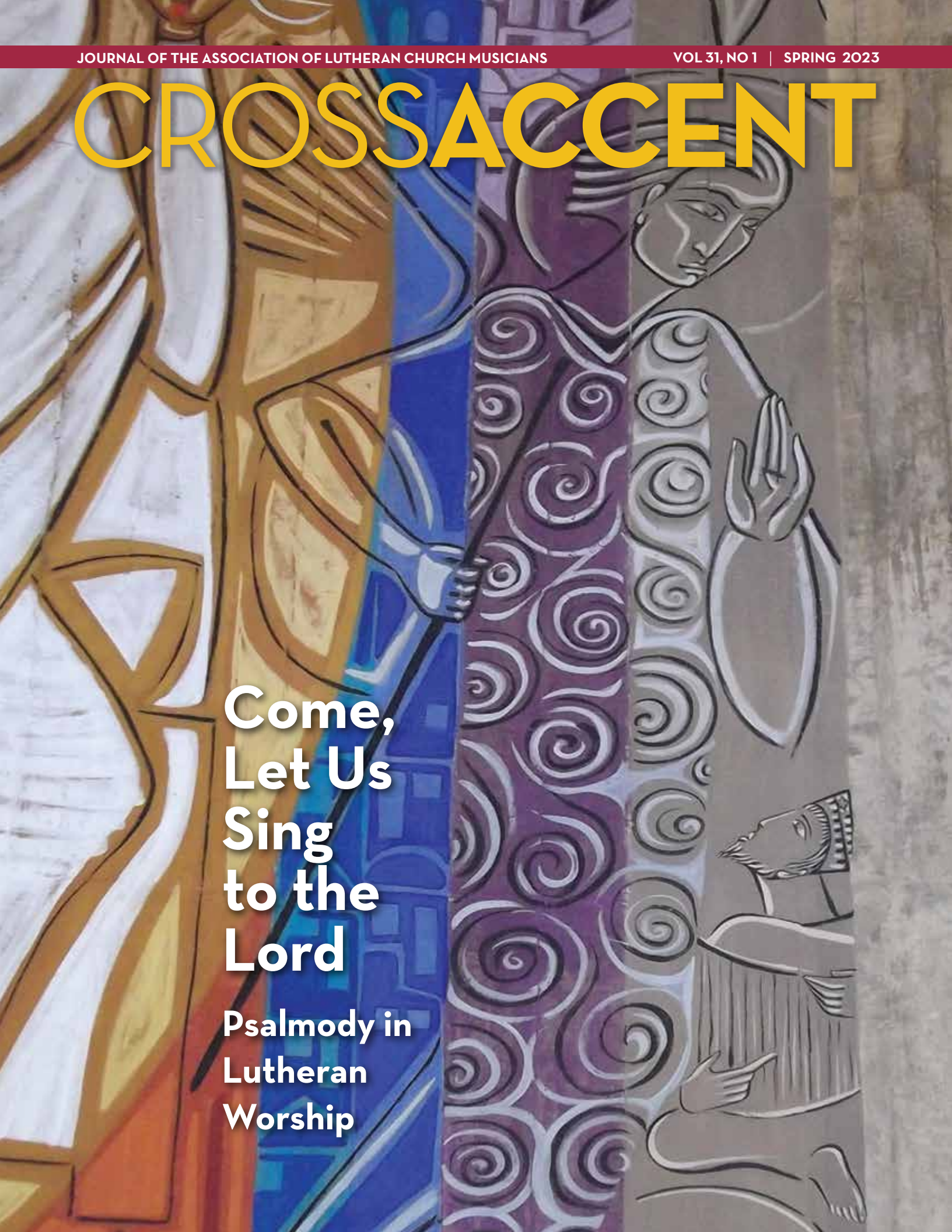


CROSSACCENT



**Come,
Let Us
Sing
to the
Lord**

**Psalmody in
Lutheran
Worship**

The Development of a New Psalter for the English-Speaking Lutheran Church

by Paul T. Prange

When the WELS decided to do an update of its popular hymnal, *CW93*, it had the advantage of already having a twenty-year tradition of two-thirds of its congregations singing the appointed psalm setting between the first and second lesson in most Sunday morning services.

