hymns to reach or retain the people we want to serve. The less obvious challenge came from those who seemed content with varying degrees of uncreative and inflexible implementations of liturgical worship. It's not surprising that some would want "something more" than that approach to worship.

The resources were always there for enriching Lutheran worship with alternate canticles and new hymns in varied musical styles accompanied by instruments far more diverse than the solo organ that commonly led worship. But many pastors and musicians didn't have the vision or ability to implement this "enriched Lutheran worship."<sup>1</sup>

Now the new hymnal suite richly provides options that can help both of the challenges described above—as well as support congregations without either challenge. The church that prefers an ensemble to an organ (or both in rotation on different weekends) will find the music they need for two musical settings of the primary Sunday service. Same for many hymns. A church that formerly relied mostly on organ, whose musicians lacked time or ability to involve other instruments, will find a wealth of resources.

Such options reinforce a healthy bias that project director Michael Schultz mentioned in the previous article in this series: "I am strongly biased toward having the congregation predominantly (not exclusively) sing the hymns, psalms, and ritual songs that have been curated and published by our church body."<sup>2</sup> In the

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past such a bias might have been heard to support a narrow musical bandwidth that wouldn't be labeled flexible and creative. That was never the intent. But now the new hymnal suite makes it far easier to implement goals of flexibility and creativity.

So I urge "as many as possible" with conviction that it's good for congregations across a synod to share a worship philosophy and core worship resources.

## NPH and the Commission on Worship

These two synodical entities have different if complementary roles. NPH is a business and a ministry, your ministry partner. From them you have received promotional materials and a preorder option. They sell products at price points that enable them to continue serving in their role.

The Commission on Worship is not a business but only a ministry partner concerned with many aspects of worship enrichment. One of the biggest opportunities for worship enrichment comes along only every 30-40 years: the release of a new hymnal. So communications from the C/W will share introductory resources and urge adoption of the new hymnal. We do this not from a business perspective but purely from a ministry perspective.

## Comments from earliest adopters

To assist congregations that have not yet ordered the new hymnal, I polled some that have already ordered and asked three questions. Various answers are included below with the hope that they might be helpful to other congregations. The congregations represented are from all over the country and range in average attendance from 38 to 560. State abbreviations follow most comments.

### How did you build consensus to make an early decision, long before able to review the pew edition and other volumes?

We started early singing songs we understood would be included and made a point of telling people the song would be part of the new hymnal. We talked about it in our leadership meetings and with the congregation that this was just what we do: new hymnal comes out, and so we will be using the new hymnal. People were looking forward to new songs and sounds, so it was a fairly easy sell. ~SC

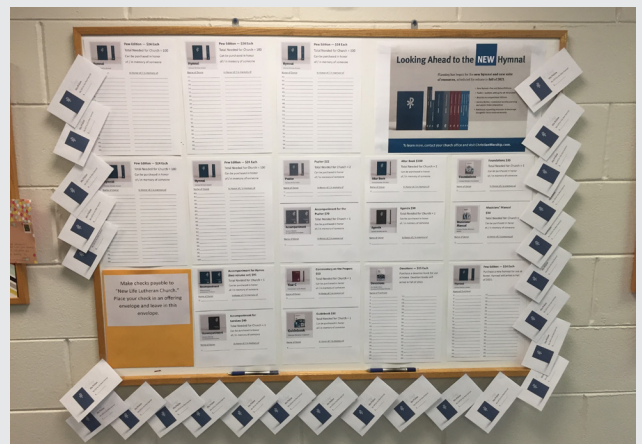
There wasn't much of a debate as to whether we would adopt the new hymnal. We participated in multiple field tests for the hymnal, plus the congregation was aware of the work I was doing on the Scripture Committee. We already have ordered hymnals and psalters to put in the pew racks (enough to make

sure we meet the minimum for the *Service Builder* discount). We also plan to subscribe to the *Service Builder*. The only item that caused some discussion was the number of physical hymnals to order, since we have for a long time printed the entire service (hymns included) in the service folder. However, the combination of needing to purchase a certain number for the *Service Builder* discount and the understanding that having physical hymnals in pews for people to look at and use in addition to the service folder is valuable for members and guests alike made that discussion rather brief. ~KY

