

Stretching Your Worship within Lutheran Parameters

Why This Topic?

- A human need
- A synodical issue
- A function of the Church of Christ

What Are Some Lutheran Parameters?

Parameter #1: Christian freedom governs our worship forms.

Lutherans have always exercised this Gospel freedom in worship.

- preaching
- rite
- calendar
- ceremony
- language
- music
- art
- architecture
- ambiance
- participation/leadership

Key Point:

Christian freedom always serves the greater interests of the Gospel.

Parameter #2: We are absolutely bound to the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col. 3:16).

"We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]: "Where two or three are gathered...."¹

"See, that's what "Your King is coming" means. You do not seek Him; He seeks you. You do not find Him; He finds you. For the preachers come from Him, not from you. Their preaching comes from Him, not from you. Your faith comes from Him, not from you. And everything that faith works in you comes from Him, not from you. Where He does not come, you remain outside; and where there is no Gospel, there is no God there, but only sin and perdition, no matter how free will can or wants to do, suffer, work, and live."²

Key Point:

Our biblical view of the Word, Sacraments, grace and faith leads us to a clear purpose for worship. In worship, we **RECEIVE** from God.

"This is how God wants to become known and worshiped, namely, that we receive blessings from him, and indeed, that we receive them on account of his mercy and not on account of our merits. This is the richest consolation in all afflictions, which the opponents destroy when they trivialize and disparage faith and only teach people to deal with God through works and merits."³

¹ Kolb-Wengert, *Smalcald Articles* III:4, 319.

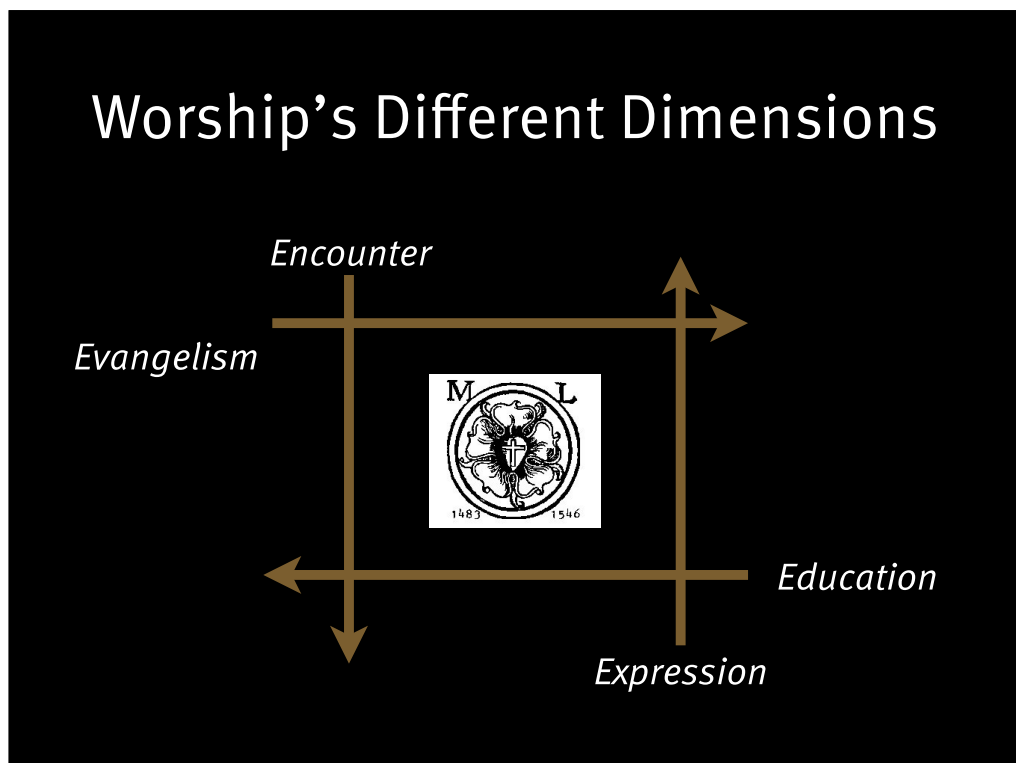
² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Church Postil I*, vol. 75 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 35.

