

## THE ROAD WHERE FAITH IS FOUND

### I WAS THERE

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP • 732

TOUCHING GOD'S PEOPLE ACROSS THE GENERATIONS



*Mark Harris and Tanya Ramer write...*

On the First Sunday on Advent, the members of the congregation with whom we serve gathered in the narthex before worship. Each of those assembled was presented with a new copy of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and during the Gathering Hymn we processed into the nave, bearing our new worship books which were then dedicated to God's glory during the opening rite.

In one form or another, this ritual action was probably repeated in hundreds, or even thousands, of Lutheran churches across North America that Sunday morning. It was meant to symbolize our "taking possession" of these new worship books, claiming them as our own, that they might be used in expressing and forming the faith of all our people for many years to come. But as is often the case with symbolic actions, this one was *proleptic* in character. It was an expression of what we hope will come to be, and not of what already is. It was a living into that which is not yet. The reality is that it will take time, use, and a lot of effort before we truly claim and live into this worship book.

In the meantime, we would do well to consider how we might midwife this process. How can we assist the church to claim *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, not just as a book restricted to use in the nave on Sunday mornings, but as a resource for the whole week? How can we help all our people, young and old, to discover the riches that are found in this book and to draw on these riches to nurture and express our faith? These are the issues which we will briefly address in this essay. First, we will ask how *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* can touch God's people across the generations, helping us to embrace young and old in the liturgy. Then, we will explore how we might use *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* as a resource to be used by God's people throughout the week.

One of the songs that has been included in our new resource is *Evangelical Lutheran Worship 732*, John Ylvisaker's *Borning Cry*. It is a song that reminds us that God is with us through all our lives, from our first breathe of life to our final expiration. By inference, this song also offers an image of the church as a place for the faithful of all ages, from the very young to the very old. But if that is, indeed, the case, it is worth asking whether we embody this reality in our life together.

“I was there to hear your bawling cry, I’ll be there when you are old.  
I rejoiced the day you were baptized to see your life unfold.”

— *Evangelical Lutheran Worship 732, stanza 4*

Recently, one of us had a conversation with one of the youth in the congregation who does not worship regularly. When asked why, she responded that worship was not important to her. As we explored the reasons behind that, I realized that worship had always been a foreign experience for her. She had simply not grown up there! She was seldom a participant in the worshipping community. She was always somewhere else in the church building—in Sunday School or in the youth room—but seldom at worship. As a result, she never learned to understand worship, to appreciate it or to find meaning for her life through it. Is it any wonder that, as a young adult, worship makes no sense to her?

Finding a balance in our learning and worship opportunities on Sunday mornings is always a challenge. We want to give people of every age an opportunity for learning and worship, in their already busy schedules. But in far too many cases, we have relegated our children to Sunday School—as an alternative to worship—treating worship as an adult domain, and then wondered why our children disappeared after confirmation. As John Westerhoff noted a number of years ago in his book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, faith is *caught*, as much or more than it is *taught*. Training our children to become active and integral participants in our worshipping communities is vital not only for our young people but for the whole church. It reframes our whole understanding of who we are as a community of faith. Now, if that is the case, what are some strategies which we can consider and employ as we strive to make congregational worship a gathering which nurtures and expresses the faith of all God’s people?

First of all, children must be involved in worship, in order for them to find meaning in experience. They cannot simply be spectators. Children learn by doing. For that matter, all of us do. The very term *liturgy* means “the work of the people.” Liturgy refers to the action of the whole assembly. If we take that definition seriously, it may prompt us to reconsider the whole way in which we think about worship. We are prompted to think not just about what we do (what are the lessons, hymns, prayers, etc.), but how we do it. How can we intentionally and actively engage the assembly in these worship activities, such that the members of the assembly are encouraged to be participants and not mere spectators? What steps can we take to assure that children, youth, and adults find worship to be a welcoming and meaningful place for them? How can we train children and adults to find their ways through the breadth of as large a resource as our new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*? What steps can we take to actively engage all in this “work of the people”?

Second, to be engaged, worship needs to be user friendly to people of all ages. That doesn’t mean we have to “dumb it down!” It does mean that we need to continue to find opportunities to help people, through training and participation, to become engaged in the worship life of the congregation and in using the new hymnal.

Children need to be able to touch and feel comfortable in the space. We can encourage our children to help us set up for baptisms and communion. We can offer them time with the pastor in the form of a children’s meditation that reflects the day’s reading from the Gospels. We can help parents both model good practice themselves and encourage their children by sharing a worship book with them, alerting them to responses in which they can take part, narrating what is going on in the liturgy, and showing them where to find the Psalms, the Daily Lectionary and even Luther’s *Small Catechism* so that they can use the book throughout the week. We can sing songs which appeal to various ages. There is no reason why children cannot take part in offering the prayers prior to or following communion or assist in the Prayers of Intercession from the front of the church, as the prayer resources are already in their hands in their pew editions.

Children can come with their parents and assist with serving the cup at communion, or even share in

ushering duties under the careful direction of a youth or adult. These opportunities are not only learning moments for our children, but they are learning moments for all who are gathered—a reminder that we are the One People of God. Not only are we mentoring our children, giving them opportunities to feel at home in worship, they are mentoring us, as well, showing us that being in worship is important to them, that they are interested in the things that are happening, and that they too seek opportunities to be active participants with the entire community in worship.