### How much longer do we need to wait?

Our two pastors and staff minister decided early on they wanted to purchase the whole shebang, and took it to our elders, and it was easily approved. We are paying for it mostly with memorial money that was donated specifically for this purpose. As I'm sure is the case with many congregations, we removed all our old hymnals from the pews for COVID-related reasons, which will make the physical transition even easier! We're also going to open it up to any members who want to personally purchase anything, and add their orders to our one big church order. I feel everyone at our church has been really open to the switch! ~WI

The process for building a consensus to make an early decision began more than ten years ago. We are liturgical in our worship style but have adopted any number of songs and services over the years to introduce new formats. For Advent and Lenten services, for example, we started with *Compline 2*, found a version of Psalm 91 that we liked better, and mixed and matched a couple of other elements and/or changed pieces for one year along the way. The people like these services, so it isn't hard for them to



Purchasing the new hymnal was part of our five-year plan. We had little discussion. 47 out of 100 hymnals are paid for as of early March with the methodology pictured above. Strictly special gifts. Many of the other books have also been purchased for the church. ~IL

be excited about a new hymnal which will facilitate trying some additional new services. ~MI

Our decision was never really a struggle. The congregation has a long history of making use of the musical resources that the synod makes available. Our people here have embraced many of the hymns and liturgies from the supplement, and are already familiar with many of the Getty tunes that will appear in the new hymnal. For our congregation, it wasn't ever really a question of "Will we choose to get the new hymnal?" but "How much longer do we need to wait?" ~GA

**What was your funding process? Budgetary over two years, plus special gifts, or what?**

We started at least two years in advance by setting aside \$2000 in our ministry plan and then made it part of our special projects list. (We share this list with people who want to make a special donation or give a memorial.) We had planned to use a special "buy a hymnal" drive this year, but a member gave a large gift as a memorial and covered the cost. Another member recently contacted me to offer to pay for the new hymnal and other volumes. So in our case, it was just something people were drawn to support. Blessed! ~SC

We were going to do "combination of budget/congregational gifts" over this year. But someone was very blessed in the recent stock market run-up and came in wanting to make a gift and paid for the first batch of hymnals/psalter/resources in one shot. So, I was able to say at elders, "Well, this is the cost I'd ask you to approve...and please know that it is already paid for..." which made the decision easier. They would have said yes anyway, but they also simply assume (as I think our council does) that our synod is putting out a new hymnal and a) we've been using some of those resources already and b) we'd of course just go along and adopt it. ~WI

*Please know that it is already paid for.*

We had talked about "every member buy two," one for them and one for the pew. Decided not to go that route as we've received gifts already of \$9,000 for it without it even being advertised outside of Elders/Council. We are all in to the tune of about \$12,000. ~WI

A few years ago a member left a gift to the congregation in his estate. He had a deep love for worship music. We used a portion of his estate to purchase a grand piano. When the hymnal's budget planning worksheet was made available, the council realized that the remaining portion of the gift would cover the cost of the new hymnals. At the same time, we do plan on inviting people to use the offering envelopes to make a special gift to the hymnals in the expectation that we can stretch our worship budget a bit further yet. ~GA

**Are you ordering the psalter? If so, for pews or just choir?**

We are ordering 25 copies to start for choir and small group use.

As far as the funding process goes, this is the announcement we've been running in our bulletin.

**Pass on the Legacy with Our New Hymnal**

*If you could make an investment that would positively impact someone for at least 30 years, wouldn't you want to do that? You have that opportunity with the release of our new hymnal. Christian Worship will be released for the fall of 2021. This new hymnal will be the staple of Eastside's worship for the next generation. Combining the best from past traditions with the best from current resources, Christian Worship keeps the gospel at the heart of our worship, kindling the joy of worship on every page. To fit our congregation's needs, we need 400 hymnals. That's a \$9600 investment. We've enjoyed the benefits of our hymnal for the past 30 years. Wouldn't you like to be part of this new 30-year investment? Could you prayerfully consider donating one hymnal to Eastside for each member of your family? Think of the impact you can make! If you have any questions, please speak with Pastor Berg.*

By early March, we've raised over \$8000 of \$9600. That's without any special drive. Those are just individual gifts above and beyond regular offerings. As of right now, we are only ordering a few copies of the psalter. But if we receive more than \$9600, we will order copies of the psalter for choir use. ~WI

We plan on purchasing 300 hymnals for the sanctuary and choir. We will subscribe to *Service Builder* and purchase multiple copies of the hymn and liturgy accompaniment books. We will purchase 30 copies of the psalter for the choir. ~MN