³ KW, *Apology* IV:60, 130.

"The woman came with this conviction about Christ: that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from him. This is the highest way to worship Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to Christ. By seeking the forgiveness of sins from him, she truly acknowledged him as the Messiah. Now to think about Christ in this way, to worship and take hold of him in this way, is truly to believe."⁴

Lutherans Have Four Different Dimensions to Their Worship

What happens when each of these dimensions of worship is stretched too far?



⁴ KW, Apology IV:154, 144.

⁵ This diagram is adapted from Timothy Maschke's fine volume *Gathered Guests* from CPH. It currently serves as the textbook for the junior worship course at WLS.

Lutherans Have Clear Principles that Govern Worship

It is critically important that we don't assume these principles! Don't take the pragmatic approach: the service went well in Mequon, so I'll do it in Midlothian.

I. LET THE GOSPEL PREDOMINATE IN WORSHIP

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).

Practical Application:

Pray your way through the hymnal

- **Order:** Daily Devotions on pp. 235–247
- **Hymn:** Seasonal hymn(s) or general hymn(s)
- **Psalm:** Psalm from the Daily Lectionary pp. 248–253 or the Psalm Schedule on p. 254
- **Scripture:** Readings from Daily Lectionary on pp. 248–253
- **Devotion:** Devotion from *A Year in the New Testament* by CPH.
- Selection from *Small Catechism* (pp. 286–294) or *Book of Concord*

II. LET THE PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP

"As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10).

Practical Points:

- Don't assume "what my members really want is...."
- Don't assume "what my community really wants is...."
- Is my worship stretch transforming the assembly into an audience that sits there in mute wonder?

III. LET THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH BE HONORED

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

"Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. In fact, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns, added for the instruction of the people, are interspersed here and there among the Latin ones. For ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant."⁶

Practical Points: Stretch your knowledge of Lutheran history and practice

- Is our knowledge of "history" really historical?
- What have I read recently that has deepened my appreciation for Christian/Lutheran history?

IV. LET THE ARTS BE USED IN SERVICE TO THE GOSPEL

"Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you... With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God... I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple...The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord" (1 Chronicles 29).

Practical Points: See the rest of the session!

Issues to Consider:

"How we sing, what we sing, what we keep, and what we leave out are shaping the faith we hand on to the next generation and the musical heritage they will have."⁷

⁶ KW, AC XXIV:1-3, 69.

⁷ Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H publishing group, 2017), 80.

"So?! We're not worshipping you!"⁸

Good hymnody and liturgy encourage *creativity, communication, and community*.⁹

Good hymnody and good liturgy protect God's people from the tyranny of the individual.

The Rite

The Lutheran Hymnal was with us for 52 years. *Christian Worship* (1993) served WELS for 28 years. As hymnals grow old, worship leaders develop an irrepressible itch to do *something* with their orders of service. They mean well! But homemade results are sometimes mixed... Honesty mixed with humility is a good policy: What was produced in my office on Thursday night may – or may not – be superior to what the collective wisdom of the Church has produced over the last 2,000 years.

Examples of absolutions gleaned from WELS worship folders:

"In the name of God, our loving Lord, I announce forgiveness to each of you who has honestly confessed your sins, earnestly repented of them, and truly accepts Jesus as your Savior and Lord."

"In moments like these, I sing out a song, I sing out a love song to Jesus.
In moments like these I lift up my hands, I lift up my hands to the Lord.
Singing I love you, Lord, Singing I love You, Lord;
Singing I love You, Lord, I love You."

Another liturgical innovation gleaned from multiple WELS worship folders:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, **"Take and eat; this is my + body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."**

⁸ Marva Dawn's response to an "I didn't like that" comment from a participant at a Concordia–River Forest *Lectures in Church Music* session.

