



First Things – September, 2022

I Don't Like Change!

We are Lutherans and Lutherans don't like change. We might recognize the *necessity* of changing a lightbulb every once in a while, but change a hymnal – why??? These lines could have been written in 1915, the year when many WELS congregations were introduced – kicking and screaming, by all accounts – to the *Book of Hymns*, the WELS' first *English* language hymnal. It had 320 hymns – words only, no music. One liturgy was two pages long, the other three pages. It had, as then WELS President G. E. Bergemann an obvious minimalist, quipped, *Everything we need and nothing that we don't*.

But other hymnal changes came...in 1941 with *The Lutheran Hymnal*. This one actually had music with the hymns. And it had psalms, along with strange foreign words like *Matins, Vespers, Introit, Collect, and Gradual*. Many WELS members thought it was *too Catholic*.

Of course, the next big change that took place in the WELS was not with the hymnal, but with the Bible – specifically with translations of the Bible. Following the completion of the New International Version (NIV) New Testament in 1973 and complete Bible in 1978 (we're probably most familiar with the 1984 revision) WELS members struggled to adjust to a Bible that was not the King James Version. And yet, by the middle of the 1980's, most WELS congregations had adopted the NIV, because they could now understand so much more of what was written in the Bible.

The adoption of NIV with its more modern English contrasted greatly with the old-fashioned Elizabethan English in *The Lutheran Hymnal* which was now approaching a half century in use. And then in 1993, *Christian Worship* (the present RED hymnal) appeared on the scene. I was in Africa at the time, but from what I heard from my friends who were serving congregations, this new *change* wasn't that difficult for most people to handle.

In late 2021 the WELS introduced another new hymnal, also called *Christian Worship*, but this time with a *blue* cover. Why a new hymnal? Why change? There are a number of reasons:

1. The new blue hymnal maintains and updates forms of worship that have been used in WELS for close to a century. *The Service: Setting One* is very similar to *The Common Service* in the red hymnal and page 5 & 15 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Beloved hymns are retained.

2. The new blue hymnal allows congregations – if they choose – to use more ornate worship services with a great variety of new music. There is, for example, a companion volume to the new hymnal called *Christian Worship Psalter* which contains multiple ways that each of the 150 psalms can be sung.
3. The new blue hymnal introduces WELS congregations to new *contemporary* hymns which are not only enjoyable to sing but have *strong Scripture-based lyrics*.
4. The new blue hymnal also offers a computer program that greatly assists and shortens the time needed to prepare worship folders and/or slide presentations which many WELS congregations now use.

Two parting thoughts:

- I remember the first time I sang through *The Service of Word and Sacrament* in the red hymnal. I struggled with that new liturgical song, *O Lord, Our Lord* (page 28) and thought, *This is awful. Everyone's going to hate it.* Today, nearly thirty years later, I have to eat my words. It's one of my favorite liturgical songs to sing (although I know not everyone will agree with me).
- I happened to be at the WELS convention in 1993 when the red hymnal was introduced. And I can still remember what then President Carl Mischke quipped in his inimitable way: *I want to go on record as saying, 'I don't need a new hymnal.' I was happy with the old hymnal, and by 'old hymnal' I mean the 1915 Book of Hymns. No, I don't need a new hymnal. But my grandchildren do, and so do those who were not born and raised in the WELS.*

Change, when it takes place, may be a little challenging. But let's strive to be patient, especially patient with each other, just as our Savior is patient with us.

Board for Lay Ministry Update

Finances – The Lord has truly blessed us:

- Through the month of July, offerings and other income was \$149,609, compared to \$133,039 in 2021.
- Through the month of July, total expenses were \$146,216, compared to \$142,697 in 2021.
- Offerings in the amount of \$31,423 were also received, which will almost exactly pay for the roof repair (now complete) which came in \$1,800 under the estimate.

Mortgage – Our recent building project ARM loan matures on 11/1/22 and will require refinancing before the maturity date.

- The Board of Lay Ministry has agreed and intends to refinance the current ARM mortgage to permanent financing/traditional mortgage using a 180-month (15 year) term in lieu of a longer term to reduce interest paid over the life of the loan.