This kind of intentional inclusion does not just happen. It takes conversation and preparation, planning and work. It takes our willingness to try out new ideas which may not quite succeed upon implementation, but which we are willing to try nonetheless. But if it is in baptism that we are made full members in the body of Christ, and if it is in worship that this body gathers, then we have no excuse but to be constantly striving to make our congregations' worship a place which embraces the gifts and nurtures the faith of all.

Those are just some of the ways in which we can be intentional about beginning to use *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* as a resource which touches God's people across the generations.

Now, let's turn our attention in a slightly different direction. What are some of the ways in which we can also begin to use *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* as a resource for all of God's people across the entire week?

As members of the ELCIC, we are constantly reminded—these days, especially—that we are a church *In Mission for Others*. One of the many things that this suggests to us is that the *others* referred to in this statement, include both those within and beyond our congregations. To be *In Mission for Others* implies being responsive to needs which are both internal and external to our congregations.

Some years ago, a wise, elderly woman, commented that, in her mind, the church's ministries are a lot like breathing: a taking in and a giving forth. Just as we need to both inhale and exhale if we are to remain alive, taking in oxygen and breathing out carbon dioxide, so the ministries of a healthy church need to reflect a drawing in and a breathing out. If we are to offer a vital witness to the world, we also need to be nurtured in our own faith. If we are to boldly and courageously share our Good News with the wider community, then we also need to be sustained in word and sacrament.

To be *In Mission for Others* implies that we are a people who strive to nurture the faith of one another and who provide a witness to the wider community. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* gives us some wonderful resources to help us do that the whole week through.

One of the small and almost hidden gems, in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, is in the section entitled *Additional Prayers*, which begins on page 72. It provides prayers for use before and after worship; for the church; for congregational life and mission; for civic life and government; social ministry; stewardship and creation; life passages; daily life; healing; and our spiritual life. Wow! Wouldn't be wonderful if we could put a copy of this resource in every home in our church and encourage our people to use it? We can envision parents encouraging their children to pick a prayer and offer it as part of their grace before supper each evening. Can you envision the kids' excited conversation? "What shall we pray about today?" We can picture a harried business-person leafing through the worship book at breakfast to find a prayer that can give direction and perspective as at the beginning of a demanding day. We can see an elderly woman with gnarled hands, turning to these prayers and using them as part of devotions at the end of the day.

These prayers are a wonderful way to remind us all that we are a church *In Mission for Others*, a people who need to pray for those within our community and beyond, a people of nurture and witness.

There are other treasures, in the worship book, which can help us to enrich our life in mission. Have you

taken time to explore the *Daily Lectionary*? You'll find it at page 1121. What a gift to the whole church! Born of the very recent work of the *Consultation on Common Texts*, the ecumenical body which brought us the *Revised Common Lectionary, Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is the very first denominational worship book to include this new set of daily readings.

The daily reading are related to the appointed readings for each Sunday. From Thursday through Saturday, the readings help the church to prepare for the Sunday proclamation. The daily readings anticipate the Sunday reading. From Monday to Wednesday, the daily readings help us to reflect on what we have heard on Sunday. They grow out of the Sunday readings.

Whether for personal devotion or congregational use, whether we use them as parents with our children or take them up at church council meetings, we are reminded that God's word speaks to us in the midst of our lives, in the midst of our joys, our struggles, our exhilarations our frustrations. The melody of a song drifts through the edge of our consciousness. "I was there..." all the days of our lives. Using the daily lectionary is a splendid way to nurture and stretch our faith, as again and again we are reminded that we are a people whose lives are rooted in God. How else could we be *In Mission for Others*?

Of course, this just touches upon the resources in our new worship book. The section on *Life Passages* (pages 276-296) provides a new repertoire of liturgies which mark some significant transitional points in our life journey, as we travel with Christ from life through death to new life. Each day of our lives is shaped by our baptismal journey, and the Healing, Funeral, and Marriage liturgies frame our daily experiences within a context of faith and the gathering of God's people. They are a reminder that we are God's hands through all our days, through all the joys, through all our sorrows, and through all that life may hold for us.

As a church *In Mission for Others*, we seek to be a living witness to all with whom we share the song of life —regardless of age, experience, colour, or ethnicity. Whether it is introducing our children to worship and providing opportunities for all people to participate in worship or in finding ways to use *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in our daily lives, we are living witnesses to God's liturgy of life.

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*In 2002, the ELCIC's Program Committee for Worship invited a number of bishops, pastors and teachers to write a series of pastoral letters under the title "Reclaiming Our Birthright: Pastoral Letters on the Every-Sunday Celebration of Holy Communion."*

*Introduced by Bishop Raymond Schultz, the letters had a two-fold thrust: They were designed to assist pastors and congregational leaders in their reflection and teaching on the matter of every-Sunday Holy Communion and to help the people of God to faithfully and deliberately reclaim their baptismal birthright.*

*The essays are available on the ELCIC + Worship Matters page at Lift Up Your Hearts [www.worship.ca](http://www.worship.ca).*