

# WORK TAKING PLACE ON THE NEXT WELS HYMNAL

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*The following update was shared at two conferences in the spring of 2015:*

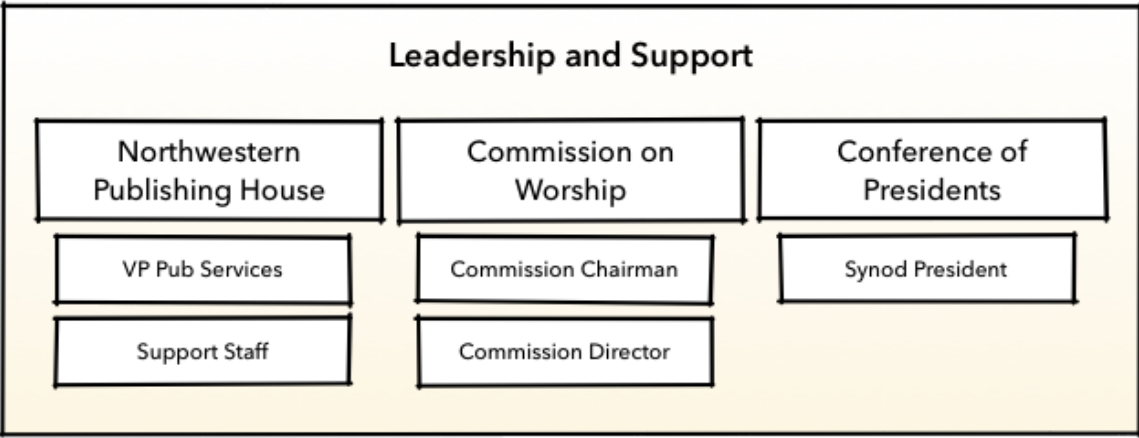
*The Central Pastors' conference (Western WI District)  
April 13, 2015; Zion Lutheran, Columbus, WI*

*The Southwestern & Mississippi River Valley Joint Conference (Western WI District)  
April 14, 15, 2015; St. Mark Lutheran, Eau Claire WI*

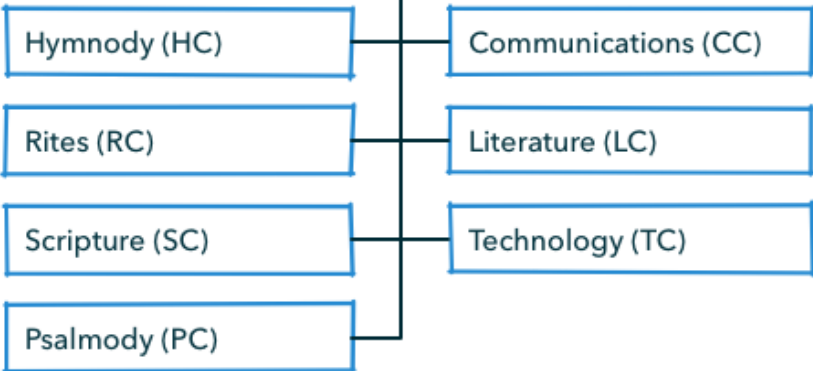
Previous essays or updates such as this bore the title, "The Shaping of the Next WELS Hymnal." That was a phrase that was borrowed from Kurt Eggert's essays in the years leading up to the release of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. (If you really wanted to knock yourself out and do some thorough advance reading, you could access one of those earlier, Fall of 2013, "shaping of the next hymnal" presentations [here](#).)

Now that we are officially 28 months into the project, we are just beginning to emerge from the shaping efforts and are starting to work on actual content. There certainly isn't a clear break between laying the groundwork which will shape the next hymnal and moving on to the actual work, but it can be said that the content of this update is much more defined than it was when several "shaping" presentations were given over the past 18 months.

We are hoping that, during calendar year 2014, we didn't wear anyone out with the four surveys that went out. We are also hoping that at this point we don't need to start from scratch in informing people about the project. The project website ([www.welshymnal.com](http://www.welshymnal.com)), the surveys that have been taken, and several information releases should have been sufficient to give most if not all of you a basic sketch of what's going on. (If you haven't already done so, please be encouraged to register your email address at our website so you can receive notifications of site updates and new blog articles.) Additionally, in terms of this update, I will include a graphic image of the administrative structure under which we are operating (next page). Between this information and the updates that appear below regarding where the individual subcommittees are at with their work, I look forward to making you well-informed and to receiving as much feedback from you as time will allow.