⁹ Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H publishing group, 2017), 78–79.

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, **“Drink from it, all of you; this is my + blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

Key Points:

Is my proposed stretch better than what I have received from my fathers? Is it better than what has been carefully curated in the authorized publications of our synod? Or is it just different?

Dedicate yourself to implementing the liturgical resources of the new hymnal to the greatest degree possible. That will be a significant stretch for many! Once the hymnal resources are mastered, they become a springboard for other worship creativity.

Complete Liturgies

Instead of spending precious time writing new orders of service, invest your efforts in planning and practicing a cycle of complete liturgies. Begin with what you know. Make it your aim – if appropriate in your setting – to add an order of service a year.

For Weekend Services:

- Divine Service I
- Divine Service II
- Divine Service III
- Divine Service IV
- “Metrical” Divine Service (American, British, German, or Scandinavian tunes available)
- Morning Praise/Evening Prayer (pp. 207 and 215 in the hymnal)
- Keep a liturgy from CW93?
- What style of accompaniment will you use for each of these services and why?

For Midweek Services:

- *Evening Prayer* (p. 215) for Advent
- Prayer at the Close of Day (p. 225) for Lent

Individual Songs of the Ordinary

Look for individual songs of the Ordinary (Gloria, Magnificat, etc.). Use these especially for festival services.

The Magnificat as an example:

- Four-part setting (p. 219)
- Through-composed setting (p. 220)
- "Tell Out, My Soul" (955)
- "Holy Is Your Name" (956)
- Choral: "Magnificat" – James Chepponis (GIA)
- Choral: "God My Savior" – Dan Schutte (OCP)

Other possibilities in the Rite:

- Gathering Rite – *The Church Gathers* – GIA Publications, G-4560
- Several seasonal Rites are available in *Builder*. See below.
- Children's devotion
- Forms of Prayer – Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer (Builder)
- Creeds from the Small Catechism
- Drama? Dance?

Key Points:

- Ritual is a fact of life. Embrace it. Enjoy it. Enrich it.
- Words and their commonly accepted meanings are important (i.e., tolerant, hate, gender, love). Loss of meaning inevitably leads to chaos in a civil society and schism in the church. The Western Rite provides a theologically tested and historically approved pattern of speaking and teaching.
- Lex Orandi/Lex Credendi ("The rule of praying is the rule of believing") is not a theological law akin to a law of science. It can, however, help ensure Gospel proclamation.
- Pastors love scissors and paste - rarely for the better.
- If something is an adiaphoron, that doesn't automatically make it neutral. Replacing an alb and stole for skinny jeans and a flannel shirt takes something and replaces it with something else. Remember that FREEDOM is one part of the issue. Freedom/Beneficial/Edification/Wisdom/ Love is a fuller picture.

There is no rite or order of service which is commanded in Scripture. Lutheran liturgical worship is solidly rooted in the Gospel and in the combined experience of the Holy Christian Church. Done well, it provides depth of theology, breadth across cultures, and clarity of communication.

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

Diagnostic Questions for Group Discussion:

1. Our organist(s) and pianist(s) play well and lead the service capably.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 2. I sense that our organists/pianists practice well in advance of each service.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 3. My congregation's singing is strong and enthusiastic.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 4. My congregation is able to sing the Psalms well.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 5. I appreciate singing most of the hymns that are chosen for worship in our church.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 6. I like it when our musicians make hymns more festive with special settings and the use of other musical instruments.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 7. I find the songs of the liturgy to be enjoyable to sing.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
 8. We use enough musical variety for the psalms, hymns, and liturgical songs.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely

Psalmody

The psalm is often the first thing axed in homemade orders of service. Instead, the Psalm of the Day should be the first thing enriched! Why? The “hymnal of the Bible” and the “Cradle of the church” has the greatest number of musical possibilities. Remember that it is proper for the choir to sing the psalm.

