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# Evangelical Lutheran Worship: History

Renewal of worship resources has taken place periodically over the three centuries Lutherans have been on the North American continent and in the Caribbean region. During this time, renewal has been marked by a movement from a vast variety of Lutheran immigrant traditions toward a greater similarity of liturgical forms and a more common repertoire of song. The liturgy set out in 1748 by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and the Common Service of 1888 are two earlier milestones along this path. In the twentieth century, the consolidation of various immigrant church bodies and those more established on this continent was reflected in the primary worship books used by the mid-century, namely *Service Book and Hymnal* and *The Lutheran Hymnal*. In 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship* was published, the fruit of an ambitious inter-Lutheran project that sought to unite most North American Lutherans in the use of a single worship book with shared liturgical forms and a common repertoire of hymnody.

The years since the publication of *Lutheran Book of Worship* have seen many changes within the church and the world. Advances in communication and technology have led to the increasing use of electronic and digital resources within the church and its worship. A growing awareness of the interrelatedness of the world, coupled with new understandings of the world's diverse cultures, has had implications as well for the church as the one body of Christ throughout the world. The use of language continues to develop in response to context and societal change, and languages other than English are more frequently used. Forms of musical expression have blossomed, and churches have embraced many of these forms for use in worship.

During the 1990s it was becoming clear that there was a growing need for a new generation of worship resources. *Lutheran Book of Worship* and some of the supplements that followed had served the church well. But there was increasing variety in worship and more diversity among congregations. At the same time, there was a deepening desire to reach out more deliberately to the unbaptized.

In the fall of 2000, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America boldly authorized a churchwide effort to define and develop “a new and common approach to primary worship resources that are supportive of the entire ELCA for the next generation.” The focus was to support all congregations and worshipping communities. The vision was to engage the whole church in the work of renewing worship. The motivation was, and continues to be, mission, for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



From that new beginning in our shared history of worship renewal, individuals and congregations throughout this church have been invited to learn about and contribute to the effort known as Renewing Worship. With help from thousands of people, the Renewing Worship project has led to the development of the new primary worship book, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, another milestone. Around this new book, a family of worship resources will continue to unfold.

For a majority of congregations within the ELCA, a book remains essential to their worship life. Though worship folders often support their weekly gatherings around the means of grace, a book that contains their primary collection of hymns and liturgical material shapes what they do when they gather. Printed material is integral to meeting the needs of many congregations. Still, at a time when there are many sources for worship materials, the more compelling argument for a primary book relates to access and the stewardship of our shared treasury of worship texts, hymns, and patterns. Producing a new book of worship in both print and electronic formats increases accessibility to that treasury. A shared book makes these treasures regularly available to more than just the people responsible for worship planning. Access to a rich array of shared texts and music will continue to nourish individuals and whole communities of faith.

It is important to remember that *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is not so much comprehensive as it is core. It will provide a grounded center that presents the breadth of a living tradition, a common treasury that reminds us that in Jesus Christ we are held together.

As the primary worship book of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* will contribute to the sense that congregations are connected, a communion of local assemblies sharing in the same mission of God.

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