- Approximately \$64,000 of the building /mortgage fund current balance of \$126,000 will be applied to the principal balance which is approximately \$364,000 at this time.
- This will reserve \$62,000 in the building/mortgage fund for future projects and/or financial assurances.
- Although this increases our monthly payment by about two hundred dollars, the board unanimously agrees that making a large pay down coupled with a shorter loan term is most prudent.

Other News

- Planning continues for updating the church sign on the outside of the entryway and refreshing the interior of the entryway.
- The ELC restrooms will be open during the Applefest Parade. The area in front of the church and ELC will be reserved for First and ELC family parade viewing. Drinks, snacks and shade will also be provided.

CrossTalk

It does NOT look like CrossTalk, our ministry for children, will be able to start on the Sunday after Labor Day. If you are interested in helping with this later in the fall, please contact Pastor Mark.

Area WELS Update

St. John's of Nodine still remains vacant. **Pastor Wolf Parsons** of Shawano is currently holding the call. St. Matthew's of Winona installed its new pastor, **Rev. Stuart Turner**, on August 21. Other area congregations which are vacant are: 1. Rock of Ages in Rochester, 2. Our Savior's in Kasson, and 3. Good Shepherd in Holmen. St. John's in Caledonia is calling a second pastor. And the Rochester multi-site congregation – called Resurrection and Life – is calling a third pastor. Please remember all of these congregations in your prayers.

Other Area Events

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) – there's a local group of WELS members over 55 who meet at First Lutheran (the East or Wisconsin Campus) in La Crosse on a monthly basis. OWLS from across the country will be *flocking* to Stony Creek Hotel in Onalaska for their annual convention, October 11-13. Check out what will be happening online **HERE**.

WELS High School Students are invited to an area-wide youth get-together on Sunday, October 16, 6:00 – 8:30 PM, at St. Paul's in Onalaska. More information is available in the church entryway.

The **Men of His Word Conference** will take place in Rochester on Saturday, October 22. You can find more information and register **HERE**.

The [WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership](#) will take place January 16-18 in Chicago. 600 attended this conference in 2020 and more are expected this time. There is an extensive number of workshops. You can find more information and/or register [HERE](#).

This Fall

1. The **First Women** will be hosting a [Yard Sale](#) on Labor Day Saturday (September 3). Please call **Kim** at the church office (507-895-4775) for more information.
2. The **First Women** will also have a [Saturday Morning Garden Party](#) on Saturday, September 10 in the back yard of the parsonage, starting at 10:00 AM. All women are invited to attend.
3. [Monday Bible Study](#) will resume on Monday, September 12 at 9:00 AM. It's a great time not only to grow in the Word, but also to get together with other members of your First family.
4. [7th & 8th Grade Confirmation Classes](#) will begin on Wednesday, September 14 at 6:30 PM.
5. Pastor Mark will be starting a 9-week [Introduction to the Bible](#) course this fall. If you're interested in attending, give him a call (608-881-4041) to discuss your availability.
6. Christian musical artist [WendySue Fluegge](#) will perform a CONCERT at First on Thursday, October 13 at 6:00 PM. You frequently hear her music playing in the background when you enter church.
7. As was mentioned above, I'm not sure when we can begin [CrossTalk](#) again this fall. Please call Pastor Mark (608-881-4041) if you're interested in helping out some Sundays.
8. Pastor Mark is hoping to start [Sunday Morning Bible Study](#), but there are a few hiccups in scheduling due to the St. John's vacancy and a visit to see their grandkids at the beginning of October. So, most likely that will be starting up again Sunday, October 16.
9. [Women Of the Word \(WOW\)](#) will be meeting on Thursday, September 8 and Thursday, September 22 at 6:30 PM.
10. [Men's Bible Study](#) will continue their study of hot button issues in the light of God's Word on Thursday, September 22.
11. The **First Women** are planning a [Bus Trip to the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum](#) Thursday November 17 through Sunday, November 20. More information is available in the church entryway.



WendySue Fluegge

Listen to her music [HERE](#).

God Bless,

Pastor Mark