

From *Christian Worship* to *The Foundation* Planning Smarter, Leading Better

WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership
January 19–21, 2026

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Crown of Life Lutheran Church; Hubertus, WI



Introduction

1. A bit of background
2. *Christian Worship* 1993 vs. *Christian Worship* 2021
3. Actively seeking out variety vs. a menu for variety greater than most congregations' needs

Christian Worship Suite of Resources

For the assembly	Hymnal (<i>three editions: pew, gift, large print</i>) Psalter
For musicians	Accompaniment for Services Accompaniment for Services: Service Builder Edition Accompaniment for the Psalter (<i>2-volume set</i>) Accompaniment for Hymns (<i>3-volume set</i>) Easy Hymn Accompaniments—Chorale Edition Easy Hymn Accompaniments—Piano Edition Gospel Acclamations for Cantors, Choirs, and Instrumentalists
For pastors	Altar Book Agenda Pastor's Companion
For pastors & other planners	Planning Guide Commentary on the Propers, Year A Commentary on the Propers, Year B Commentary on the Propers, Year C
Reading resources	Our Worth to Him: Devotions for Christian Worship Foundations Guidebook (<i>not yet available</i>) Musician's Manual (<i>not yet available</i>)
Digital resources	Christian Worship: Service Builder (builder.christianworship.com) Christian Worship: Musician's Resource (online.nph.net/musicians-resource)

Where do I find it?

Northwestern Publishing House website: www.nph.net
Use the drop-down menus, or enter these direct addresses:

<https://online.nph.net/church-supplies/categories/hymnals-songbooks/christian-worship-suite>

<https://online.nph.net/christian-worship-hymnal-suite.html>

CW Musician's Resource

online.nph.net/musicians-resource

Musician's Resource Search

Fill out as many fields as possible to help narrow your search.
[Click here to learn more about Musician's Resource and for FAQs.](#)

<p>Hymn Number ⓘ <input type="text"/></p> <p>Hymn Title ⓘ <input type="text"/></p> <p>Hymn Tune ⓘ <input type="text"/></p> <p>Psalm Number ⓘ <input type="text"/></p> <p>Psalm Title ⓘ <input type="text"/></p> <p>Psalm Tune ⓘ <input type="text"/></p> <p>Rites ⓘ <input type="text" value="Select a Rite"/></p> <p>Type ⓘ <input type="text" value="Select a Type"/></p>	<p>Hymn Section ⓘ <input type="text" value="Select a Hymn Section"/></p> <p>Lectionary Sunday ⓘ <input type="text" value="Select a Year"/></p> <p><input type="text" value="Select a Sunday"/></p> <p>Scripture Reference ⓘ <input type="text" value="Book"/></p> <p><input type="text" value="Chapter"/></p> <p><input type="text" value="Verse"/></p> <p>Meter ⓘ <input type="text" value="Select a Meter"/></p> <p>Packages ⓘ <input type="text" value="Select a Package"/></p>
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What will I find? Content includes:

Service settings for liturgical ensemble
Service settings for organ & instruments
Hymn settings for liturgical ensemble
Alternate accompaniments

Choral alternate hymn stanza settings
Instrumental chorale parts pack
Instrumental descants
Lead sheets
Easy instrumental ensemble pack
Vocal and instrumental descants

Awake, My Heart, with Gladness

AUF, AUF, MEIN HERZ

4 Now I will cling for - ev - er to Christ, my
Sav - ior dear. My Lord will leave me nev -
er; with him I need not fear. He rends death's
i - ron chain; he breaks through sin and pain. He

The image shows a four-system musical score for a hymn. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The music is in the key of D major (two sharps) and 3/4 time. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. A large red watermark 'For review purposes only' is overlaid diagonally across the entire page.