**Project Director**



In the above administrative structure, the names of subcommittee chairmen will be filled in as the subcommittee's current work is described (below). The other Executive Committee (XC) positions are as follows: Project Chairman Jon Zabell; Project Secretary Dan Sims; At-large members Mike Marquardt and James Tiefel; C/W Director Bryan Gerlach; Project Director Michael Schultz. A total of approximately 60 individuals (pastors, teachers, lay men and lay women) make up the official membership of the hymnal project.

It was Rev. Paul Prange who first noted that 1524 would be the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what can be called the first Lutheran hymnal, the *Achtliederbuch*. Our timeline is not rigidly set on releasing the next hymnal in 2024, so we are currently telling people that we are shooting for the early 2020s.

What follows is my customary way of trying to make sure that I don't leave any major items out of the presentation – a running description of the work of the seven subcommittees. At this point in the project a small mountain of data has accumulated. It will likely turn into a small mountain range of data by the time we're finished, but I am grateful for the volunteer efforts of all those involved in the project. They have already been doing a ton of work. My position with the hymnal project is the only position that is compensated. I am a paid employee of NPH. I am called by the Conference of Presidents. I work closely with the Commission on Worship, on which I am an advisory member.

## SCRIPTURE COMMITTEE (SC)

*Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, chairman*

We asked the SC to be the first out of the gates in getting at the work, due to the fact that there are a number of other facets of the project which will depend on the lectionary. With the first survey of active pastors indicating that approximately 95% of congregations make use of the three year lectionary in *Christian Worship* (CW) and/or *Christian Worship: Supplement* (CWS), we realize that both the lectionary itself and its related resources are high priority items in our project.

We have also asked the SC to serve as the hymnal project's translation committee. In that regard, the Scripture Committee drafted a translation rubric that was approved at the first meeting of the XC in September of 2013. Their rubric followed the eclectic choice method which was approved at the 2013 synod convention. The primary working translation of the project is NIV2011, with NIV1984 serving as the backup choice where there are weaknesses or deficiencies that require changes. Since the time that resolution was approved, it has been established that NIV1984 won't be available as a backup choice, so the committee will be bringing an updated recommendation for a backup translation.

The kind of work that flows from this rubric can be illustrated by the research of both the SC and the PC (Psalmody Committee.) The SC reviewed all scripture references or strong scriptural allusions in the CW line of products (not including psalms). Of just under 200 instances, it

identified four instances where it recommended replacing NIV2011 with NIV1984. Similarly, the PC has compared both of the NIV translations of all CW/NSS/CWOS/CWS psalms, marking those places where changes may be necessary.

Something that has not been determined is how much of the scriptures will actually be published in connection with the hymnal project. If a complete Psalter is published (see below), then all the psalms would be in play. The actual scripture verses of the lectionary choices would only be published if they are made available in an electronic service builder of some sort (see below) or as NPH continues with printing scripture lessons on bulletin covers (something on which congregations are obviously free to make translation decisions at the local level). One Lutheran version of a service builder product (that of CPH) includes the entire scripture version within the electronic product. Several translation-related items such as these are bridges we have not yet crossed.

The main work of the SC is the update of the three-year lectionary. Steady and intensive work will result in a first draft of this update being ready by September 2015. It will feature three lessons per Sunday or festival. While the CWS supplemental lectionary sought to incorporate more OT narratives, the new lectionary will seek to strike a good balance between prophecy and narrative in the OT lections. The preferences of the committee and the indication gained from survey results have been one and the same with regard to the second lesson. *Lectio continua* readings will not appear in the updated lectionary but will be replaced by individual lections chosen on the basis of a single, integrated theme between all three lessons.

A church year calendar proposed by the SC has also been approved by the XC. In several ways this calendar more closely corresponds with calendar designations of the broader church. Numbered propers based on actual calendar dates are used to proceed through the season after Pentecost. While Last Judgment and Saints Triumphant will not appear as such, the eschatological themes of those Sundays will certainly remain in the lections of the final few Sundays of the season after Pentecost. Reaching those final Sundays and those eschatological themes each year is accomplished by dropping early rather than final Sundays after Pentecost, something that is readily accomplished in the numbered propers system.

