

Striving for Balance in Worship

An essay by Rev. Jonathan Micheel, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Taylorsville, Utah presented to the Fall Pastors' Conference of the Nebraska District's Western Conference meeting at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Grand Junction, Colorado on September 27-28, 2016

A USEFUL FRAMEWORK

Often you need to remember two things. When you drive, don't hug the center line or the shoulder. When you preach, proclaim both law and gospel. Remember justification and sanctification.

Remembering two ideas simultaneously can help us also as we plan worship.

We've seen in our other presentations that the formulators of Article X needed to remember two things. They wanted to maintain their Christian freedom and not be bound by any regulations imposed by the Roman Catholic Church. Yet they also valued their connection to the Church catholic, and they didn't want to let go of valuable Christian practices.

We have contemplated how Luther, in his great treatise on Christian freedom, kept two vitally important principles in mind. One was the freedom given by the gospel. The other was the love and service God wants us to give our neighbor. Neither one of these should be neglected in favor of the other. We need to remember both.

In a similar way, we try to find balanced ways of practicing many aspects of the gospel ministry. We try to remember two things, not just one. That's the theme of Prof. Daniel Deutschlander's classic book *The Narrow Lutheran Middle Road*. Recently at a missionaries' conference in our district Prof. Dan Leyrer illustrated many examples of this in his presentation "As Shrewd as Snakes and as Innocent as Doves: Balancing the Heads God Gave Us with the Hearts God Gave Us." It can be difficult to balance use-your-head shrewdness and pure-of-heart honesty when navigating the challenges of mission and ministry. But, since Jesus told his disciples to be both shrewd and innocent, it's necessary to keep both in mind. It's not either-or, but both-and. It's doing one thing without leaving the other undone.

Such striving for balance is wise as we plan what to do when people gather around Word and Sacrament to receive God's gifts and to worship him. This essay aims to point this out by discussing pairs of ideas that come into play as we guide the worship of our congregations. By giving thought to each pair, we will strive for a balanced position.

Today we will focus on the following two examples of striving for balance in worship:

THE WORSHIPING BODY –THE WORSHIPING INDIVIDUAL

CONTINUITY – VARIETY

We could certainly delve into many more topics. My hope is that thinking through these two pairs will spur readers on their own to apply this framework to other aspects of worship.

The two sets of concepts I've selected are some that I've wrestled with in working with worship. It could be that what you struggle with is not mentioned. In a similar way, you may find that your experiences in a given area are far different than mine. If that's the case, then of course your conclusions will differ from mine. That's what makes Christian freedom both lovely and frustrating; there are no definitive ways that things must be done if they are in the realm of adiaphora. All we can do is think, listen, and talk... then think, listen, and talk some more. Yet from this kind of fraternal discussion we grow in understanding, in empathy, and in wisdom.

Also, we should remember that any discussion like this is not the definitive discussion, but rather part of an ongoing dialogue. As has been said by many, when we realize that something is an adiaphoron, we should not use that designation as a trump card to end debate: "You can't criticize me for that; it's an adiaphoron!" No, just the opposite. When we see that something is in the realm of Christian freedom, it's actually then that we are permitted to discuss and debate it. Then the discussion begins, not ends.

Let's engage, then, in some brotherly thought and discussion, to the glory of God.

THE WORSHIPING BODY AND WORSHIPING INDIVIDUALS

THE WORSHIPING BODY

EXAMPLE 1: CONFESSING THE FAITH

I recall a thought crossing my mind while I was growing up. As we said the Nicene or Apostles' Creed in church, I remember thinking, "I never talk this slowly! To say these words at such a slow pace—this seems so fake, not like a personal confession of my faith."

What I didn't realize until much later is that when we say the creeds together with other believers, the emphasis is not on each of us individually making a heartfelt, personal confession of faith. To be sure, we should engage our minds and hearts as we publicly say what we believe. I'm neither saying that we should be insincere nor condoning mindless verbalizing. However, speaking together emphasizes not our individual identities but our corporate identity. We speak in unison as diverse members of the one body of Christ.