**Any other unique stories that would provide interest for the article or quotes from members?**

Nothing really unique, except our people are very excited. ~TX

Our worship committee was very excited to see the wealth of materials available at a substantially lower cost than first anticipated. We had committed early on to books in the pews for a number of reasons; the pricing structure made that a no-brainer from an economic standpoint, as well. ~WI

There is a bit of frustration expressed in that there are a number of TBD items and details connected with the new *Christian Worship*. Yet, I know the project is very ambitious in its scope and timetable for publication.<sup>3</sup> ~MN

*The pricing structure made books in the pews a no-brainer.*

The National Conference on Lutheran Leadership [January 2020] was an incredible help. We were able to bring five members of the congregation, including our office administrator and two council members. We all left the conference deeply impressed with every aspect of the hymnal showcased there: the support volumes, the *Service Builder*, and above all, the worship services. It allowed those members to be strong early advocates for the hymnal. ~GA

It's been decided we will gift all our organists/pianists with their own copies of all the accompaniment books (we have six accompanists), which I thought was super generous of the leadership. ~WI

*We all left the conference deeply impressed with every aspect of the hymnal showcased there.*

We look forward to many instrumental parts already prepared. I play trumpet, we have an occasional violinist, a couple of guitar players, some hand drums, a flute, a penny-whistle player, if you can believe that, and some other people we are trying to get involved with occasionally playing a piece. Pre-transposed pieces and other various options are exciting to the special music people who are looking forward to getting their hands on these resources.<sup>4</sup> ~MI

At Trinity, Waukesha, we are at an advantage since we've been almost exclusively using new service music, hymns, psalms, etc. for all our services since Advent (Year C, one year ahead of other WELS congregations to help prepare planning resources for other churches next year).<sup>5</sup> There have been many positive comments on the new hymns, revised texts, and service music. ~WI

## Confidence in the project

Now, back to a question posed in the first paragraph: how can a congregation consider purchasing something they haven't yet had a chance to thoroughly review? Perhaps the comments above from diverse congregations around the country can help to answer the question.

Another confidence-building factor is the caliber of those serving on the hymnal project's Executive Committee. It has been a highlight of my almost 40 years in the ministry to work with these men, people with both sound theological grounding and practical parish experience. It is a testimony to the confidence that our

synod can rightly have in this committee that one member was a seminary professor, two others accepted calls to the seminary during the project, two others have declined calls to the seminary, and two others have served as professors or administrators at synodical schools. Furthermore, every word in the new hymnal has been scrutinized by a doctrinal review process.

In closing I emphasize again that the hymnal project recognizes that congregations are in different places as far as decisions and timelines. This article doesn't intend to lobby but to provide perspectives from the congregations cited. Still, whether you preorder soon or don't even think about the new hymnal this year, we hope that eventually the vast majority of congregations will adopt the new hymnal just as we did in the years following 1993.

- <sup>1</sup> This is not a careless and unfounded generalization. Survey data from those 291 SoWE congregations clearly supports the observation.
- <sup>2</sup> "A Wealth of Accompaniment Options," March 2021. Back issues are available at [worship.welsrc.net](http://worship.welsrc.net).
- <sup>3</sup> Most of 20 resources are coming out at the same time in the fall of 2021. Compare that to the years following 1993 when only the hymnal and manual were released. The *Handbook* came out in 1997, the *Altar Book* in 1999, *Occasional Services* and *Pastor's Companion* in 2004.
- <sup>4</sup> Instrumental parts with transpositions will be provided by *CW: Musician's Resource*.
- <sup>5</sup> The hymnal project director is a member of this church. The planning resource mentioned will be released in summer. For a detailed analysis of this church's needs, see "Trinity Hymnals," a supplemental online doc at the link in note 2.

## New at christianworship.com

"Why a New Hymnal?" This bulletin insert is newly added to a ZIP of other bulletin inserts. It came about from a pastor's request for something very simple as opposed to "visit the website." It may be useful to share before a decision-making group meets or simply to build interest for the arrival of the new hymnal. Find it in the Publicity Toolkit link under Resources.

"*The Wedding Rite in the New Christian Worship*" – an article by Prof. Jonathan Micheel from the Spring 2021 issue of *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

Coming later this year: a variety of introductory videos useful not only for evaluating and understanding hymnal project choices but also for exploring and using various resources.