

# NEWSLETTER



November, in the Year of our Lord 2008

Volume IV, Issue No. 2

cluster group where you can grow in your commitment to rich and relevant worship.

## FROM OUR PRESIDING MEMBER

Dear Friends,



The glow of our time together at Columbia Theological Seminary, the first moment in our three-year focus, still warms me. We gathered with forty-five folk, many of them members of AR&LW, thirteen representatives from an equal number of Reformed seminaries in North America, and three ecumenical guests who graciously shared their insights regarding our times of conversation and discernment. Again and again our three year focus called us to ask: How, where and when do we form a new generation of worship leaders in the Reformed tradition?

✠ Liturgical Worship

We became aware of what we already intuitively knew: that different seminaries form leaders in many ways in three distinct settings: through required and elective courses, inspiring chapel programs and field education sites. Students take on leadership roles as they watch mentors and classmates, and as they reflect intentionally on what they have inherited from their home congregations. And we discovered that, in spite of the intense desire congregations have to call seasoned and mature worship leaders and preachers, often our seminary worship curriculums have developed little over the past fifty years to support that desire.

We also explored how congregations, seminaries, and judicatories can covenant together more intentionally to share the rich traditions that will equip the church to reach a new generation of disciples. Our time together was marked by renewed relationships, new friendships, and a growing sense that the Association's mission to nurture worship that is "trinitarian, ecumenical, incarnational and sacramental" has many allies throughout the church.

And did I mention our worship together? Our preacher was eloquent, worship leaders were grace-filled, musicians were plentiful and talented, the singing was glorious, and our space in a small chapel at Columbia was made sacred by our passionate prayers and God's ever-present Spirit.

We began our time at Columbia with the dream that the Association could/should initiate a number of cluster groups across the country, to continue the conversation between annual meetings. This dream was given wings with a generous grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Much to our surprise and delight, groups were forming even before we left Columbia. It is our hope that eight to ten small clusters will report at our next annual meeting with insights gleaned from conversations around generative questions that grew out of our time together.

And so the three year vision conceived at a steering committee meeting in Reno, Nevada and birthed in Seattle, Washington, began to grow in Decatur, Georgia. We hope and pray that you will find a

We also hope that you have put on your calendar our next annual meeting that will once again take place at Columbia Theological Seminary, following another excellent offering of its Summer Scholars Program, the last full week of July, 2009. Some have questioned our sanity, going to Georgia in July—a visionary decision confirmed by the warm and gracious hospitality of the Center for Continuing Education there.

I hope that you will spread the news abroad of our profound commitment to help shape a new generation of worship leaders, who are faithful, loving, and wise. Your continued prayers and commitments will help us along the journey. Thank you!

With warmest regards,

*Gregg A. Mast*  
 Presiding Member, AR&LW  
 President, New Brunswick Theological Seminary  
[gmast@nbts.edu](mailto:gmast@nbts.edu)



## 2009 AR&LW GATHERING

*At Columbia Theological Seminary  
 Decatur, Georgia (metro Atlanta)*

• **Pre-Meeting: Monday-Wednesday, July 27 – 29**  
 Columbia Seminary's "Summer Scholars 2009"

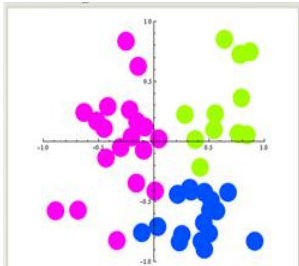
• **Wednesday-Friday, July 29 – July 31**

## AR&LW Annual Meeting



*Year Two of a Three-Year Engagement*  
**Plan to attend!**  
**Put it on your calendar now!**

## CLUSTER GROUPS: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION



The three-year initiative of AR&LW is a continuing conversation. The discussion of how persons might be formed to lead congregational worship begins and ends with annual meetings. It started at the one held this past July at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia and will end at the one to be held in 2010.

Crucial to this conversation are cluster groups, which will carry it forward in between annual meetings. Into this conversation are invited members of local congregations, pastors, musicians, officers of the local church and judicatories, and seminary faculty and staff.