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676, abr.; tr. John Kelly, 1833-1890, alt.
Tune: Johann Crüger, 1598-1662; setting: Richard Hillert, 1923-2010

Text and tune: public domain; setting: © 2001 Northwestern Publishing House
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MR-443X41

Christ Begins

CHRIST BEGINS

$\text{♩} = 56-60$

Melody

Bass Guitar

Mel

Bass

Refrain

Mel

Bass

Mel

Bass

The musical score is written in 6/8 time with a tempo of 56-60 beats per minute. It consists of four systems of staves. The first system includes a Melody staff (treble clef) and a Bass Guitar staff (bass clef). The second system includes a Mel staff (treble clef) and a Bass staff (bass clef). The third system includes a Mel staff (treble clef) and a Bass staff (bass clef), with the word 'Refrain' written above the Melody staff. The fourth system includes a Mel staff (treble clef) and a Bass staff (bass clef). Chords are indicated above the Melody staff in each system. A large red watermark 'For review purposes only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

Music: Luke Thompson, b. 1981; Kent Reeder, b. 1986; arr. Marjorie Flanagan, b. 1955

Text and music: ©2017 Northwestern Publishing House
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MR-385X98

Psalm 34D

Taste and See

Gospel feel ♩ = 80

Introduction

Capo 3: D D7/F# G G#dim7 D /C# Bm7 /A E7 G/A
 F F7/A Bb Bdim7 F /E Dm7 /C F7 Bb/C

Melody

Bass Guitar

Refrain

D D7/F# Gadd6 A7 D Gdim7/B
 F F7/A Bbadd6 C7 F Bdim7/D

Mel

Bass

Last time to Coda ⊕

A7sus4 A/C# D D7/F# G G#dim7
 C7sus4 C/E F F7/A Bb Bdim7

Mel

Bass

D /C# Gdim7/B A7 G D/F# Em7 A
 F /E Bdim7/D C7 Bb F/A Gm7 C to Verses

Mel

Bass

Music: Francis Patrick O'Brien, b. 1958

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MR-34DX98

Glory to God

The Service: Setting Two (Organ)

The musical score is for the introduction of 'The Service: Setting Two (Organ)'. It is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes parts for C Instrument 1, C Instrument 2, B-flat Trumpet 1, B-flat Trumpet 2, Tuba 1, Tuba 2, Saxophone Alto (SA), Tuba (TB), and Organ. Each instrument part begins with the word 'Introduction' and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The organ part is written in a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The organ part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass and chords in the treble. The brass and woodwind parts play a melodic line that rises and then levels off. The organ part concludes with a sustained chord in the bass and a melodic line in the treble.

The Foundation from WELS Congregational Services

Where do I find it?

<https://welscongregationalservices.net>

Select "The Foundation" near the upper right corner



WELS Ministry Resources Modules & Training Consulting Blog **The Foundation** Stats Report

Congregational Services

Ministry resources, training, Bible studies, ready-made graphics, and more

WELS Congregational Services exists to encourage and equip congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry. [ABOUT US](#)

Popular searches

THE FOUNDATION EVERYONE OUTREACH MARRIAGE MOMENTS STEWARDSHIP COMPASSION WITNESSING STATS

Find a resource or module ... [Search](#)

On the main page for *The Foundation*, there is an introductory video and a link to a *Worship the Lord* article about this resource. Scroll down to discover all the resources that not only support worship but all others areas of ministry that intersect with worship.

Year A - All Seasons

DOWNLOAD WORSHIP PLANNING MATERIALS
FESTIVAL HALF OF YEAR AVAILABLE

DOWNLOAD HEART IMPRINTS [Download](#) DOWNLOAD TEEN DEVOTION FACILITATOR GUIDES [Download](#)

DOWNLOAD "MY WORSHIP NOTES" FOR CHILDREN [Download](#) DOWNLOAD FAMILY DEVOTIONS [Download](#)

The Foundation Resources by Church Season

- Year A - Advent - Imminent Arrival [+](#)
- Year A - Midweek Advent - Bible Songs of Christmas [+](#)
- Year A - Christmas - Christ the Savior Is Born [+](#)
- Year A - Epiphany - Identity Revealed [+](#)

What will I find? (A better question might be, “What won’t I find?”)

