

in these or similar words
CRAFTING LANGUAGE *for* WORSHIP



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Preface

In January 2013, fourteen people gathered for a three-day writing retreat at the Calvin Center, twenty miles south of Atlanta, Georgia. Those days included worshiping together; talking about liturgy, language, the church, and current cultural contexts; quiet time for writing; and group time for assessing honestly and constructively the writing that was produced. The idea was to develop a body of material that could serve as a practical guide to crafting liturgical language for a specific context, as well as a variety of illustrative examples. This book is the result of that collaborative effort.

Everyone who contributed to this resource did so thinking of a variety of local contexts and situations. We composed flexible prayers. We adapted a number of improvisation techniques, as used by musicians, to structure improvised speech. We experimented with fresh language and fine-tuned it. We wrote prayers that minimized the assembly's reliance on paper. Everyone involved in the project had a profound respect for the liturgical texts as presented in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and sought to keep the spirit of these texts at the heart of our work, while also leaning into the freedom and flexibility that are intended in our principal worship resource, but often overlooked in our actual use of it. As a result, the writing process felt less like a typical workshop and much more like worship.

About the contributors

Jennifer Baker-Trinity is an associate in ministry who enjoys writing at the intersections of theology, liturgy, and music. In addition to writing for the church, she leads assembly song at Beaver Lutheran Church. She lives with her spouse and their three children in central Pennsylvania. She also blogs at giftsabounding.blogspot.com.

Tracey Breashears Schultz is pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas. She and her husband, Chris, live near the church in the historic Heights neighborhood. Tracey is a wordsmith who loves liturgy, preaching, children's ministry, walking trails, coffee, and fine wine. She is passionate about the intersection of faith and daily life and delights to find God in the ordinary.

Richard Bruxvoort Colligan is a freelance musician, composer, and liturgist with a special affinity for the Psalms. He came to this circle with a passion for exploring how words and music shape us over a lifetime and is committed to composing adventurous and imaginative songs for the ever-evolving

church. His songs have been published by various denominational publishers, and his music is available at Worldmaking.net and PsalmImmersion.com. Richard lives with his family in Strawberry Point, Iowa.

Suzanne Burke is an editor at Augsburg Fortress where for more than a decade she has guided the development of the Sundays and Seasons family of annual worship planning resources. She has worked with many pastors, musicians, and lay worship leaders who are already doing the kind of creative and faithful contextualization encouraged in this resource. Her own worshipping community, Our Saviour's Lutheran in Minneapolis, experiments on a regular basis with contextualizing language for worship.

Erik Christensen is pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Logan Square on the north side of Chicago. As he curates texts to be spoken and sung in worship each week he is aware that the gathered assembly is increasingly less biblically literate and so looks for ways to make more explicit connections between the weekly scriptures and the other elements of the service.

Pam Fickenscher serves as senior pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield, Minnesota. Her interest in contextual language began with her first call in mission development at Spirit Garage, an urban community that gathers around word and sacrament in rented theater space. She is energized by leading liturgy with attention to the ways that space, size, season, and shared experience of the assembly shape how they hear words and the Word.

Paul Friesen-Carper is a multifaceted musician, songwriter, and self-professed "liturgi-nerd." His love of worship has been nurtured through encounters with the Living Word in communities with wide ranging ways of doing and understanding worship. He is dedicated to this work because, over and over, he sees the Spirit move a people who claim, trust, and challenge their religious inheritance.

Jay Gamelin has always loved the way language can provoke a response. In the work of his community (Pilgrim Lutheran in Lexington, South Carolina), they are always looking for ways in which words can bring the person in worship to a new spiritual place. Jay loves how this project takes this work seriously and encourages the whole church to engage this spiritual practice.

Scott A. Moore is a singer, wannabe guitarist, liturgical design consultant, and lover of all words great and small. As a practicing liturgist in the former East Germany, he is eager to find ways to communicate the mysteries of God in new and timeless ways, especially for those new to the faith. He jumped at the chance (and would again) to work on such a project with this promising and experienced group of liturgical leaders from various disciplines.

Peter J. L. Perella was serving as the director for worship formation and liturgical resources for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at the time of the writing retreat. Although a great lover of traditional liturgical language and rites, in his role as director, Peter yearned for the historic texts of

the church to be a uniting bridge rather than a dividing wall. This work is partially a result of that desire. Sadly, Peter died of sinus cancer in February 2014 at the age of 35.