In upcoming years the SC will be working to produce an update of *Planning Christian Worship* (PCW). Feedback and survey information inform us that this is one of the most frequently used CW products. The SC is planning to have this be an expanded treatment of the lessons and other propers of the day, short of specific homiletical commentary but more substantial than the existing PCW.

## TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE (TC)

*Rev. Caleb Bassett, chairman*

It is with the understanding that technology will likely have noticeable differences six to eight years from now that the TC is devoting the early years of the project more to research than

development. Most often, that translates into a statement along these lines: The TC is working to identify needed functionality that will facilitate a very efficient use of hymnal resources in the future.

It should be noted that both the TC and the XC clearly envision releasing both a hard copy hymnal and a comprehensive suite of digital products and materials. In the future as we get closer to the time when we will actually be introducing the materials, we will be demonstrating how the hard copy book and the digital resources are set up to work in close harmony with one another.

As a result of meetings, discussions, broad and narrow surveys, research and consultations, the TC has identified three main products that it will be seeking to produce: 1) a worship planning application which, among a number of other things, includes the ability to audition hymn tunes and to produce worship folders which can include the entire service; 2) a personal digital hymnal application; 3) a digital framework for musicians.

One of the desirable features of the worship planning application is that it be able to automate the online reporting process for reprinting copyrighted materials. We are taking steps to include this as part of the program.

Something for which we want to prepare people/congregations is the advent of an annual subscription-based model for worship applications and resources. This approach is becoming more and more common not only for large vendor items such as Microsoft Office products but also for the hymnal and worship applications of more and more denominations. We feel it's incumbent upon us to release a product which can actually take the hassle out of both short- and long-range worship planning by making available everything in our church body's worship line, and which includes tech support, product maintenance and possibly additional materials in the future. Providing such a product will not be inexpensive for NPH. NPH will likely need to make some adjustments to be able to provide resources in this way. All of these things are in the works as the TC goes about its work.

## PSALMODY COMMITTEE (PC)

Rev. Paul Prange, chairman

The first work of the PC was to start reviewing all of the existing psalms in CW/NSS/CWOS/CWS. That work is pretty much complete. As mentioned above, this review has included looking at all the differences between NIV2011 and NIV1984. Beyond that, the thinking of the Psalmody Committee has been shaped to the point that the members have come to a general consensus as far as their approach is concerned. Survey results clearly showed us that the CW type of psalmody (responsorial) has become a bit of a fixture as far as congregations that are regularly singing the psalms. The PC's consensus is to build on that fact by retaining the musically stronger refrains and tones and by "freshening up" (tweaking or replacing) refrains and tones that have perhaps become tired or haven't gained much traction.

A similar number of pages for psalmody is envisioned in the next pew edition. Most of what is found on those pages will be responsorial psalmody.

A handful of pages in the pew edition, however, will likely include other types of psalmody. Committee members who are familiar with the resources sense that there has been something of an explosion of musical compositions treating the psalms – either individual pieces or entire psalters. For that reason, the committee very much desires to expose congregations to more styles of psalmody. These would include metrical psalmody, verse and refrain psalmody, antiphonal reading, Taize, and world music, to name a few. Having a handful of examples of different types of psalmody in the pew edition is intended to let people know that we do plan to have an additional resource for psalmody beyond what appears in the pew edition.

Perhaps the easiest way to explain the Psalter that the PC will be working on is to provide an example. Martin Tel's [Psalms for All Seasons](#) treats each of the 150 psalms by providing the full text of each psalm along with several, or in some cases close to a dozen different musical settings of each psalm. The PC will be working on a less extensive but similar Psalter, one which is slated to include treatments of all 150 psalms (rather than only those appointed for lectionary use), and at least one or two additional musical settings beyond what is in the pew edition.

From the beginning of the project, the PC has been given the nod to handle the Verse of the Day (VotD). Anecdotal evidence was confirmed by survey results which indicated that few congregations regularly sing the actual Verse of the Day. In many cases the minister speaks the actual VotD, which is then followed by the congregation singing the General Verse. The NPH set of VotDs (copy masters that can be reproduced for the choir or other cantors) was a significant project but has come to be a resource that doesn't see a great deal of use. For several reasons, the PC is holding off on going forward with producing a whole new set of VotDs. We'll want to have a set lectionary before choosing the actual scripture verses for the VotD. Also, there may be other options, such as seasonal VotDs (think of maybe 6-10 settings/verses similar to the two General Verses used in CW/CWS resources). Stay tuned.