Confessions of faith provide us with an opportunity to express catholicity, that is, our connection with the holy Christian Church. The Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds are recognized as ecumenical expressions. The definition of "ecumenical" must be clarified. This is not the drive to sideline doctrine in favor of superficial unity, the false ecumenism that came of age especially in the Twentieth Century. No, the creeds represent a true ecumenical spirit: these are beliefs that are confessed by Christians throughout the world, through the course of Christian history.

Speaking the Nicene Creed sends a message: "Christians have searched the Scriptures and struggled to craft a summary of who God is and who he is not. We're on board with that summary." Speaking the Apostles' Creed makes a similar statement: "Through Baptism, millions of Christians through the ages have been connected to the triune God, whose nature

and work they expressed with these words. I'm part of that body, and so I confess faith in the same God."

My point is not to diminish the importance of our individual connections to our Savior or our personal confessions of faith. I mean to say that there's more to worship than what any of us may be thinking or feeling as an individual.

THE WORSHIPING BODY

EXAMPLE 2: SINGING

Music in our age is almost all personal and individual. In fact, most of the time we do not have to listen to any music that does not appeal to us. Usually we can craft our own customized playlists or set our preferences on streaming services. If we're listening to live radio and we hear a song we don't like, we can switch to any number of other stations.

Then we come to church. Once we sit down, we have no choice about what kind of music we'll encounter. And what we encounter is music that's, well, weird. Sometimes it's in a style that's foreign to us. Even when the style sounds more familiar, the words are like nothing else we typically hear. And then we're asked to sing! Um, we don't sing. Except on karaoke night, and that's only after a drink or two. Maybe once in a while we'll sing in the car if it's a familiar song we really like. But to sing dense poetry to odd tunes? Strange.

Yet we can think of this in a different way. Most of the time, we view music as something only for entertainment: "If it's fun, I'll listen and even sing." There are a few times, though, that music serves a different purpose. Before a sporting event we sing the national anthem (or at least listen reverently while someone else sings or plays it) not because it's got a good beat that we can dance to, but for other reasons. It's a song that shows we're part of something bigger than ourselves. We listen or sing to express our connection with other citizens, including those who lived long ago.

There are a few other occasions when group singing unites people. The raucous chanting and singing at a professional soccer game is one. The crowd singing "Don't Stop Believin'" or "Sweet Caroline" at a football or baseball game is another. Now, these may be fun songs to sing anyway, but the attraction to singing in these groups is that we're doing something together with other people cheering for the same team.

I see the music we sing in church as more similar to the national anthem than to the songs on our personal playlists. And I don't mean that what we sing is old and boring rather than new and fun. As we sing in church services, we are expressing a connection with the other Christians who are there. It's sometimes a contemporaneous connection—other Christians are singing or saying what we are right now somewhere in the world. Or it's a connection that transcends time—other Christians now with the Lord said or sang what we're singing or saying.

It's noteworthy also that when we sing together, we are involving our bodies and minds, which God created, in proclaiming his works and praising his name. In some ways it's akin to a crowd of people joining in a round of applause or cheering together. For a few moments, with the exception of only a few stragglers, the individuals in that crowd are thinking about the same

thing with their minds and doing the same thing with their bodies. Many people coming together as one.

To join in singing what we wouldn't normally sing—it feels odd. But that could be a good thing. It could mean that we are, if only for a few moments, moving away from our individual preferences and doing something for the sake of the larger body.

A practical suggestion you might have heard before: pick opening and closing hymns that are fairly easily singable. That probably means choosing ones that are familiar to most people, or at least ones that aren't very difficult to pick up. I do encourage you to sing the tougher “heritage hymns,” too. For instance, “Lord, You I Love with All My Heart” or “How Lovely Shines the Morning Star” are beautiful and rich hymns with deep roots in our spiritual history. But they sound different than anything most people hear today, and they're challenging to learn. So enlist the help of a soloist, choir, or small ensemble to introduce and lead them. Explain to people that you're singing these hymns not just because they're traditional but because they're faith-builders. And put these more difficult hymns near the middle of the service. That way, if they bomb, people will have half an hour to forget!