Martin A. Seltz serves as a pastor, as publisher for worship, music, and congregational life at Augsburg Fortress, and as one of the cantors at Christ Church Lutheran, Minneapolis. Intensely interested in what people speak and sing aloud when they worship, he enjoys both the incarnational gift of words and working with gifted shapers of words to find ways with language that are durable yet expendable, timeless yet present.

Kevin Shock enjoys ministry with seniors, Penn State students, and the people at St. Mark Lutheran in Pleasant Gap, Pennsylvania. These different ministry contexts provide opportunities to listen to and shape language for a variety of people. He believes that liturgy comes alive when it employs authentic language for the people who are participating. His hope is that this resource sparks creativity and courage for using honest, holy language in your worshiping communities.

Jared R. Stahler is associate pastor of Saint Peter's Church in New York City. The church's liturgies integrate music, jazz, dance and performing, dramatic and visual arts, all tailored for a number of different and diverse communities. Pastor Stahler holds a degree in organ performance from Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, and completed graduate studies at Yale Divinity School and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

For nearly 20 years, **Scott Weidler** has served on the worship staff of the ELCA. Part of his work included crafting the introductory process for congregations through synods of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Through that venture, it became clear that more help was needed to interpret the "in these or similar words" rubric. This resource is the result of that learning.

In These or Similar Words does not intend to provide definitive answers or official positions in matters related to language for worship. Its illustrative examples are just that: experiments with approaches to particular circumstances, designed to spark similar attempts in your surroundings. This resource invites you to engage in conversation with its writers and with crafters of liturgical language in your own worshiping communities, to consider how their insights and guidance may best inform the many different contexts in which local leaders guide the worship life of their communities. In so doing, this resource in its own way seeks to further the renewing vision of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*: "to make more transparent the principle of fostering unity without imposing uniformity," so that ultimately the resources bearing this identity might "be servants through which the Holy Spirit will call out the church, gather us around Jesus Christ in word and sacrament, and send us, enlivened, to share the good news of life in God" (*ELW*, Introduction, p. 8).

–The contributors

Introduction

“An assisting minister invites the assembly into prayer in these or similar words.” “The presiding minister may address the assembly in these or similar words.” Have you noticed that this phrase—in these or similar words—appears regularly within the liturgies presented in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*? These words, tucked into various rubrical directions guiding the action during worship, beg to be unpacked. What is the spirit and intention behind these words? Why were they included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*? And, if desired, where will these “similar words” come from?

To begin to answer these questions, consider these words from the introduction to *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*:

Worship takes place in particular assemblies with particular contexts. Yet every assembly gathered by the Holy Spirit for worship is connected to the whole church. Worship unites the people of God in one time and place with the people of God in every time and place. We use patterns, words, actions, and songs handed down through the ages to express this unity and continuity. . . .

The Christian assembly also worships in the midst of an ever-changing world. And because the worship that constitutes the church is also the fundamental expression of the mission of God in the world, worship is regularly renewed in order to be both responsible and responsive to the world that the church is called to serve.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* continues the renewal of worship that has taken place over the three centuries Lutherans have been on the North American continent and in the Caribbean region. . . .

Evangelical Lutheran Worship is a core rather than a comprehensive resource. The collection of materials . . . reflects a body of prayer and song that our churches consider worthy to hold in common. . . . Still, it is not possible or necessary for a single worship book to contain all the expressions of worship desired in every context by an increasingly diverse church. . . .

Evangelical Lutheran Worship continues to emphasize that “freedom and flexibility in worship is a Lutheran inheritance, and there is room for ample variety in ceremony, music, and liturgical form” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Introduction). . . .

Evangelical Lutheran Worship is the title of [a] book, but [it] is much more than [that single] book. The pew edition [and its related volumes are] an unfolding family of resources . . . intended to respond to the developing needs of the church in mission. (*ELW*, pp. 6–8)

In These or Similar Words is an extension of that resource family. The inspiration for this volume grew from a desire to offer some practical guidance and wisdom to worshipping communities that want to begin, or already are, crafting their own language for worship.

Why would we write our own worship texts?