Christian Worship: Psalter is a must-have for any congregation hoping to stretch their worship life! Become familiar with the following tables and appendices in the Psalter:

- Lectionary Table (pp. VII-X)
- Thematic Index (pp. 834-838)
- Performance Notes (pp. 822-828)
- Genre and Musical Style (pp. 832-833)

Experience and implement the following major styles of Psalmody:

- Single Tone and Double Tone (72A)
- Anglican four-part chant (46C)
- Metrical paraphrase (62C)
- Folk tune (27D)
- Lyrical (63A)
- Gelineau (23D)

Resource:

Recordings of CW Psalms are posted on a CW Psalter channel on YouTube. These videos will help you determine whether or not a Psalm is too much of a stretch for your parish.

Hymnody

Problems in Paradise:

1. **Too many pastors and worship leaders select hymns poorly.** Hymns function emotionally as well as theologically. Select hymns based on their function in the service as much as on theological content or support of the day's Proper.

Hymn function:

Opening Hymn (_____)

Sets the mood of the service and prepares people for worship

Watch length

Well known by the congregation

Hymn of the Day (_____)

Selected from the list of our best hymns to match the theme of the lectionary

Sermon Hymn (_____)

Careful match with sermon focus

Hymn with emotional content

Select as the first hymn during the Distribution

Distribution Hymn (_____)

Consider seasonal and longer hymns

Closing Hymn (_____)

Short hymn or several stanzas

Well known by the congregation

Get to know the congregation's repertory of hymns. It is better to sing fewer hymns with knowledge and enthusiasm than more hymns which the congregation doesn't know. Perhaps 250-300 hymns is the sweet spot for most congregations.

2. Americans don't sing as often or as well as they once did.

Listening to music has replaced participating in music in the experience of many people.

Schools (including Lutheran schools) do not have music programs as strong as those in the past.

3. The growing use of "text only" hymns

In any given congregation singers fall into three categories: good singers, average singers, and poor singers (non-singers). Singers also can be divided into two groups: WELS background and non-WELS background.

When singers aren't sure of where the melody is going, they experience the D-F-A phenomenon: They have DOUBTS about the tune; they have FEARS about singing it incorrectly; they ABSTAIN from singing altogether.

A ♪ placed before a hymn does nothing. Roughly two-thirds of Americans have played an instrument at some point in their lives. Providing the melody line will help more people than we might imagine.

4. Church buildings often lack acoustics that enhance the sound of voices and instruments.

Optimal reverberation time in a room intended for music and singing is between 2.1 and 2.5 seconds. Reverberation time above 3 seconds can compromise the spoken word.

5. Inadequate musical instruments cannot lead or support congregational singing.

A pipe organ modeled after the designs of 18th century German organ builders remains the best instrument to accompany the congregation's song. These instruments were refined by Lutherans to lead Lutheran hymn singing. A pipe organ built on this design by a reputable company remains the best choice for even small congregations. This is true musically and economically.

Beware of pipe organs built by organ aficionados in their basements. A good digital organ is better than a bad pipe organ.

On today's worship scene a piano is almost as important as an organ in Lutheran worship. Acoustic pianos are the best choice and come in a variety of models depending on the length and placement of the strings on the instrument. Even smaller congregations probably require a studio model for leading congregational singing.

A digital piano is a realistic substitute for an acoustic piano—but an electronic keyboard is not!

6. Musicians who lack ability or training cannot lead Lutheran hymn singing effectively.

= If a hymn fails miserably, don't blame the hymn.

Hymn Introduction:

- Organ/piano alone
- Use hymns for instrumental music
- Soloists
- Choir
- School! Children will sing what their pastors and teachers sing.
- Sing in alternation with the congregation (pastor/congregation; choir/congregation; organ/congregation; men/women/all; etc.)