THE WORSHIPING INDIVIDUAL

EXAMPLE 1: ENCOURAGING PERSONAL PIETY

I've focused so far on the corporate dimension of worship because, in my observation, that's the dimension that's counterintuitive for us in our individually oriented culture. However, we should not neglect the individual Christian at worship.

My first suggestion is to cultivate and encourage personal, devotional worship among the Christians we serve. (A reminder for pastors: one key way to encourage devotional worship is to exemplify it.) When a believer sets aside time to read or listen to the Word, to think about it and to let it prompt prayer—this is a time for personal worship.

I said above that when confessing the creeds or something else that expresses our connection with the Church catholic, we set aside our personal thoughts to show our commonality with other Christians. We slow down our speaking pace for the sake of saying the same words at the same time with other believers. But when we are praying and meditating privately, we can pause right in the middle of a Bible reading, the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer and let our thoughts take us to personal concerns and prayers. We remember Luther's words to his friend Peter the Barber:

I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forego the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I

might have learned from much reading and speculation. (“A Simple Way to Pray,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 43)

This could apply also to music. We have access to recordings of thousands of Christian songs and hymns. Time for personal worship could include time to listen—or even to sing along with—the songs and hymns that are especially meaningful to each of us. When I gather with other believers, then the emphasis is on making music together, our hearts and minds and voices joined as one. But when I spend time alone with Jesus, then I can listen to music that strikes a responsive chord with me personally.

I don’t mean to say, “Keep your favorite music to yourself, and don’t make me sing it!” What I mean is that if the only time I ever spend time with Christian music on Sunday mornings, then I’ll probably want the songs I sing in church to be favorites. If they’re not, I may feel frustrated. I’ll want to give attention to my own preferences, and I may see the assembly as an obstacle to my personal devotion. “This is the only time I can think about the Word, but now I’m supposed to stay on track with everybody else’s prayers and songs?” On the other hand, if I’m spending time worshiping as an individual, then I’m less likely to mind setting aside my own preferences for an hour to worship with other believers. Taking time for personal worship during the week can increase my satisfaction with corporate worship on Sundays.

THE WORSHIPING INDIVIDUAL

EXAMPLE 2: TIME FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Still, there are opportunities during our group services when we can provide opportunities for individual worship. A few suggestions follow.

After the congregation speaks the confession of sins, some time for silence can be provided. A simple rubric can explain what the time is for: “Brief silence for personal confession.” The corporate confession that we speak together is not intended to eliminate private and personal confession to God. A few moments (e.g., about ten seconds) can provide time to reflect on our personal sins and silently ask God for forgiveness. (The current hymnal project is planning to make this rubric standard in the confession of sins.)

Christian Worship established the practice of giving worshipers time during the Prayer of the Church to offer silent prayers. The hymnal’s standard introduction: “Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.” This can be inserted into other prayers, too, including ones that the minister speaks by himself. Other instructions can be given occasionally, like this one from the prayer for the mission of the Church: “Hear us, Lord, as we pray for a family member, an acquaintance, a neighbor, or a friend who does not believe in you, or whose faith is weak or troubled.” Different seasons, Scripture readings, or service themes could suggest other directions. The fundamental idea is that time for individual prayer can be incorporated into the prayers of the whole congregation.

Personal prayer and reflection can easily take place during Communion distribution. I often include these instructions in the worship folder at that point in the service, making use of two prayers from page 11 in the front of *Christian Worship*:

During the distribution is also a fitting time to pray. Silently speak to God in your own words and thoughts. Remember people in need of help. Think of both spiritual needs and physical needs. These prayers may also be helpful:

Before Receiving Communion — *Lord, I am not entitled to be a guest at your holy table. But you are the friend of sinners, and you will not cast me out. This bread is your body, which bore my sins upon the tree. This wine is your blood, which purifies me from all guilt. At your invitation, I come rejoicing. Receive me, my Savior. Amen.*

After Receiving Communion — *Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for nourishing me in this sacrament with your body and blood. You have given me forgiveness, life, and salvation. Let me always remain in you as a branch remains in the vine. Send me out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.*

Note also the prayers on pages 134-139 in the front section of the hymnal.

