Background document: Hymnody

Hymnody

Foundational principles

The hymnody editorial process has been guided by the confessional principle that the church is "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel" (Augsburg Confession, article VII). *The Use of the Means of Grace* (1997) provided additional and more specific guidance based on this confessional principle. *Principles for Worship* (2002) was also a helpful resource for this work. The following themes from these works are especially important for hymnody:

- In music for worship, the people's song is central and the voice is the primary instrument. This principle has many implications for a body of hymnody, including the identification of song that is accessible to singing congregations, with an emphasis on melody as well as singable harmony and rhythm.
- Two primary tasks of hymnody are to proclaim the word of God--law and gospel, justice and mercy--and to support the celebration of the sacraments. In its singing, the church both praises God and bears witness to the faith. This principle reflects an important Lutheran accent that calls for a significant body of hymnody to carry it out.
- Hymnody embraces the whole church across the centuries and throughout the world. Thus it is richly representative of various forms of musical expression and of cultural diversity. As each generation adds its voice to the voice of the church through the ages, the inclusion, assimilation, and balancing of this variety becomes more delicate and demanding.
- Hymnody both honors memory and forms memory, both nurtures faith and helps faith to grow. In every generation a body of hymnody will strike a balance between words and music that sustain communal memory and those that reflect the continuing development of language and song.
- Hymnody reflects and serves the unity of the church. As church bodies have entered into closer relationships over the past generation and as people's church affiliations have become more fluid, it becomes increasingly important to identify a significant core of hymnody that can be shared, with common texts and music wherever possible, across the churches.
- A body of hymnody will reflect pastoral dimensions in the selection of materials.
 The proposal acknowledges that some hymns and songs are included for pastoral reasons.

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Applications and goals: general

On the basis of these principles, the editorial teams identified applications and goals for the body of common hymnody. Among the general applications and goals are these. The body of hymnody will:

- Exhibit balance within the whole corpus of hymnody and, to the extent possible, within seasonal and topical categories of hymns.
 - o Include hymns from a variety of different time periods and geographic points of origin.
 - o Include text and music pairings that strike an appropriate balance between past usage and ecumenical commonality.
 - o Contain both simple and complex elements.
 - o Acknowledge a range among congregations related to worship practices, demographics, pieties, and musical abilities.
- Include Lutheran, ecumenical, and new hymns:
 - <u>Lutheran</u> includes hymns that reflect Lutheran identity and roots, hymns that are in current Lutheran usage, hymns that uphold particular emphases of Lutheran theology and witness, and Lutheran poets and composers;
 - o <u>ecumenical</u> includes, but is not limited to, those hymns currently having wide ecumenical usage
 - o <u>new</u> includes hymns not previously included in predecessor hymnals or supplements and may include both old and new hymns and commissions.
- Support the church year, including the three-year cycle of readings in the Revised Common Lectionary, as well as themes of the Christian life in community and in the world.
- Consist of words and music that foster the singing of the assembly gathered around word and sacrament.
- Have practical limits related to size and copyright issues.

Applications and goals: texts

In addition to these general applications and goals, the following refer particularly to the words of the hymns. The texts of the hymns will:

- Be seen as a means of proclaiming the faith of the church and, therefore, exhibit theological soundness.
- Promote honesty regarding the wide range of life experiences (e.g., lament, death, chronic illness).
- Use image and metaphor effectively, adding hymn texts with language and imagery that balance the language and imagery in the body of existing hymnody, with the goal of an inclusive collection of hymns rather than a collection of inclusive hymns.
- Across the whole collection of hymn texts, give attention to language of worship that reflects God's all-embracing love for creation, taking particular care in the use of metaphors related to color, ability, human power, the range of human experience, and the creation, and minimizing the unnecessary use of gender-specific terms.
- Include some original languages in both newer world song and possibly, for more well-known hymns, in the European core.
- Be suitable for use primarily by worshiping assemblies.

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- Exhibit clarity, balance of thought, and cohesiveness.
- Be succinct in expression and have a reasonable overall length.
- Offer multiple possibilities for use throughout the year rather than having a narrow range of usefulness.

Applications and goals: music

The following applications and goals refer particularly to the music of the hymns. The music of the hymns will:

- Support the voice of the assembly as the primary musical instrument.
- Acknowledge the occasional tension between versions of music that are faithful/original/accurate and versions in current usage.
- For hymns intended to be sung in harmony, use standard harmonizations of hymns wherever possible to support part-singing.
- Be accessible to a variety of musical styles and instrumentations and levels of difficulty, which will be supported in accompaniment editions.
- Combine practical usefulness with excellence of musical craft suitable to the style of the music.
- Have a level of musical difficulty that is matched to the performance abilities of the majority of people who constitute the worshiping assemblies of our churches (for example, in regard to range, key, pitch level, and rhythmic complexity).

The work of the Renewing Worship project related to hymnody has been complex and challenging, yet ultimately promising for the renewal of the church's song. The hymnody for the new book of worship is offered with the ongoing hope that these resources of word and song will serve the church in new and creative ways, while honoring and continuing our Lutheran heritage.