Heart Imprints (see p. 9)

A worship resource for children in the congregation, elementary school, or early childhood ministry. Whether you are giving a children’s sermon, or planning chapel for your Sunday school, early childhood ministry, or Lutheran elementary school, this resource provides ideas for your message that will coordinate with the church year and the worship being planned on Sunday. Consisting of a Bible reading, an object lesson outline that articulates the law and gospel, and a suggested order of service, Heart Imprints connects to the church year and is available throughout the year.

Teen Devotion Facilitator Guide (see pp. 10-12)

Our teens face challenges to their faith like never before. In 2016, WELS Discipleship began to publish weekly devotions specifically with them in mind as a series called Transformed (wels.net/transformed). Beginning 2022, *Transformed* teen devotions were prepared to connect to *The Foundation*. The teen devotions and youth leader facilitator guides will follow the texts chosen and presented in the “Preacher Podcast” to maximize the work that a preacher may be doing already for the weekend. The template for the facilitator guides noted below could easily be adapted for any sermon text that a preacher may study. The philosophy here is to do good work once and then use it in as many forums as possible.

My Worship Notes for Children (see p. 13)

This reproduceable template encourages children to observe what occurs in worship and what the main message from God’s Word was in each service.

Family Devotions

This resource may be downloaded to be copied and distributed, or the devotions can simply be accessed through the internet (for example, read by the father off his cell phone screen around the dinner table with his family). Three weekly devotions are provided with families in mind. Age-appropriate questions and a closing prayer are included.



The Foundation Resources by Church Season (These are the primary resources from *The Foundation*)

Each season or segment of the church year can be promoted through a “series” or common theme that brings the services together and allows for easy and attractive promotion. Resources include:

- Preacher Podcast
- Fonts and licenses (for a consistent appearance in promotional materials)
- Publicity checklist (to assist with promotional efforts via social media and church website, see p. 14)
- Graphic files with the series logo
- Slides with the series logo and look
- Graphics for social media posts
- Promotional video
- Worship planner with suggestions for various congregational settings (see pp. 15-16)
- Worship folder covers with series logo

1st
Sunday
after Epiphany

January 11, 2026

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:13-17

THEME: Identity Revealed
Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One

SONG: CW21 377/ CW93 89 - To Jordan's River Came Our Lord

VISUAL: Guess Who board game

OBJECT LESSON

Show the *guess who* game to the children. Have you ever played Guess Who? If you haven't played it before, let me explain the game. You play by asking questions of the other person to figure out which character they picked. Each of the characters have distinguishing features, so I might ask about certain eye colors or hair colors or whether they wear glasses or not.

BIBLE TRUTH

In the Bible before Jesus came, it was kind of like a game of Guess Who. God put clues in the Old Testament talking about who the coming Messiah was going to be. In our scripture lesson today, we see some of those clues being fulfilled and God showing us who Jesus really is. He is the Christ, the Anointed One, our King.

Often, we try to fulfill our own righteousness. We try to do the right things—not so that we can love our neighbor and glorify our God, but so that we can look good to others on the outside or earn our own righteousness. This can look like working hard on a project so we look good to our teacher. Or maybe saying an assignment was easier than it actually was because we want our friends to think we are smart. It could even be pointing out the wrong someone else is doing so that we look better. These things may look good on the outside, but the motivation is to earn our own worthiness and salvation. But we know that the expectation for heaven is perfection and no one on earth is perfect—even if they look like it.

Thankfully, we have Jesus. At the Jordan River, God used John the Baptist to identify him as the Savior we needed, the One who came just as the prophets foretold, who fulfilled all the prophecies and became our salvation. John baptizing Jesus and the Spirit coming on him was God's way of identifying Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed

One. The Father's voice declared that he was well-pleased with Jesus because Jesus was living a perfect life in our place. And he gives that perfection, that righteousness, to us through our baptism. He knows our sinful motivations. He knows we are unworthy of the salvation we need. And yet instead of saying to God, "Look at how much better I am than them," he clothed us with that perfection at our baptism to say to God, "Look, they are perfect and forgiven. They are my children. They can go to heaven." What an amazing gift!