CW93 had introduced responsorial psalm settings to WELS congregations. Each appointed psalm had one setting with a refrain, selected verses, and the Gloria Patri. Two-thirds of WELS congregations indicated by survey that they used those settings nearly every Sunday, and they expected something similar in the updated hymnal. One-third of WELS congregations indicated that the responsorial style did not work for them. Some of those congregations indicated that they would consider singing the appointed psalm if it were in a hymn-like metrical paraphrase format. A few congregations indicated that they would like more variety in psalm-setting styles.

The committee working on the psalm section of the hymnal update faced an interesting dilemma. Should it publish two settings of every appointed psalm in the new hymnal, one responsorial and the other a metrical paraphrase? Page considerations did not allow it. How could the new hymnal meet the needs of most congregations? How could those congregations sing the psalms in styles that went beyond responsorial and metrical paraphrase?

It would be the first American Lutheran English psalter of this style and scope. It would be curated to be usable by all English-speaking Lutheran churches across the world.



PHOTO: WILLIAM PEKRUHL

Members of the Psalter committee—Michael Schultz, Grace Hennig, Adrian Smith, Samuel Hacker, Amy Hansel, Paul Prange, Daniel Witte, Dale Witte—in the Chapel of the Christ at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN

After months of deliberation, the committee working on the updated hymnal, *CW21*, decided to publish one setting of each appointed psalm in the hymnal pew edition in a variety of styles. It also decided, crucially, to authorize the publication of a companion volume containing multiple settings of all 150 psalms. It would be the first American Lutheran English psalter of this style and scope. It would be curated to be usable by all English-speaking Lutheran churches across the world.

The committee working on the psalm section of the hymnal update became the committee working on the new psalter. It reviewed more than

The committee reviewed more than 10,000 settings in English, voting on over 5,000 of them and eventually curating the best ten percent

ten thousand settings in English, voting on over five thousand of them and eventually curating the best ten percent for use in congregations, schools, and homes.

The result is *Christian Worship: Psalter* (CWP; Northwestern, 2021), available in a one-volume pew edition and a two-volume *Accompaniment for the Psalter*. It is also available in the electronic service-planning format familiar to users of *LSB*. The publisher also offers additional musician’s resources individually online, including alternate keyboard harmonizations and accompaniments, vocal and instrumental descants, alternate choral stanzas for the metrical paraphrases in varying voice combinations and styles, arrangements for liturgical ensembles, handbell resources, extractions of the chorale voices for transposing instruments, and more (<https://online.nph.net/musicians-resource>).

CWP settings are chosen to be usable by an average Lutheran congregation. There is a responsorial setting for each psalm. Many of them are freshly composed by such modern composers as Mark Haas, Phillip Magness, and Dale Witte. Over one hundred of them are single-tone settings, but even the double- and triple-tone settings are doable by an average congregation. The responsorial lyrical settings, such as Marty Haugen’s “Shepherd Me, O God” for Psalm 23, have proven their usefulness in corporate worship.

There is at least one metrical paraphrase for each psalm. They range in musical history from the sixteenth-century composer Heinrich Schütz (eight settings) to the twenty-first-century composers Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, Matt Papa, and Stuart Townend (five settings). They range in textual history from Isaac Watts (eleven settings), who wrote many of his hymns in the early eighteenth century, to the modern writers Christopher Idle (twelve settings), Martin Leckebusch (twenty-three settings), and Timothy Dudley-Smith (seven settings). Sixteen hymns are set to the melodies of American folk tunes.

Some of the hymn texts and tunes are freshly composed for this psalter. Jaroslav Vajda (d. 2008) had previously written a paraphrase of Psalm 111 for use with a tune from the Becker Psalter (1602). CWP committee member Grace Hennig composed a beautiful new tune, LEISE, for the text. (You can hear the new setting by searching Google or YouTube for “CW Psalm 111.”) The CWP committee wanted to make use of the George F. Handel public domain tune CHRISTMAS, but no suitable text was found. The director of the entire CW21 hymnal project, Pr. Michael Schultz, supplied a new paraphrase of Psalm 117, “All Nations, Join to Praise the Lord,” and it became setting 117C in CWP.

