

Summary of the Liturgical Review Process *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

Background

The contents of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, a new primary worship resource, were compiled and developed as part of the five-year Renewing Worship project. Most of the texts, hymns, songs, and other liturgical material that did not previously exist in worship resources of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America appeared in the Renewing Worship series of provisional resources. The content of these provisional resources received at least two levels of review, pre-publication and post-publication. Pre-publication review involved responding to and incorporating insights from development panels associated with each volume's content area.¹ Prior to publication, the content of each provisional volume was also reviewed by the Renewing Worship Resource Proposal Group, the group that provided oversight for various aspects of the Renewing Worship project.² Churchwide testing of provisional materials, together with surveys and focus groups facilitated by the Department for Research and Evaluation, were integral to post-publication review. Post-publication review also involved compiling many submitted comments and completed response forms (included with each publication), all of which informed deliberations concerning the content proposal for a new primary worship resource.

Role of the Resource Proposal Group

While becoming familiar with every aspect of the Renewing Worship project and overseeing much of the work, the Resource Proposal Group was responsible for development of proposed content for a new primary worship resource. The Resource Proposal Group was also involved in responding to the comments, critiques, and insights gathered in and through the final liturgical review.

Role of Staff

Members of the Project Management Staff³ served as members of the Resource Proposal Group and on each of the editorial (drafting) teams and consultative groups associated with Renewing Worship. Facilitation of the liturgical review process is the responsibility of the Executive for Worship and Liturgical Resources. It is important to

¹ Development panels provided input for and response to the work of the editorial teams that drafted Renewing Worship provisional resources. These development panels of 18 to 35 members included teaching theologians, bishops, pastors, musicians, and other worship leaders.

² Members of the Resource Proposal Group included Susan Briehl, Spokane, WA; Lorraine Brugh, Valparaiso, IN; Michael Burk, Chicago, IL; Cheryl Dieter, Chicago, IL; Joseph Donnell II, Gettysburg, PA; Jonathan Eilert, Brecksville, OH; Gordon Lathrop, Philadelphia, PA; Rafael Malpica-Padilla (through 12/02), Chicago, IL; Robert Rimbo, Detroit, MI; Thomas Schattauer, Dubuque, IA; Martin Seltz, Minneapolis, MN; and Karen Walhof, Bloomington, MN.

³ The Project Management Staff includes the ELCA Director for Worship; the Worship and Music Publisher, Augsburg Fortress; and the Renewing Worship Coordinator.

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note that in the ELCA policy for liturgical review, the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council are named as integral to the process. Both groups received regular updates at their meetings and printed reports throughout the Renewing Worship process in anticipation of the liturgical review that would be necessary for a new primary worship resource.

Liturgical Review

On April 15, 1991, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America received the “Statement of Policy and Procedures for Review of Liturgical Material Prepared by Churchwide Units,” with the understanding that the statement was for immediate implementation. This policy statement remains determinative for the liturgical review of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. The review policy provides for differing degrees of endorsement and status for liturgical materials based on questions of theological integrity and liturgical usefulness. A primary worship resource intended for use by congregations throughout this church, such as *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, is considered to be “encouraged material” and is endorsed as “COMMENDED” upon successful completion of extensive liturgical review. This review includes the recommendation of the appropriate unit, review by the Conference of Bishops, and approval by the Church Council. The Executive for Worship and Liturgical Resources, with the aid of worship colleagues from the churchwide organization and Augsburg Fortress, is responsible for completing the liturgical review on behalf of the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

Designated Reviewers

Designated liturgical reviewers for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* included teaching theologians, bishops, pastors, musicians, and other worship leaders. Because of the breadth of the material under consideration, a limited number of people were identified as comprehensive reviewers, with the expectation that they would become familiar with and respond to the content material in its entirety. Other designated reviewers responded to one or more of the following content areas: all liturgical texts, psalms and psalm prayers, principal rites, hymn texts and tunes, and liturgical music.

A total of 62 individuals accepted the invitation to serve as designated reviewers. Designated reviewers included six synodical bishops⁴ identified by the chair of the Conference of Bishops, three members of the Church Council, four executives of the churchwide organization, and two officers of this church. Teaching theologians who were asked to provide either comprehensive or more limited review were identified in consultation with the ELCA Director for Theological Education in the Division for Ministry. Pastors, musicians, and other worship leaders were recommended by synodical

⁴ All members of the Conference of Bishops had access to the materials and were invited to respond as they desired, but only six bishops were considered designated reviewers.

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bishops and other church executives. The deans of every ELCA seminary were invited to encourage their respective faculties to engage the material collectively. While no collective responses were received, some individual faculty members who were not among the designated reviewers provided input.

A disability audit directed by the Division for Church in Society, and the review comments provided by the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations through the Department for Ecumenical Affairs, provided additional input to this review process. In addition, representatives from each church body with which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shares a full-communion agreement were invited to review the material. Two church body representatives accepted the invitation.

In addition to the contributions from designated reviewers, final decision making incorporated the input received from throughout this church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which included comments and contributions directed to Renewing Worship (telephone, mail, and Web-based communication), conversations at Renewing Worship Day events and other presentations by churchwide worship staff, hearings at two Churchwide Assemblies (2003 and 2005), as well as plenary discussion, deliberation, and action by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.

Completing the Review

Responses were compiled. In addition to identifying and addressing specific texts or details, especially with regard to theological concerns, recurring themes or issues were identified. Strategies were developed for addressing all issues that were raised. When concerns reflected a concern or objection from only one or a very few respondents and the preponderance of other responses affirmed the proposal, the recommended strategy was most often to leave the proposed content unchanged. In some instances, a single objection of a theological nature prompted a recommendation for change. When a number of respondents voiced concern or recommended an alternative, a strategy for change was developed.

Compiled responses were provided to a consultative group that included members of the Resource Proposal Group, a member from the Conference of Bishops and a member of the Church Council. Proposed strategies, addressing theological and liturgical issues were then taken up by the consultative group which affirmed or advocated change of proposed strategies for addressing any challenges to the content.

Recommendations that grew out of that group shaped the final report to the Conference of Bishops. That report articulated areas of tension, specific concerns and recommended changes to the content material and at least two specific textual matters about which the bishops were asked to assist in the final decision making. The conference of bishops affirmed the report and recommendations.

The Church Council Program and Services Committee then received an executive summary of what had transpired since the Churchwide Assembly in Orlando, a summary of issues raised, recommended strategies for addressing them, and the body of material intended for inclusion in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* with revisions. That committee, on behalf of the Church Council, devoted their time together to reviewing materials, in light of what they had received in advance, and in conversation with the Executive for

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Worship and Liturgical Resources, the Publisher, and two former Church Council members who had been involved in matters related to Renewing Worship since its Church Council authorization in 2000.

Conclusion

The level of review prior to the content proposal for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and the breadth of conversation surrounding the material once it became public, contributed to widespread affirmation from reviewers. A limited number of areas for concern were identified and addressed. As a whole and in most of its parts, the proposed content was judged to be faithful to Scripture, consistent with the church's historic tradition, reflective of a Lutheran understanding of the use of the means of grace, and accessible to today's worshiping assembly in both language and style. The Church Council received the report on the liturgical review at its November 2005 meeting and determined that the liturgical review had been completed satisfactorily. The Church Council commended *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* to this church's congregations for use as an "enriching addition" to ELCA worship patterns.