DISCUSSION AND APPLICATIONS

Can you remember some other ways Jesus is described in the Old Testament? Maybe some names he was called?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you for the amazing gift of salvation you give us for free. We sin and try to make ourselves look better than we are. Thank you for forgiving us. Remind us of your goodness so we can live out of thankfulness. To you be all the glory. Amen.



Teen Devotion

Year A – First Sunday in Advent

Imminent Arrival



One truth shared: Rejoice in Jesus' coming.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in What's Coming

Rejoice? In what?

Philippians 4:4 is up there on the most famous list of Bible passages. Students memorize it. Adults buy Bible artwork on Amazon displaying it. Christians often quote it. But here's the question nobody really asks out loud: Do we actually believe it?

It's pretty easy to rejoice when life is coasting along smoothly on autopilot. But you're a teen—you know life doesn't usually work like that. School drama, sports pressure, friend issues, family stress, anxiety, breakups, breakdowns, and being pulled in a hundred directions can make rejoicing feel... well, unrealistic. Sometimes impossible. You may respond like many suffering Christians—Rejoice? In what?

Before giving up on the idea, stop and notice something important. *What time is it?*

Yes, it's almost Christmas-shopping-and-hot-chocolate season. But in the Church Year, it's something deeper: *Advent*. Advent means *coming* or *arrival*. It's a season that tells us to look in three directions at once:

1. Jesus *came* at Christmas to be our Savior.
2. Jesus *comes* to us now through his Word and sacraments.
3. Jesus *will come again* on judgment day.

And believe it or not, all three of those advents give you real reasons to rejoice—even on the hard days.

Why Advent actually matters

Verse 7 says we have the peace of God that “transcends all understanding.” Why? Because Jesus came in real skin and bones to live perfectly and die for you. That means:

- You are forgiven.
- You are loved.
- Not even death can win anymore.

That kind of peace doesn't make sense to the world—but it's real. And it “will guard your hearts and your minds” every single day, even on the days you don't feel strong.

Because Jesus has made you part of God's family, verse 6 becomes true for you too: You can bring anything—literally anything—to God. The anxiety. The mistakes. The fears. The future. And he listens.

Then Paul drops one more reminder: "The Lord is near."

- Near... as in coming back soon.
- Near... as in the ending of the story is already written.
- Near... as in joy is the final chapter, not fear.

When Jesus returns, every pain disappears. Every heartbreak is healed. Every problem ends. Joy wins.

So dear teen, rejoice in the Lord *always*! Why? Jesus has come for us, Jesus still comes to us, and Jesus will come again. Yes, "I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, so many things weigh us down and stress us out in this life. When anxiety feels heavy and worries pile up, remind us of your Advent. Remind us that you came for us, you still come to us through your Word, and you will come back for us without fail. Fill our hearts with peace that doesn't make sense and joy that can't be shaken. With confidence in your promises, I pray: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

Year A – First Sunday in Advent Imminent Arrival

One truth shared: Rejoice in Jesus' coming.

Rejoice in What's Coming

Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- What are some things you genuinely look forward to this time of year—traditions, food, days off, events, anything?
- Why do those things spark excitement or make you happy?

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.*

- What makes it hard for teens—for you—to feel joy every day?
- Agree or disagree. It's harder for teens to have daily joy than adults. Explain your thinking.

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to begin a spiritual conversation.*

- When Jesus was born, angels announced "peace on earth." How is Jesus' peace different from the world's version of peace?
- Why do you think the peace Jesus gives "surpasses all understanding"?
- If Jesus comes to us now through his Word and sacraments, what are some simple, realistic ways we can grow in joy?
- Agree or disagree. "Judgment day will be a day filled with joy, not fear." Why?

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the "connecting question" above.*

- What's the difference between happiness and joy?
- Summarize why Christians can live with joy every day, no matter what's happening in life.

For children to use during worship.

My Worship Notes

Name _____

What is the name of the church season or special day today?

What is the color of the church today? Circle one: Blue White Purple Red Green

The sermon text was:

This is in the: Old Testament New Testament



What is the sermon about?