CWP is for English-speaking Lutheran congregations, but its treatment of Psalm 117 is a good example of the diversity of languages and musical styles available for corporate worship. Setting 117A is from the French community of Taizé and includes a Latin text. Setting 117B is a Watts text set to a German tune, LASST UNS ERFREUEN, and is printed in singable four-part harmony. Setting 117C, mentioned above, is also printed in four-part harmony. Setting 117D is a traditional Spanish tune, ALABAD AL SEÑOR, with both the English and Spanish text provided. Setting 117E is a simple single-tone response by LCMS composer Henry V. Gerike. Setting 117F is Taiwanese (O-LO), with both an English and a Pinyin Chinese text. Finally, setting 117G is from Ghana (DA N’ASE), with an Igbo text printed above the English.

A wide variety of musical styles are available for use by congregations with some musical resources. There are examples of Conception Abbey, Gelineau, Gregorian, and Twelve Point responsorial settings. Anglican Chant can be sung melody-line only or in parts. There are representative settings by the Australian band Sons of Korah and by the American composer Wendell Kimbrough. Lead sheets are available for songs originally written for guitar.

PSALM 141

Psalm 141



A psalm of David.

- 1 I call to you, LORD, come quick-ly to me;
hear me when I / call to you.
- 2 May my prayer be set before you like / incense;
may the lifting up of my hands / sacrifice.
- 3 Set a guard over my / mouth, LORD;
keep watch over the door / of my lips.
- 4 Do not let my heart be drawn to what is / evil
so that I take part in / wicked deeds
along with those who are evil-/doers;
do not let me eat their del-/icacies.
- 5 Let a righteous man strike me—that is a / kindness;
let him rebuke me—that is oil / on my head.
My head will not re-/fuse it,
for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evil-/doers.
- 6 Their rulers will be thrown down / from the cliffs,
and the wicked will learn that my words were well / spoken.
- 7 They will say, “As one plows and breaks / up the earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the mouth / of the grave.”
- 8 But my eyes are fixed on you, / Sov’reign LORD;
in you I take refuge—do not give me o-/ver to death.
- 9 Keep me safe from the traps set by evil-/doers,
from the snares they have / laid for me.
- 10 Let the wicked fall into / their own nets,
while I pass by in / safety.

Let our prayers be acceptable in your sight. Come and help us in time of need that we may sing your praise in holy joy now and forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Church sings Psalm 141 to pray for rescue from temptation. Many Christians are accustomed to singing verse 2 as part of an evening service. Martin Luther said, “Psalm 141 is a prayer psalm against godless teachers who appear to be friendly and speak smooth words rather than threats. The psalmist says it is better to be rebuked and corrected by godly teachers. Even if evil comes upon us, and we are uprooted and torn, suffering cross and death, it is better to trust in the Lord rather than in sweet false teaching.”

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PSALM 141

Let My Prayer Rise before You 141A

Let my prayer rise be-fore you as in-cense,
the lift-ing up of my hands as the eve-ning sac-ri-fice.
O LORD, I call to you; come to me quick-ly; hear my voice
when I cry to you. Let my prayer rise be-fore you as in-cense,
the lift-ing up of my hands as the eve-ning sac-ri-fice.

Refrain text: Book of Common Prayer, 1979, public domain
Music: David Schack © 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship, admin. Augsburg Fortress

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An interior page of the Psalter, left page showing the psalm tone, text, prayer, and background; right page is one of several additional settings.

CWP is also designed for personal and family devotions. Each psalm is printed in its entirety (NIV text) and is pointed to be chanted with psalm tones as desired. A freshly written psalm prayer is followed by an explanation of how the church has used that psalm through the ages and by a devotional thought or two. Then comes commentary on that particular psalm from Luther in a fresh translation.

Rev. Dr. Jon D. Vieker, dean of chapel at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, recently wrote,

The singing of psalms was prescribed in a great number of Lutheran church orders for almost two centuries following the Reformation. Over time, the practice of a “German psalm”—most often a paraphrase of a psalm sung to a hymn tune—faded in favor of a broader practice of hymn-singing. In recent decades, however, Lutherans have returned to

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the psalter, singing the psalms of Scripture in a variety of forms. *Christian Worship: Psalter* provides congregations with a variety of settings for most psalms, and something for every psalm. Pastors and musicians are given choices that will help them match the talents of their choirs and soloists to the hearts of their congregations.¹



Paul T. Prange serves as the WELS administrator for ministerial education. He was chair of the psalmody committee for CW21 and CWP.

Note

1. Jon D. Vieker, in a Northwestern Publishing House promotional email to LCMS churches, November 2022.