## HYMNODY COMMITTEE (HC)

*Rev. Aaron Christie, chairman*

Toward the beginning of the hymnal project, XC members were invited to start reviewing all 711 hymns in CW and CWS (psalms and rites as well). Once the HC was populated, those 12 committee members were given the same task. TC chairman Caleb Bassett did a wonderful job of creating an online database where this work can be done collaboratively. It's called the tracker, and it's been extremely useful in organizing all the reviews that are being done. New psalm settings and new hymns will eventually make their way into the tracker system.

I mention the tracker system because we already have hundreds of pages of reviews of the CW/CWS hymns. As those reviews were being done on an individual basis, the HC was also framing a number of guiding principles for XC approval. Those philosophy statements cover areas such as language usage, choice of musical setting, key/transposition/range, number of

stanzas, descants, amens, and so forth. By June 2015, all hymn reviews will be done and the HC will be poised to go through its first round of designating which hymns will not appear in the next pew edition. With a goal of including 650 hymns, it is common for hymnal projects to replace approximately one third of the hymns in a previous hymnal. With 711 hymns in CW/CWS, this will mean designating approximately 225 as not to be included in the next book and identifying about that many new hymns (not necessarily new but new to us if not included in previous hymnals) for inclusion. We are currently standing at the threshold of plowing through hymnals and hymn collections to identify “new” hymns for consideration. We anticipate putting several thousand hymns in the hopper in order to ultimately arrive at a couple hundred to include in the next hymnal.

To help with this process, we do have a number of different data sources, such as hymn usage statistics from our own hymnals and from others, survey results concerning favorite or least favorite hymns (coming in 2015), as well as the detailed reviews of all the hymns. With all those reviews complete, HC members are able to open up each hymn and go through all the review comments that have been posted for that hymn.

On the flip side of the “let them go” coin, it isn’t difficult to identify a core group of hymns that will undoubtedly appear in the next pew edition. 180 such hymns were initially identified, based on their common appearance in six different Lutheran hymnals. A corpus of 90 hymns has been identified for a new WELS hymnology curriculum that is due to be released around 2017 (not a part of this project but obviously related). So in the past two months the HC has begun the daunting task of editing the texts and music of all the “slam dunk” hymns which are already able to be processed. This work will be non-stop for the next several years. The starting point for both text and music editing is what appears in CW and CWS.

Two of the most common requests we have received about the music of the hymns is that they be lowered in pitch and made easier for those with average or less than average keyboard skills. Lowering the pitch has been an interesting discussion point, something akin to the chant of the limbo game (“How low can you go?”). Lowering the pitch was done somewhat extensively in CW, and we still get requests to do more lowering.

Other rather common requests are for more four-part, block- chord harmonizations so that people can sing in parts, and that we include a few scripture references on each of the hymn pages, something *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) included but which CW/CWS did not.

## RITES COMMITTEE (RC)

*Rev. Jon Micheel, chairman*

The work of the RC is another case where it is important for us to realize the ways in which the members of our church body make use of the worship resources that we publish. Some have used the old phrase “the liturgical period of the judges” to describe what was happening in Sunday worship during the 1970s, a time when it may have seemed that “everyone did as he

saw fit.” To various degrees people had tired of the repetition of TLH pp. 5/15 and it seemed that many were creating their own orders of service. Is the same true today?

It’s never easy to say with precision and accuracy just how many congregations closely follow the orders of service as they are printed in CW/CWS. It likely seems that the time has not only passed but has actually long since passed when worshipers could go to any WELS church in the country and worship according to an order of service virtually identical to the one they made use of at their home congregation. At the same time, the surveys that were taken in 2014 gave a clear indication that a strong majority of congregations make use of the orders of service that are printed in CW. This has been a reminder to the RC (certainly not the only reminder) that we must, with the Lord’s kind strengthening, expend every possible effort toward getting the rite right.

To that end, the RC has been busy with a great deal of research and discussion, as its members have set about coming up with a template for the main order of Holy Communion. Their unofficial guiding principle has been, “Which rite will best serve the members of our church body from 2020 through 2050?” Accordingly, they have been slowly, methodically, and painstakingly crafting the skeleton of this main communion service. It is one that is being fashioned according to the historic rite familiar to all of you. The flow of the elements of this service has been established in draft form and the committee has moved on to working on the actual texts of the various elements. When the texts have been established, the final matter of a musical setting will be on the table.