The moments at the conclusion of the service can be useful for individual worshipers to think again about what they have heard in the service. This instruction printed in the worship folder may be helpful:

Take a moment to reflect on today’s message, a Scripture reading, or a hymn during the service. Or pray silently the Prayer of the Day: [the Prayer of the Day is reprinted here]

The services of the Daily Office, especially Vespers and Compline, are designed to include moments for silent reflection. *Christian Worship* introduced this after the singing of the psalm. Has it caught on in the last two decades? Maybe not! It still feels strange to many. People are thinking during the silence, but they’re probably often thinking thoughts like these: “What am I supposed to be thinking about now? What exactly is ‘silence for meditation’ supposed to mean? How long is this silence? Haven’t we been silent long enough?”

Some simple instruction can help this be edifying and not so awkward. Before the service begins, worshipers can be “forewarned” about the times of silence that are coming. Some things to think about during the silence can be suggested, either in verbal instructions or printed in the worship folder. Some possibilities (these are general; they could be customized for the particular psalm you’re singing):

After the psalm, we will spend a few moments in silence. Some suggestions:

Reread the words of the psalm and think about what they’re saying.

Ask God to give you the blessings the psalm talks about.

Pray for someone who is on your mind.

Ask God for help with a stressful situation.

THE WORSHIPING BODY AND WORSHIPING INDIVIDUALS

THINKING & TALKING

Now it’s your turn. Take a few minutes to discuss this section with those seated near you. Here are some questions to get you started, but don’t feel bound to these.

- Share an experience in which you tried to balance needs of the larger group with the needs of individuals in worship.

 - Was there anything in this section you hadn't thought about before—or hadn't thought about in this way? If so, what?

 - Name something in this section that you disagree with and briefly explain why.

 - Name something in this section that you find useful and would like to remember.
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CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

Every kids' show knows it. *Scooby-Doo* did when I was a kid, and *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* did when my kids were toddlers and preschoolers. Watch your kids' show of choice and you'll see it:

- The basic structure of almost every episode is the same.
- The details within that structure change from episode to episode.
- A few times each year there's a special episode with a different structure.

What these shows are doing, in their own ways, is striving for a balance between continuity and variety, between keeping things the same and changing things up. They know their viewers want to feel at home in each episode. They want to know what's coming. Yet they also desire something new from time to time.

We experience a similar tension as we plan worship. We know that continuity from week to week is appreciated. Yet variety is the spice of life, not to mention something that most worshipers desire and expect.

What makes things difficult—not only in regard to this pair of concepts, but for many others, too—is the unavoidable reality that different people prefer different things. Some worshipers wouldn't mind if there were almost no change from week to week. Others would like something fresh every Sunday. Does a happy medium exist? Not to the precise specifications of every person. Nevertheless, we can try to harness the benefits of both continuity and variety while being alert to potential problems.

THE VALUE OF CONTINUITY

Continuity in worship helps ensure that we get important things done when we assemble. The patterns that we follow or create help us remember key things to do. This is really a purpose of the countless rituals that fill our lives. We establish daily, weekly, and monthly patterns. Why? Because certain things need to be attended to every day, week, or month. So we set up recurring patterns to make sure we remember to brush our teeth, take our medicine, pay our bills, or pick up our kids from practice. In a similar way, the continuity that rituals provide for our worship ensures that we remember key things related to our God and our relationship with him. Examples include hearing his Word, receiving his forgiveness, praying to him, recalling what Jesus has done, and celebrating his Supper.