Did we have a Sacrament today?



Baptism?

Yes

No



Communion?

Yes

No

My favorite song today was:

What did you learn about God today?

Draw a picture of something you heard or saw today:

What are you thankful for today?



PUBLICITY CHECKLIST

Epiphany 2026 - Year A

PLEASE NOTE: Most publicity materials are available in both English and Spanish.

SERIES THEME: Identity Revealed

“Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “reveal.” It is the season when you see Jesus begin his public ministry, revealing the reason the Son of God came to earth. During Epiphany, you will come to understand that when the true identity of Jesus is revealed, you realize your own true identity as well.

Date & Theme	Channel	Action	Wording
Week of January 5 (or prior) <i>Introduce theme</i>	Worship folder/newsletter blurb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place blurb in print and electronic versions of worship folder and newsletter Include “Identity Revealed” logo graphic (multiple versions available) 	<p>“Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “reveal.” It is the season when you see Jesus begin his public ministry, revealing the reason the Son of God came to earth. During Epiphany, you will come to understand that when the true identity of Jesus is revealed, you realize your own true identity as well.</p> <p>Join us for a new series: Identity Revealed</p>

Epiphany 2026 - Year A - 1

	Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post “Identity Revealed” title Facebook graphic Post “Identity Revealed” 1x1 video file (<i>with or without WELS logo</i>) 	<p>“Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “reveal.” It is the season when you see Jesus begin his public ministry, revealing the reason the Son of God came to earth. During Epiphany, you will come to understand that when the true identity of Jesus is revealed, you realize your own true identity as well.</p> <p>Join us for a new series: Identity Revealed</p>
	Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post “Identity Revealed” title Facebook graphic Post “Identity Revealed” 1x1 video file (<i>with or without WELS logo</i>) 	<p>“Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “reveal.” It is the season when you see Jesus begin his public ministry, revealing the reason the Son of God came to earth. During Epiphany, you will come to understand that when the true identity of Jesus is revealed, you realize your own true identity as well.</p> <p>Join us for a new series: Identity Revealed</p>
	Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post “Identity Revealed” 16x9 video file to YouTube or Vimeo (<i>versions available with or without WELS logo at end of video</i>) Show “Identity Revealed” 16x9 video file during this week’s announcements 	<p>“Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “reveal.” It is the season when you see Jesus begin his public ministry, revealing the reason the Son of God came to earth. During Epiphany, you will come to understand that when the true identity of Jesus is revealed, you realize your own true identity as well.</p> <p>Join us for a new series: Identity Revealed</p>
	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post theme information Post link to “Identity Revealed” video on YouTube or Vimeo Post “Identity Revealed” graphic 	<p>“Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “reveal.” It is the season when you see Jesus begin his public ministry, revealing the reason the Son of God came to earth. During Epiphany, you will come to understand that when the true identity of Jesus is revealed, you realize your own true identity as well.</p>

Epiphany 2026 - Year A - 2



IDENTITY REVEALED

JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE ANOINTED ONE

(The Baptism of Our Lord)

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

“Christ” is not the family name of Jesus. It is a title. The Greek word “Christ” and the Hebrew word “Messiah” both mean the same thing: “The Anointed One.” Anointing was the practice of pouring liquid over the head of someone to signify selection for some special task. When the Lord had someone anointed, he also poured his Spirit over them. It was the fulfillment of promises made over centuries.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Isaiah 42:1-7 – The Lord promises to put his Spirit on the Messiah.

Acts 10:34-38 – The Holy Spirit was poured out onto Peter’s listeners as he told them how God anointed Jesus.

*Matthew 3:13-17 – In the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power.

Preaching Note

The Gospel is chosen, providing the preacher the opportunity to explain how someone with no sin fulfills all righteousness by being baptized. As the Messiah, Jesus stands in the place of sinful human beings, first at the font and then at the cross. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God. When we are baptized, we are also revealed as children of God, connected to the death and resurrection of Christ.

[Psalm 45](#)

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 45 in services that honor Christ, the anointed King, as the groom for his Church, the bride.