At this stage in the game, there are many things which fall into the category of TBD (to be determined). How many rites will be printed in the front part of the hymnal? Will there be a version of “The Common Service” in the hard copy hymnal, in digital resources, or in both? Will there be multiple musical settings of the canticles (existing or newly written) for the same texts?

At this point the questions would only continue if this update were to take up the matters of the future status of The Service of the Word, Morning Praise, Evening Prayer, and so on. These (and all of the occasional services) have not yet come to the RC table, but they soon will. The RC is also tasked with handling the Prayers of the Day (PotD). What we have heard and found is that the PotDs aren’t always a solid match to or don’t have an easily discernible connection with the theme of the three lessons. This will be taken into consideration when work is begun on the PotDs.

## LITERATURE COMMITTEE (LC)

*Rev. John Koelpin, chairman*

The first set of guidelines for the Literature Committee established the fact that we would be in need of updates for the types of resources which are currently available in *Christian Worship: Manual* (CW:M) and *Christian Worship: Handbook* (CW:H). As compared to the SC, the LC didn’t



have a pressing need to get going right away since most of what it is treating is based on material which is either not yet approved or doesn't yet exist. Now, of course, that has changed, and the LC is fully engaged with its tasks.

Producing/writing/editing books is no small task. The LC has involved itself with reviewing the ancillary materials (handbooks, hymnal companions, manuals, etc.) of other denominations' hymnals, both past and present. On the CW:M side of things, rather than producing a book which, for the most part, ends up only on the shelves of the pastor's library or the church library, the RC has identified four target audiences which it feels would greatly benefit from CW:M types of materials. Those four audiences are: 1) those who attend (lay members at worship); 2) those who assist (worship committees, elders, acolytes, altar guilds, ushers, etc.); 3) those who adorn (choirs, choir directors, ministers of music, organists, accompanists, etc.); and 4) those who administer (the presiding minister). These are the four volumes which the LC desires to publish as hard copy books (likely also available in digital media). Whichever media choices are made, it is hoped that congregations will be able to provide or will encourage members to secure for themselves the different volumes which address their various activities or areas of service.

On the CW:H side of things, the committee has now begun to work on prototypes of updated treatments of hymn/author/composer information. While a hard copy handbook is not envisioned at this point, we are not at the point of saying what kind of media delivery system will be used for this type of resource. As mentioned above, we don't have a firm grasp on what the best tech options will be X number of years from now. It is for that reason that we are encouraging the LC (and to a great degree all of the other committees as well) to concentrate on "getting the content kicked out"; down the road we'll worry about the type of media delivery that will be used.

What we do know about the technology angle is that we'll have much greater ability than did the last hymnal project as far as search and study functions and availability of resources. For example, the extensive scripture index of hymns found on the back pages of CW:H is a resource which, once updated, will be able to be accessed/cross-referenced/searched in a number of different ways in a digital product. "Ditto" for suggested hymns. And while digital products can do marvelous things, we may be in a very good position to be able to produce a separate hard copy volume which includes every conceivable index or listing imaginable (well, you know what I mean) when it comes to things like suggested hymns, lectionary index, hymn topic index, psalm topic index, Hymn of the Day (HotD) index, hymnal concordance, etc., etc. Beyond the updating of CW:M and CW:H material, the LC has an interest in a couple other areas in terms of studies/materials that might be offered. These would include items such as Bible Class studies on the HotDs, and studies or running explanations of each of the main rites in the pew edition (lay-level; different than what is covered in the hard copy manuals mentioned above). Also being discussed is a theological commentary (lay-level) on the content of the hymns.

Finally, the LC, together with the WLS homiletics department, has been exploring the possibility of homiletical studies based on the new lectionary. In that it is based on the new hymnal's lectionary, this is an item that would lean toward the hymnal project. In that it is also, philosophically, an item that is of interest to WLS, the Commission on Worship ("Preach the Word"), and NPH (past publisher of "the green books"), there are facets of such an undertaking that would seem to make it lean away from the hymnal project to other individuals or committees. Currently, where this undertaking goes would be one more item where we would have to say, "Stay tuned."

## COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE (CC)

*Rev. Jonathan Bauer, chairman*

For having populated its committee less than two years ago, the CC has already put in a great deal of effort and has accumulated a great deal of data in the process. What follows is a look at what they've already done and what they have in the works.

Initially conceived as the communications channel for the project (project to constituency), it would be expected that we would be communicating with the WELS constituency through means and media such as WELS Communication Services ([www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net); Together), Forward in Christ, NPH, the Commission on Worship (Preach the Word and Worship the Lord newsletters), a project website and blog ([www.welshymnal.com](http://www.welshymnal.com)), conference and convention presentations, and the like. The CC has made sure, however, to turn the communications component of our project into a two-way street (constituency to project).

The first place where this began to take place was through the project website. Since the summer of 2013 when the site launched, we have received just over a thousand website comments and submissions. All of these have been processed in a way that identifies and categorizes the main point(s) of each comment. Comments where specific issues are raised are converted into "issues" in the tracker, and each issue is earmarked for and assigned to an individual subcommittee. Every comment and submission is archived on the private side of the website.

Conferences such as this one are also events at which the project director takes notes and forwards to the CC a transcript of those notes. All conference comments are processed as outlined in the immediately preceding paragraph.

Very early in the work process, the CC chairman was interested in having congregations do a week by week review of the propers and other elements (HotD, PotD; order of service) of the weekly worship service. This "three year review" was set up to cover Years A, B, and C of the lectionary. Over a hundred congregations have filled out a form each week, resulting in a wealth of information and data, all of which is processed and collated on a weekly basis. Cumulative results of all of Year A can be viewed by downloading [this report](#). We certainly

want to thank all the participating congregations/individuals who have taken the time to do this weekly reporting.

As mentioned early in this update, 2014 was the year during which we sent out four surveys focused on four groups: Survey 1 for all active pastors; Survey 2 for all active LES teachers and Sunday School teachers; Survey 3 for all musicians, choir members, choir directors; and Survey 4 for all members. In ascending numerical order by survey number, there were 814, 987, 1003, and 4392 respondents, respectively. In addition to the detailed and graphed results of the multiple choice questions, each question where the respondent could type in an answer (totaling thousands of individual responses) was processed, codified and ultimately summarized. Further, a prose synopsis of these results will be published in FIC and BoRaM as "A Snapshot of WELS Worship."

In addition to continuing these types of efforts, what now lies before the CC is the matter of field testing, slated for most of calendar year 2017. Both the CC and the TC are in contact with the other five "content-producing" committees to identify and prepare those sample materials which will be set before members of our church body for their reaction and feedback. Finally, during the closing years of the hymnal project timeline, the CC has charted a course for providing educational materials about the worship resources which will be made available to the congregations of our synod.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

As project director, my days and nights include: virtual Google hangouts (video conferencing with subcommittees); organizing, reorganizing and assigning work; adjusting the timeline; collecting and reviewing hymnals; making presentations; prepping Finale scores; text and music editing; hymn research and review; writing articles and reports; budget oversight; serving as liaison to NPH; answering emails and commenting in discussion threads; helping to chart the course for subcommittees; and other miscellaneous items. I occasionally do some work on writing or translating a hymn, or on composing a hymn or choral setting.

But through this update runs the thread of what we are really all about (from the home page of the project website): Christ's church on earth has always been blessed by people who think not only of themselves, but of those who worshiped before them, those who worship with them, and those who will worship after them. When I hear that sentence, I am not thinking about how I might be a blessing to those who ultimately use the resources produced by this hymnal project (though the Lord, if he so chooses, may bring that about). I am thinking of people from the 1993 project, such as Rev. Kurt Eggert who poured his soul into *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* during the closing years of his life. I am thinking of people from the 1941 project, such as Bernard Schumacher who almost single-handedly composed practically all of the harmonizations of the hymns in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. What a blessing their work has been to me, as, in those two volumes, I can identify almost all of the hymns which are not only my favorites but which have brought the gospel to my forgiveness-hungry heart.

We have a great deal of work to go, but things are starting to come together in a way in which we are beginning to be able to see where it's all going. Your interest, involvement, comments and discussion will help us on our way. Thank you for working through all of this. I look forward to being with you and discussing these matters with you.

Respectfully submitted,  
Michael D. Schultz, director  
WELS Hymnal Project