Repetition can embed spiritually salutary truths in Christian's minds. Those who minister to Christians with Alzheimer's have likely seen this. I recall Herb, an elderly man whose Alzheimer's worsened during the year I served as a vicar. When I'd visit, Herb would not know me by name or face, but he knew I was from his church. And when I spoke the words of the confession of sins, the absolution, the Creed, the Communion liturgy, and the benediction, Herb could say them along with me, almost word-for-word. I don't think he ever set out to memorize these words, but by years of repetition they'd sunk in, and he had contact with these life-sustaining truths even when his prevented him from remembering many other things.

Continuity has advantages also for those who do not read or who don't read well. Young children, for instance, have been termed "pre-literate"; they'll read someday, but they can't yet. As you listen for their voices during a church service, you'll probably hear them most during the parts of the service that repeat from week to week: the Lord's Prayer, the "Amen" responses, the recurring canticles. We may have in our worshiping assemblies also people who don't feel comfortable reading, such as a man in my church who experienced a traumatic brain injury years ago. There may also be people whose first language is a language other than the one you're using in worship. For all these groups, continuity can enhance engagement and participation.

CAUTIONS ABOUT CONTINUITY

It's important to note that the patterns themselves are not the main thing; it's their content. Routinely going to the gym doesn't help unless you exercise when you get there. So also merely having patterns in worship does not help us; it's what we receive and do that matters. Who can forget the LORD's scathing indictment of Israel's worship? "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me" (Amos 5:21). And the LORD is the one who established those religious festivals! Jesus' warning comes to mind as well: "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7,8). Recurring patterns are helpful in worship, but only as helpful as what happens when the patterns recur.

These warnings highlight a potential dangerous downside to continuity. While repeating patterns and words can foster familiarity and sink truths into our minds, repetition can also

create an environment that encourages thoughtless words. We can go through the motions without engaging our minds and hearts.

Continuity can also morph into an unhealthy rut. Even though repeating elements of worship intends to reinforce spiritually valuable truths, it can have the opposite effect. If not balanced with some variety, key parts of the counsel of God can actually get forgotten if not covered by those repeating patterns.

Because of potential dangers, continuity is best when tempered with healthy variety.

THE VALUE OF VARIETY

Variety in worship enables us to hear, think about, sing about, and pray about the many truths of Scripture. We use repeating patterns to make sure we're paying attention to the core of Word and Sacrament, but we need variety to help us proclaim the whole counsel of God.

Varying parts of the service also helps to mitigate the possible danger of falling into thoughtless repetition. If we alter the words we say and sing occasionally, our minds must focus on understanding them. This positive feature can combine forces with the previous one: variety brings more truths of the sacred Word to our attention, and it can help us pay closer attention to them when we see them.

CAUTIONS ABOUT VARIETY

Too much variety can be counterproductive. If worshipers are constantly wondering what's coming next, it's true that it can heighten their alertness—a beneficial thing. However, it can potentially distract them from the content of the service by drawing their attention too much to the process of the service.

Brain researchers teach us that a certain amount of stress is helpful. It heightens our mindfulness and kicks the brain into a new gear. Encountering something different from the norm in a church service can have that beneficial effect. But too much stress leads to distress—a feeling of overload that can actually decrease engagement. You can feel that line being crossed during those uncomfortable moments of silence in a church service when no one is quite sure what's supposed to happen next, or when people are unsure about something unfamiliar. This is a line we walk upon when trying to balance continuity and variety: changing things up to keep us alert, but not changing so much that people feel confused and tune out.

We add variety to services in order to increase participation: rather than tuning out the I've-heard-this-a-million-times-before words, something new helps captivate worshipers' attention. However, constant variety can actually hinder participation. Consider the earlier examples of pre-readers or those who are not comfortable reading. Printing a new service each week for the worship folder or the projection screen is effective only when worshipers can read with ease. This is true for most people in our highly literate culture, but we should be aware that it's not true for all.