Why might a worshipping community wish to explore the local crafting and use of such “similar words”? A simple Internet search reveals dozens of sources of newly created liturgies, prayers, and other worship texts. Various published resources such as *Sundays and Seasons* (Augsburg Fortress, annual publication) offer seasonal or even weekly worship texts for use in congregations. Why spend the time and energy creating your own worship texts when there is already so much available?

Imagine the objects in your home. Some are revered because they come from your childhood or were gifts from a loved one. Some are new; some are old. Some you expect will wear out rather quickly from daily use; some are brought out only for special occasions. But it is likely that you value these different items not so much for their resale value as for their usefulness in daily life and the way they connect you to the people who made them or the people who passed them on to you. Language used in worship can have these same qualities and evoke the same kinds of responses in us.

Worship planners and leaders can feel overwhelmed by the choices they have or exhausted by the idea of needing to create more. But when communities set about to intentionally contextualize their worship for those who are there, or those who are not there yet, we all become co-creators, contributors to the work of *common* prayer rather than spectators or judges of what someone else has created.

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1), which means we also are blessed with creative powers, making order out of chaos. When we participate in the creation of worship, we reflect God’s glory and remind one another that God’s work of creation continues as well.

How far can we stretch from the center?

Maybe your worshipping community has already discovered the creative task of crafting language for worship. Some examples could be:

- A prayer team gathering each week to write the prayers of intercession

- A worship committee generating seasonal orders of confession and forgiveness
- A pastor and youth leader engaging the youth in worship education by collaboratively crafting a thanksgiving at the table

In these situations and many more, members of the congregation are crafting language for worship. But specifically what words? Where do we start? Can we use any words? Just how far can we stretch (or have we stretched too far) from the foundational patterns of the church? If we always do everything in worship “by the book,” do we need encouragement to do some stretching beyond the center? Or, at the other extreme, have we stretched so far that we are no longer connected to brothers and sisters in the wider church—beyond our own congregation? These are some of the questions this resource has been designed to explore.

This book's pattern

Writing texts for worship is not just about a *product*, but also a *process*. Part 1 introduces some broad considerations around crafting language for worship. These short essays could be read and discussed in a group setting even before a writing team is formed or any writing begins. Part 2 provides a variety of exercises designed to help you identify the specific context in which you worship, as well as the makeup, values, and sensibilities of your worshiping community. These exercises will also help you lay some groundwork for your writing process. Part 3 takes a close look at “what’s going on” in each of the liturgical texts within the services of Holy Communion and Holy Baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, presents some illustrative examples of newly written texts, and then suggests a way of organizing a process for crafting each type of liturgical text. Plenty of space is provided for note taking and capturing early drafts.

Be not afraid! This is serious work, yes, but also an opportunity for the Spirit to show up in ways that may be delightfully unexpected and full of blessing.

HOW CAN WE BEGIN THIS WORK?

Whether worship texts in your community are being crafted by one person or many, the process is helped by understanding that community. This next section is designed to help you better understand your local context—the time and place in which you are writing, for whom, and in what current circumstances—and give some initial shape to your writing process through a variety of individual and group exercises. You don't have to do all of these exercises! Read through them and decide which will be most helpful to you.

EXERCISE A

Who are the people who make up your worshipping assembly?

It is critical to intentionally name the groups of people who make up your worshipping community (or communities). Consider the following (there may be more).

- seniors/retired
- single without children
- couples with children
- single parents/caregivers with children
- professionals
- working class
- ethnic groups
- adoptive families
- blended families
- families with parents of same gender
- same gender couples without children
- cradle Lutherans
- many newcomers to the faith

If you regularly have multiple worship services, will this list be similar for all services or quite different? You may need to make separate lists.



EXERCISE A, continued

Now review your list(s) and consider these questions.

1. How do the different people in your community relate to the texts currently used in worship?
It might be helpful to invite representatives into the conversation rather than making assumptions about what they think and how they feel.
2. How might these different groups of people receive changes in texts?
3. How might certain words convey power, privilege, or bias in unintended ways?
4. How much new language can your congregation embrace?
5. Even if they can embrace a great deal of change, how much is effective in embedding words of faith in worshipers?
6. How might reactions to these questions help determine
 - a. the amount of text you choose to contextualize?
 - b. which parts of the liturgy you contextualize?
 - c. who (which worship gatherings) can best receive textual adaptation?

These are not easy questions. Most worshiping assemblies are made up of many different kinds of people. Finding a balance is key. Intentionally naming the challenges, however, is an important first step.