Stretching Your Hymn Repertory:

A Teaching Hymnody (Luther's Catechism Hymns):

- 634 – "These Are the Holy Ten Commands" (635 – Schultz alternate)
- 941 – "We All Believe in One True God" (940 – Dretzel alterate)
- 720 – "Our Father, Throned in Heaven Above" (MELITA for an alt tune?)
- 378 – "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord" (377 – Tiefel alternate)
- 650 – "From Depths of Woe, Lord God, I Cry" (651 – Vajda alternate)
- 659 – "Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior" (673 – "O Lord, We Praise You")

Luther's Hymns That Can and Deserve to Be Sung:

- 378 – "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord"
- 439 – "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands"
- 482 – "Triune God, O Be Our Stay"
- 673 – "O Lord, We Praise You"
- 865 – "O Lord, Take Pity Once You've Seen"
- 866 – "If God Had Not Been on Our Side"

Lutheran Heritage Hymns Worth a Second (or First!) Look:

- 603 – "All Praise to God Who Reigns Above"
- 641 – "Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide"
- 658 – "With All My Heart I Praise You, Lord"
- 679 – "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It"
- 826 – "From God Can Nothing Move Me"
- 827 – "Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing"

Hymns of Paul Gerhardt

- 324 – "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You" (Advent)
- 334 – "I Stand Beside Your Manger Here" (Christmas)
- 428/429 – "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (Passion)

- 443 – “Awake, My Heart, with Gladness” (Easter)
- 501 – “Evening and Morning” (General)
- 611 – “Joyously I’ll Praise My Savior” (General)

Hymnody for an Alternate Setting of the Liturgy

- 959 – “Trisagion” for Kyrie (See below)
- 935 – “All Glory Be to God on High” / 938 – “This Is the Feast” (Season of Easter)
- 940 – “We All Believe in One True God”
- 944 – “Holy, Holy, Holy”
- 947 – “Lamb of God, Pure and Holy” OR 403 – “Lamb of God” by Ken Kosche
- 949 – “In Peace and Joy I Now Depart” / 950 – “Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace”

Hymns of Getty et al.

- 568 – “His Robes for Mine”
- 753 – “My Worth Is Not in What I Own”
- 813 – “He Will Hold Me Fast”
- 818 – “My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone (Psalm 62)”
- 851 – “Now Calm Your Heart”
- 867 – “Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near”

Stretch Your File Cabinet:

- Keep concertatos for future instrumental variety even if you never order it as a choir selection.
- Keep Scripture-based texts in biblical order in a large three-ring binder
- Remember the principle of “reducible complexity.” Can a mission church do a Buxtehude cantata?

Stretch Your Use of Instrumentation:

- Take a census of musical instruments on hand and note their quality
- Take a census of the musical resources in your parish – type, ability, willingness
- Look for creative combinations. (Can congas play with the organ?)
- Watch carefully for modern settings of classic hymns – both for singing and instrumental/keyboard use
- How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice....

Ambiance and Ceremony

- Work the church year!
- Study ceremony and – when possible and appropriate – experience it
- Ambiance and Ceremony can speak to all the senses
- Know the difference between Sign and Symbol.

Specific Suggestions:

Advent: A Season of Preparation

- Advent Lessons and Carols (Builder)
- Service of Light with procession for midweek services?
- Save Christmas for Christmas
- Subdued sounds – forego the Gloria
- Lighting of the Advent wreath during the Gospel Acclamation?

Christmas: A Celebration of the Incarnation

- Family service?
- Candlelight service – excellent opportunity to experiment with ambiance
- Include the Lord's Supper Christmas Morning
- Athanasian Creed – second part
- Christmas Lessons and Carols – When?