BALANCING CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

EXAMPLE 1: THE ORDINARY AND THE PROPERS

The standard parts of the Liturgy comprise what we call the Ordinary. These recurring elements help us make time for hearing the Word, praying to the Lord, and receiving his gifts in Holy Communion. The varying Scripture readings (the lectionary) and the parts of the service that change along with them are what we call the Propers. (The Scripture readings and parts of the service labeled “of the day” are propers.)

The Ordinary-Propers system seeks to balance continuity and variety. A framework of Word and Sacrament, rooted in the experience of the broader Church, fleshed out by changing readings that present hundreds of parts of Scripture to the worshiper each year—we use this system not merely because it’s traditional, but because it helps us harness the benefits of both variety and continuity.

BALANCING CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

EXAMPLE 2: THE CHURCH YEAR

The Propers follow an annual pattern we know commonly as the Church Year. One half of the year is built around a review of the life of Jesus (the “festival half”), while the other is built around the teachings of Jesus (although sometimes loosely so, since the “non-festival” half of the year includes not only teachings but also events in the life of Christ).

This cycle is another way of tapping into the benefits of both continuity and variety. Sunday by Sunday, the events and teachings we hear are changing. Yet the change happens in a repeating way. The pattern is familiar; we see a similar combination of variety and continuity in the Old Testament’s annual cycle of festivals. Each festival highlighted a different aspect of the LORD’s work or of the covenant relationship between him and his people. The repetition of the annual cycle reinforced these vital truths and impressed them upon generation after generation. Granted, some generations disregarded this cycle or emptied it of meaning with their unbelief. Still, the annual cycle of changing festivals (similar to our Propers), combined with the day-to-day, static system of sacrifices (similar to our Ordinary) was designed to bring blessing to worshipers.

BALANCING CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

EXAMPLE 3: BUILDING A REPERTOIRE OF HYMNS

A few years ago, a conversation with some church members gave me an “aha” moment. We happened to be talking about singing in church when one of them said, “If I know a hymn, I’ll sing it. If I don’t know it, I won’t.” This should probably not have been revolutionary to my thinking, but it was to a degree. It reminded me that while I may enjoy trying out new music, not everyone does. While musical variety may be fun for some, it can be frustrating for others.

May I offer a practical suggestion in this regard—one which you may already do? When it comes to group singing in your assembly, think in terms of building a repertoire of songs and hymns that become familiar to people. A ballpark figure if you work with hymns might be 250 that you use on a regular basis. Some of these might be only once-a-year choices, while others will be sung much more frequently. Then think about expanding this repertoire occasionally. Stretch yourself and your congregation, but not too far too fast. Occasionally add a new hymn, canticle, or song to the corpus that worshipers know. But when you do, help people get acquainted with what's new. Recruit a talented soloist to sing the first couple of verses, then invite people to join in singing along. Sing that song several times over the course of a month or two. (My congregation did this recently with “Before the Throne of God Above,” an old text set to a fairly new tune. We sang it several times during Lent, and then were able to add it easily to the Good Friday service.) This tactic can help balance the freshness of variety with the comfort of continuity.

BALANCING CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

EXAMPLE 4: ROTATING ORDERS OF SERVICE SEASONALLY

The following seems to be a common configuration throughout our church body: first Sunday of the month is Common Service with Communion; second Sunday is Service of the Word; third Sunday is Service of Word and Sacrament; fourth Sunday is Service of the Word; fifth Sunday (if there is one) is Morning Praise. Even if it's not exactly like that, have you seen this pattern?

An upside to this rotation is that one order of service doesn't get stale too quickly. (Granted, maybe it does after a few years, but in this system it may take six months to repeat an order six times.) A downside, however, is that it can be hard for new members or worship guests to get familiar with one order of service. Someone who visits four weeks in a row encounters a different service setting all four times.