Hymns

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	384	384	377
HOD	377	377	378
Third/Distr	374	374	379
Closing	692	379	679

[374](#) (The Star Proclaims the King is Here) returns to the melody from TLH.

[377](#) (To Jordan's River Came Our Lord) has the same words and melody as CW93, but the organ accompaniment is easier.

[378](#) (To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord) has the melody from Luther's day, which should be practiced before singing.

[379](#) (Christ, Your Footprints through the Desert) has the words from CWS but is set to a new tune which is unfamiliar but not difficult to sing.

[384](#) (Hail to the Lord's Anointed) has the familiar words and tune, but the organist accompaniment is easier.

[679](#) (God's Own Child I Gladly Say It) has become beloved since it was introduced in CWS.

[692](#) (All Who Believe and Are Baptized) is familiar from TLH and CW93.

Worship the Lord

No. 111, November 2021



The Foundation: *for everyone*

By Bryan Gerlach

By now you've probably seen some publicity about *The Foundation*. A video introduction was shared in early October.¹ Maybe you're already making use of resources for Advent. This article makes the bold claim that *The Foundation* offers something for everyone—for every pastor and every congregation. Why? Because worship is the essential foundation of everything a congregation does.

For everyone

These flexible and varied resources have potential to serve every pastor and every congregation. First, as noted in the introductory video, you can use *The Foundation* even if you don't have the new hymnal. You can easily adapt the worship plan for CW21 in the Year C Planner to CW93. The new lectionary is available in the free test drive version of *CW Service Builder* (builder.christianworship.com) and for purchase from Logos. 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) 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. Or if you use the Year C Planner for hymn suggestions, note that a hymn comparison cross reference index is available.²

Second, you can pick and choose what you'll use. Maybe you start using season and Sunday themes in Advent, but you're not yet doing social media promotion. So that aspect will wait until Lent or Easter.

Saving time

I've often said that it would be a delight to be just beginning my years as a pastor in 2021 rather than in 1983. I know that various cultural changes have put new pressures on pastors. Some of these are different or intensified compared to the end of the last century. But a wealth of new resources and technologies certainly are enriching the way pastors carry out their work, especially related to worship. Instead of being a primary user of those new

You can use The Foundation even if you don't have the new hymnal.

resources, I will enjoy the fruit of planning by others from my place in the pew or on the organ bench.

But new resources just take more time, don't they? Where will that time come from? What pastor isn't already plenty busy? Is there any pastor who doesn't wish for more time, whether for ministry tasks or family?

That's what's so exciting about *The Foundation*. This collection of resources doesn't expect you to carve out more time to improve some area of ministry. These resources save you time by giving you things that you don't have to create yourself. These resources have potential to bring blessings in several arenas.

Improved content

By using resources from *The Foundation*, pastors can hope to offer improved content. That content might be sermons or social media publicity/outreach or a long-range worship plan.

In the earliest days of my ministry and certainly during the years of my schooling (NWC 1976), worship planning was kind of an autopilot thing. Lots has changed in the intervening years. A "culture of expectations" changed. People have a higher expectation of excellence in worship (at whatever level is fitting and feasible for each congregation). Denominational loyalty changed. The best

Pastor Gerlach is Director of the Commission on Worship and a member of the WELS Hymnal Project Executive Committee and Hymnal Introduction Committee. He previously served churches in El Paso, TX and Citrus Hts, CA. He enjoys introducing new hymnal content from the organ bench in two Milwaukee-area churches.

This collection of resources doesn't expect you to carve out more time to improve some area of ministry.

worship we can offer will help to deepen people's appreciation for Lutheran worship. The breadth of musical styles in worship expanded. The new hymnal takes advantage of broader styles while still recommending options within "Lutheran parameters."

Of course, higher worship expectations might mean higher demands on the pastor's time for planning worship. Anything that can help the pastor with planning and reduce the time required becomes all the more important. Thus, the synergy between *The Foundation*, the Year C Planner, and *CW Service Builder* becomes all the more valuable.