Epiphany: A Season of Light

- Candlelight on January 6?
- Baptism of our Lord: *Remembrance of Baptism* (Builder or CW:OS p. 15)
- Transfiguration: *Farewell to Alleluia* (Builder or CW:OS p. 146)

Ash Wednesday

- Ashes?
- Ash Wednesday Confessional Rite (Builder)
- Black paraments and gown preferred (Good Friday also)

Lent: The Season of Battle

- Midweek focus = Passion of Christ; Sunday focus = battles of Christ
- No Alleluias (be careful with the hymns!)
- Gathering Rite

- Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline) – is preferable for midweek services
- Ambiance – reflective, but not “lights out”
- Less is more for midweek services!

Palm Sunday

- Procession with palms (Builder or CW:OS p. 180)
- Palm Sunday or Sunday of the Passion?
- Responsive reading of Passion? (Narrator; Voice; Jesus; Crowd)

Holy Thursday:

- Holy Thursday Confessional Rite (Builder)
- Stripping of the altar (Builder or CW:OS p. 185)

Good Friday

- *Service of the Remembrance of the Cross* (Builder or CW:OS) is the primary service
- *Service of the Seven Words from the Cross* (Builder CW:OS) is a devotional service
- Typically, communion is not celebrated on Good Friday (Holy Thursday/Easter Vigil)

Easter: A Season of New Life

- *Easter Vigil* (Builder or CW:OS p. 228)
- Holy Communion in at least one service?
- “This Is the Feast” (938) or “God’s Right Hand and Holy Arm” (937) replace Gloria for the Season of Easter
- Introduce the Paschal Candle

Ascension: God Mounts His Throne

- Recess the Paschal Candle

Holy Trinity

- The Trinitarian section of the Athanasian Creed

Season of Pentecost or “Kickoff” Sunday

- The Service (Narrated Version)

Church Building

"We shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us."¹⁰

Diagnostic Questions for Discussion:

1. My church is comfortable to worship in whether it's cold or hot outside.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
2. When I bring friends to church, they comment how beautiful and well-maintained the church is.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
3. I've noticed how often symbols are used in Christian art, and I understand most of the symbols in my church (on banners, paraments, windows, etc.).
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
4. It's quite easy to sing in our church because the acoustics are good for singing.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely
5. My church has plenty of space to visit and greet guests before and after worship.
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
do not agree at all agree completely

What is the point to these five questions?

- 1) We are spiritual creatures. We are also physical creatures.
- 2) What unintended messages might your building and grounds be giving? (Meta-Messages)
- 3) Christian architecture communicates or obscures biblical truth.
- 4) Good science is often involved in good worship.
- 5) The Gospel is free. Ministry to people requires an investment in time, resources and space.

¹⁰ Sir Winston Churchill to the House of Lords on October 28, 1943. The topic of discussion was the rebuilding of the House of Commons that had been badly damaged in the Blitz.

Renovation Project Pointers

- Focus not only on the initial impetus for renovation. Keep an eye on what the proposed renovation does to the entire worship space.
- Keep your ear on acoustical issues. Good acoustics can easily be destroyed. The new carpet under your feet will look nice and sound terrible. Spend the money to get an acoustical study done early in the project. It is money well spent. Opt for floor coverings that both look nice and sound nice. (Hint: tile)
- Don't cut corners. Instead, view your renovation as one chapter of your sanctuary's entire lifetime. Accomplish what you can with excellence. Leave the rest for a separate phase that can be done when God provides the resources. One project, well-done, often serves as an encouragement for additional upgrades in the future.
- Don't be afraid to enlist professional consultants and/or worship leaders in WELS. They are here to serve. An outside set of eyes and a lifetime of different experiences often prove helpful to building committees that are seeing things up-close and very personal.

In Sum

Today's confessional Lutherans have what they need to actively engage a secular culture. With Christ at the center of our pulpits, the focus of our rites, and the sum of our song, confessional Lutherans are both rooted and relevant. It is regrettable that our worship treasures are often presented poorly if not outright panned. It is hoped that our new hymnal - together with a comprehensive set of resources - will help WELS congregations embrace worship's purpose, enrich their parish practice, enliven their song, and empower their outreach. In short: Master the fundamentals. Then stretch!

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