What are the cluster groups? From the brochure created to announce the groups, we read, “The geographical cluster groups will be seeded during the 2008 Annual Meeting of AR&LW. The first members of each cluster will be sent from the meeting charged with identifying and inviting participation from others who share the commitment to faithful formation of worship leaders. Questions generated during the Annual Meeting will provide the spark for the initial conversation. Regular meetings, whether face-to-face or electronically, and periodic reporting to the grant project director are expected.”

For this purpose AR&LW received a generous grant in the amount of \$15,000, chiefly for alleviating some of the cost of travel as well as offering hospitality and fellowship within the groups. The money came in the form of a Worship Renewal Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian worship, Grand Rapids, MI, with funds provided by the Lilly Endowment.

Each cluster group has been asked to begin conversation around one or more of the questions generated during the 2008 annual meeting. The lead questions are:

- Why does the seminary worship?
- How might the seminary impart denominational traditions of worship to a diverse and multi-denominational student body.
- How might the seminary make the case for the centrality of worship to the teaching of theology?
- What is necessary for worship leaders to be “musically prepared” to plan worship?
- What are the expectations of field education with respect to students, seminaries, congregations, and supervisors?

Groups are forming across the country right now with plans underway for initial meetings to take place by December 1, 2008. Currently, groups are forming in New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, Richmond, Virginia, the mid-Atlantic, Dallas and Austin, Texas, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. There are wide-open opportunities for groups to form in the west and Pacific Northwest. Are you interested in participating in this grassroots effort? Do you have a vested concern about the formation of worship leaders? Perhaps joining a cluster group now is for you.

A web resource page has been created to provide information regarding the worship grant, the creation of cluster groups, and guides for conversation. Please visit: <http://arlw.worshiprenewal.googlepages.com/>

For additional information (and a more personal touch!) email the project director: [kkwesterwick@gmail.com](mailto:kkwesterwick@gmail.com).



## FROM THE SECRETARY/TREASURER

At the annual meeting of our Association at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, I was able to report a 2008 membership of 42 individual members (non-students), 3 student members, and 4 institutional members. Since that time, we have added another 8 individual members (non-student), for a total of 57. We are pleased that some of our seminary representatives and others who participated in the first meeting connected with our three-year focus on the formation of worship leaders have joined our organization.

I encourage all of our members to make the work of the Association known to others who have a desire to see a renewal of worship in the Church, adding not only to our numbers, but also to our voice, and providing a greater network of support for clergy and laity who are engaged in this important effort in their own congregations as well as at seminary and judicatory levels.

Because membership renewals generally came in later this year than previously, and because of a change of personnel at the publisher of *Liturgy*, the mailing to the membership of the issue that carried a report of our 2007 annual meeting was delayed until this fall. By the time you read this article, your copy should have arrived or be in the mail.

We are still awaiting word of the disposition of our application to the Internal Revenue Service for a determination letter recognizing our tax exempt status. My recent telephone contact with the agent assigned to our “case” indicated that our application, sent in March, will finally be considered on October 3.

Exclusive of funds from the Calvin grant (\$15,000) and contract (\$7,500) and the Myers grant (\$10,000), our current checking account balance is about \$4,000. That figure also includes \$500 specified for use as a scholarship for younger seminarians to attend the annual meeting of the Association. Transfers from the Myers grant, covering registration fees for seminary representatives to the annual meeting; from the Calvin contract, covering registration fees for ecumenical guests and our writer; and from the West grant, covering registration fees for congregational representatives, will add about \$1,700 to that total, which still leaves us behind where we stood a year ago.

Our 2008 membership figures are somewhat lower than they were for 2007. Meanwhile, our organizational costs have increased due to a number of Steering Committee conference calls related to the details of putting our three-year focus into action, the increased costs of travel for the fall Steering Committee meeting, and the one-time costs of hiring a writer for the Calvin grant application (\$1,200) and the I.R.S. application fee (\$300). I also have been informed by the publisher that the per copy price of *Liturgy*—a membership benefit included in your annual membership fee—has increased from \$15 in previous years to \$18 for this year’s issue. That was an increase unknown to the Steering Committee when it was decided to maintain the 2008 membership dues at the same rate they have been since our organization began.