Preacher's Podcast

The initial podcasts feature Jon Hein, Coordinator of Congregational Services, seminary professors Tom Kock and Sam Degner, and a variety of parish pastors. Kock comments on the podcast:

I expect the Preacher's Podcast to be extremely well received. The combination of two parish pastors talking through that Bible segment along with a seminary professor (who often has expertise in the book the text is found in, or who has expertise on the subject matter addressed in that segment), all guided by a moderator makes for an amazingly organic conversation. The participants take turns addressing various points in the text: Law-Gospel thoughts which could be preached, illustrations, theme-thoughts, etc. We chose to work a year ahead on these. So, the pastors have preached on that text in their congregations. Because of that, they have had the chance to see what worked and what didn't work and can bring great suggestions for segments of the text which might need to be more fully explained or illustrated. For those pastors who are already doing excellent exegetical work, the podcast will simply allow for other perspectives to broaden their thinking. For those who aren't as able to dig into the Greek and Hebrew, or who have faced a challenging week timewise, the podcast will help them to take their text study deeper, allowing their sermon to become even more of a blessing for their people.



Beginning with Easter 2, seminary professor Jonathan Micheel will be involved. He offers the following thoughts about the benefits of these podcasts.

I often found that after doing a text study I got stuck. Not completely stuck, but I would lose momentum—looking at a lot of notes and struggling with how to sort through them, organize my thoughts, and move on to the next steps of outlining and writing. And, of course, at that stage I was also looking for things I had not considered—even if just a fresh illustration, a point for application, or some angle I had not thought of.

This is where the Preacher's Podcast can help. It won't replace a pastor's text study or composition of the sermon. But it may "grease the wheels" a little. Like a circuit meeting where preachers are thinking out loud about a text and how to preach it, the podcast aims to get preachers' mental gears turning. Maybe a preacher will hear a point he hadn't thought of. Or maybe he will hear a point that he had already uncovered, but when he hears it expressed in a slightly different way, it will spark an idea. That's what the preachers who are recording the podcast often report; they begin the recording with their own notes, and then additional thoughts occur to them in the course of the podcast discussion. One thought leads to another. We hope that many preachers will have similar experiences.

Curated resources that the Lutheran pastor doesn't have to tweak.

Devotional resources for adults, families, and children

The Foundation is for everyone with devotional resources that take a cue from Sunday themes and reinforce them throughout the week. Beginning in Advent this year the *WELS Family Devotions* provided by the Discipleship office³ will explore Sundays' themes, diving into them more deeply throughout the following week. These are available in both print (read from a browser) and podcast options. Also, the much beloved *WELS Daily Devotions* will seek to incorporate the prior Sunday's theme throughout the week. This will not only bless the thousands of WELS members who use these devotions but will also allow congregations to share them with guests who worshiped with the congregation on Sunday.

Beginning in Easter 2022 *Transformed*, the weekly youth devotion with a newly added youth Bible study leader's guide, will also sync with *The Foundation's* seasonal and weekly themes.

From the Lutheran Schools office, *Heart Imprints* offers weekly children's devotions based on the *upcoming* Sunday theme. These can be used for a school chapel (LES or ECM), a Sunday School devotion, or a children's message during Sunday worship. The

devotional leader will save time by using these age-appropriate messages that are connected to Sunday worship. Just be sure to coordinate with potential devotion leaders so that the same content isn't used by more than one person in the same week. Note that options are available each week both for Pre-K and K-8. Since these are still in development, they weren't all posted when *The Foundation* website first went live. The *Heart Imprints* for Advent will be available by November 15 at the latest.

Outreach

The Foundation website helps everyone with outreach. For most worship series, there is a promotional video that highlights the seasonal themes. Additional resources include professionally designed promotional graphics for every worship series and a promotional text for each *season* and each *week*. When these resources are featured on your church website or social media pages, members can be encouraged to share them with their unchurched friends.