A suggestion: try rotating orders of service seasonally. If you have Communion every other Sunday, it could be two orders of service. Here is an example, :

- Epiphany Season (January-February): Service of Word and Sacrament alternating with Haugen Morning Praise
- Lenten Season (March-April): Common Service alternating with Service of the Word, or a Lenten gathering song followed by one of those
- Holy Week and Easter: special orders of service
- Easter Season (April-May): Divine Service II with seasonal canticle melodies, with or without Communion
- Pentecost Season, first part (June-August): Service of Word and Sacrament alternating with Haugen Morning Praise
- Pentecost Season, second part (September-November): Divine Service I, with or without Communion
- Advent: An Advent gathering song followed by the Service of Word and Sacrament or Service of the Word

Of course, each pastor would adapt this to his congregation, taking into consideration which service settings people know, which they don't yet, what musical resources are available.

Speaking of musical resources, this strategy is appreciated by musicians who are not as proficient, sticking with one or two orders of service for several months in a row can be helpful; they don't have the anxiety of having to learn or relearn a new service setting every week. The aim is to balance continuity and variety, and also to highlight the Scriptural emphases that change with each season of the Church Year.

BALANCING CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

EXAMPLE 5: A SINGLE RITE WITH MULTIPLE SETTINGS

The final example I'll share comes from the WELS Hymnal Project. After study and discussion, the following plan was proposed in regard to the main Communion services in the new hymnal. An excerpt from a May 2015 post on the Hymnal Project blog explains:

Back to the Rites Committee's proposal: We are proposing that settings of the main Communion service have the same basic progression. This means that if there were two main Communion services in the front of the new hymnal (this hasn't been decided yet, but we mention it for the sake of an example), they would both have the same parts of the service in the same order.

But wait a minute. Won't this result in a stultifying sameness?

We don't believe so. Even with a consistent order of service, we envision many opportunities for some healthy variety:

- There will be different musical settings of the canticles and other parts of the service. "Holy, Holy, Holy" would appear in all the services, but each would have its own tune and setting.
- We plan on offering different wording in each service setting for things like the Confession of Sins and the prayers throughout the service.
- Options for variety will be offered in the italicized rubrics throughout the service. As one example, under the heading for "Glory to God in the Highest" it would read, "*This Is the Feast of Victory' may be sung during the Easter season.*"
- We are exploring the possibility of a new preaching service, in the same vein as the Service of the Word. A service like this would offer an alternative order for congregations who would find it helpful.
- We should also note that we don't mean to say that it's wrong to move parts of the service around occasionally. Nor do we intend to say that there's only one "authorized" order for the parts of the service. Worship planners will still have the discretion to do that as they deem it beneficial for their flocks and their guests.

All in all, we believe that one basic framework for the main service will be beneficial. It will offer a solid skeleton that can be fleshed out in beautiful and different ways.

The aim of this plan is not to restrict worship planners from employing variety that will be beneficial to their congregations. Nor is the purpose to imply in any way that there is only one right way or right order in which to worship. Rather, the purpose is to set up a standard or default order of service that worship planners can use as a foundation. To this consistent order they can add helpful variety. The hope is also to bring a degree of unity (but not lock-step uniformity) to the worship of those in our church body.

CONTINUITY AND VARIETY

THINKING & TALKING

Take a few minutes to discuss this section with those seated near you. Here are some questions to get you started, but don't feel bound to these.

- In what ways the tension between continuity and variety surfaced in the worship life of the congregation(s) you have served?

- If you don't use a liturgical format for your worship, in what ways do you balance variety with familiarity?

- Name something in this section that you disagree with and briefly explain why.

- Name something in this section that you find useful and would like to remember.

CONTINUE USING THE FRAMEWORK

Striving for balance in worship—there are many more possibilities we could profitably explore. A few, among many others, to which we could apply the framework we have been discussing:

- Nurture and outreach
- Holding onto our heritage and speaking to contemporary culture
- Worshiping adults and worshiping kids
- What's old and what's new

May what we've discussed today encourage us to remember two things simultaneously, whatever those two related concepts may be. Out of love for our Lord, his people, his message, and those yet to hear the gospel, may we strive for balance in worship.