Greeting

What's Going On?

The presiding minister greets the whole assembly, often with the words used by the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 13:13) to greet the churches. Then the assembly greets the presiding minister in return. In the letter to the Corinthians, these words accompanied Paul's greetings from all the other churches and his encouragement for the Christians in Corinth to greet one another in peace and love. Now, here, these are words that mean to do what they say. In God's mercy, the words convey the very grace, love, and communion of which they speak. In this mutual greeting, with apostolic authority, the presiding minister and the assembly are established and held in the triune life of God. (SA, p. 129)

This moment of mutuality in the living word of God constitutes one of the seminal moments in all Christian liturgy. With it the gathering comes to clear expression and the service clearly begins. (SA, p. 130)

What's Not Going On?

- It is not the pastor's "good morning."
- It does not need to be repeated or echoed. Many pastors who have used *Lutheran Book of Worship* will remember a practice that involved the apostolic greeting before the Kyrie and hymn of praise, and another greeting or salutation, with a "may" rubric, just before the prayer of the day. That duplication has been eliminated in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, even if the greeting is separated from the prayer of the day by some further song.

An Example

Evangelical Lutheran Worship (p. 98)

The presiding minister and the assembly greet each other.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

This assembly is to be the communion of the Holy Spirit around the grace of Jesus Christ and the love of God, spoken and given in word and sacrament.

The assembly, by its response, acknowledges and prays for the triune God to be with the one who is presiding for them.

Greeting Examples

Some of the following examples are not greetings in the strictest sense of the greeting's function. "Alleluia. Christ is risen!," for example, is not so much a greeting as an acclamation. These examples include greetings, acclamations, and combinations of both.

A

The God of peace be with you.
And also with you.

For an assembly that has very recently suffered a tragedy.

B

Alleluia. The Spirit is here.
The Spirit is here indeed. Alleluia.

From the ELCA's twenty-fifth anniversary materials.

C

You are children of God
We are children of God!
God has something to say.
And we are listening.
God hears our voices.
So we sing and pray.
Come, let us worship.
Come, let us worship!

The Sunday nearest to school starting (Rally Day). Expecting many children in worship.

D

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,
our Prince of Peace,
our Mighty God,
our Wonderful Counselor,
who is and was and is to come.
Amen.

Advent

E

Christmas

Good Christian friends, rejoice!
Today Christ is born in Bethlehem and here in [*insert name of town/city*].
From realms of glory, angels sing.
From fields, keeping their watch by night, shepherds arrive.
Bearing gifts, wise people travel from afar.
And we too have come to the manger to see the newborn king.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

F

Time after Epiphany

As we gather for worship today
I am here to greet you in the name of our God
who is always being revealed to us—
in a manger, in a river, at a wedding.
We gather now in the expectation
that God will once again show up in food, in water, in community.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

G

Lent

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord,
who runs to meet us while we are still far away,
who gathers her children as a hen gathers her brood,
who fills our hearts with treasure that lasts.
Amen.

H

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Easter

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

God has rolled the stone away,

Jesus Christ is on the loose,

and the Holy Spirit is in this place teaching us and guiding us into all the truth.

Amen.

I

This is God's house, and so as we gather for worship

Time after Pentecost

I greet you on behalf of the master of this house, its builder;

and the master of this house, its heir;

and the master of this house, the Spirit that fills it and warms its chambers.

In this house there are many rooms so that you—

whether you're standing on the porch this morning, looking in,

or standing in the kitchen, getting ready to bring bread and wine to the table—

might find a place you can call home.

Let the people say Amen!

Amen!



Now it's your turn to try writing a greeting for your ministry context.

DATE/S AND DAY/S OF USE:

CHURCH-YEAR SEASON:

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE DAY OR SEASON:

IMAGES FROM THE SCRIPTURE READINGS THAT MIGHT BE USED IN THIS GREETING:

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS (REFER TO ANY CONTEXTUAL ASSESSMENTS YOU MADE ON PAGES 25–29):

Basic pattern for the greeting:

- Often trinitarian, though not always
- The presiding minister greets the assembly in the name of the God who gathers us
- The assembly, by its response, acknowledges and prays for God to be with the one who is presiding for them

Characteristics of the greeting:

- Succinct
- Names God as the one who meets us in the place of worship