So, that's several ways *The Foundation* can serve everyone. But to be clear, here's the most important way: the congregation and its guests who worship and benefit from devotions find themselves saturated in gospel-rich messages and worship content.⁴ Just as the new hymnal offers curated resources for 21st century Lutheran worship, *The Foundation* offers curated resources that the Lutheran pastor doesn't have to tweak to make them Lutheran. For example, the Lent series is "Crushed"—not some version of "Try harder to resist temptation, like Jesus did."

No criticism and no guilt

Over the years some might have sensed a lurking message coming from various programs offered by Congregational Services and other efforts at encouraging professional growth or even from a practical essay at a pastors' conference: "You're not doing well enough." To which a fair response in some situations might have been: "But I'm already overwhelmed by time demands and expectations! Where am I supposed to find time to think through and implement this new and improved whatever?" It's always appropriate for pastors and congregations to evaluate if they are doing everything they can for the cause of the gospel or how they might adjust use of time to target higher priorities. Self-assessment and goal setting are important. But it was never the intent of various past programs merely to criticize or induce guilt. And yet some programs were not as immediately practical and out-of-the-box usable as *The Foundation*. Some might have offered lots of good ideas that were more conceptual than practical. They required a lot of effort back home after being introduced at a workshop or consultation.

Immediately usable resources at a highly affordable price: totally free!



The free logo for the Year C Lent series, Crushed.

The Foundation is not like that. It offers immediately usable resources at a highly affordable price: totally free! Here are some comments from pastors who have taken an early look at these resources.

I wanted to thank those who worked on *The Foundation*. What a resource and major time-saver for the busy pastor! I used to do all that stuff on my own (minus the video—I just never did those). I'm not sure where the impetus came from, but all of you should be commended for making it work out so nicely. I'm going to be pushing to incorporate it here where I serve.

This is excellent! I appreciate how it is ministry driven, worship centered, and freely available.

This is exactly what synod is for. Love to see us using our potential. Thank you so much.

I was so excited when I saw this and will be sharing the resources!

The sermon helps in the podcast is gold. Listening to that right after my text study will be part of my weekly sermon preparation.

What a resource and major time-saver for the busy pastor!

Those who are producing resources for *The Foundation* hope that you can find something, many things, to use either to produce a better "product" or to accomplish goals in a more efficient way. Or both!

And please give us your feedback. This is a new venture for us in Congregational Services. What works well for you? What doesn't? What else could be part of *The Foundation* package? We plan to conduct a survey sometime after Easter, but your feedback is welcome at any time.

Work Smarter, Not Harder!

Practical thoughts that fit different congregational situations ... in no particular order:

1. Explore the new hymnal and its resources with the weekly hymn suggestions as your “starting point” for exploring the wealth of resources now in *Christian Worship* (2021).
2. Prepare school chapel devotions in sync with the church year and with helpful ideas for object lessons and orders of service that you don’t need to develop on your own.
3. A social media coordinator or volunteer can easily manage worship promotion on behalf of the called workers.
4. Find worship resources for a variety of congregational settings, for a variety of instruments, and in a variety of musical styles with the NPH Musician’s Resource—and know that you can trust the theological content!
5. Service booklet (worship folder) explanations (e.g. theme of the service, summary of each reading) are ready-to-print and don’t have to be written from scratch by the pastor or others.
6. Support your families with devotions you can trust that coordinate with the previous Sunday’s services: Encourage families to put a link for Family Devotions on their smart phone browser’s mobile favorites folder.
7. Offer a teen Bible class without needing to adapt theologically questionable materials or starting from scratch. Show them how the sermon’s thoughts were practical even for their lives as high school students!
8. Choir directors can equip their choirs to function *liturgically* (and not just as “anthem choirs”) without spending a significant amount of money on special music. Variety for hymn performance is found easily in the NPH Musician’s Resource.
9. Many of The Foundation’s promotional resources are prepared in English and Spanish to support Spanish-speaking ministry settings within WELS.
10. Pastors sometimes have difficulty coming up with fresh ways to proclaim law and gospel and faithful applications of God’s Word that connect well with the people in the pews. The Preacher’s Podcast supplements your text study with insights from brothers in the ministry who have wrestled with the same texts and issues that you face.