During our business meeting at Columbia Seminary,



Gregg Mast and Kimberly Long were re-elected, respectively, as Presiding Member and Assisting Presiding Member. Priscilla Kimerly (for West Plano Presbyterian Church) and Kerry Westerwick were re-elected to the Steering Committee class of 2011. The Presiding Member announced his appointment of Martin Tel to fill an unexpired term in the class of 2010 due to the resignation of Gail Snodgrass, who was thanked for her service to the Association.

At the meeting, the creation of a position of Membership Secretary was approved, and Barbara Hedges-Goettl was appointed to serve in that capacity. Henceforth, membership forms and fees should be sent to her (see the enclosed membership form for her address in Kenosha, Wisconsin).

Thank you for continuing to support your Association. Dues received after September 30 will be credited to the 2009 membership year.

*Bruce L. Taylor*  
 Secretary/Treasurer, AR&LW  
 Pastor, Spanish Springs Presbyterian Church,  
 Sparks, NV  
[church@spanishspringspres.org](mailto:church@spanishspringspres.org)



### AR&LW WEBSITE

Do visit the AR&LW web site — [www.arlw.org](http://www.arlw.org). You will find there full information about the cluster groups described in this issue. Also, as information becomes available, the site also will contain a link to Columbia Theological Seminary's Summer Scholars' event — among other useful links to things liturgical. Macintosh users may need to download the Firefox browser to activate some aspects of the website. Free downloads for Mac OS X are available at [www.Mozilla.com/Firefox](http://www.Mozilla.com/Firefox).



### FUTURE ANNUAL MEETINGS OF AR&LW



- **2010** Dates TBA  
 Prince Conference Center  
 Calvin College  
 Grand Rapids, Michigan  
*to be held in conjunction with an event sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.*



## MAY YOU HAVE A BLESSED THANKSGIVING



### NEW MEMBERS JOIN

We are pleased to welcome the following new members since publication of the spring newsletter:



- **William Blake Spencer**, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Richardson, TX
- **David VanderMere**, Minister of Music, Central Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA
- **Clem Street**, Interim Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Bishop, CA
- **Shelley Reel**, Chester, Virginia (M.Div. Candidate at Union Theological-PSCE, Richmond, VA)
- **Thomas E. Dipko**, UCC minister and denominational executive (retired), San Francisco, CA
- **Barbara Hedges-Goettl**, Kenosha, WI (PhD Candidate at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL)
- **Christopher Dorn**, Western Theol Seminary, Holland, MI
- **Robert Mann**, Denton, TX
- **Jan Ammon**, Princeton Theol Seminary, Princeton, NJ
- **Beth Spaulding**, Waltham, MA (ThD Candidate at Boston University School of Theology)
- **San Francisco Theological Seminary**, San Anselmo, CA
- **Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church**, Dallas, TX
- **David Gambrell**, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY
- **Kristin Saldine**, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, TX
- **Priscilla Mojica-Rust**, Genesis Presbyterian Church, Austin, TX
- We are also happy to *welcome back* in our membership **David Stubbs** and **Jim Still**, after a brief hiatus:



### MORE INFORMATION ON THE 2008 ANNUAL MEETING

Members will want to check out these two links to additional articles by Tom Dipko about our recent meeting in Decatur:

- Formation of Worship Leaders: Focus on Leaders: [www.calvin.edu/worship/wcom/campus/seminary\\_ed.php](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/wcom/campus/seminary_ed.php)
- Formation of Worship Leaders: Focus on Seminaries: [http://www.calvin.edu/worship/wcom/campus/seminary\\_formation.php](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/wcom/campus/seminary_formation.php)

**BOOK OF WORSHIP,  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
*Nearly 25 Years On*

In July of 1977 the Eleventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC) adopted a resolution directing the Executive Council “to request the Office for Church Life and Leadership (OCLL) to develop, if feasible, a book of worship for the United Church of Christ using inclusive language.” At a post-Synod meeting of the staff of OCLL I was named primary staff coordinator for the project.

Early in 1978, having affirmed the importance of a book from a sampling of opinion across the UCC, a ten person committee was formed to undertake the task. The committee included seminary faculty, local church pastors, a campus minister, and lay persons. Though each of the individuals had knowledge, gifts and interest in the worship life of the church, the committee was not intentionally a group of “experts” but rather a cross section of the church’s leadership.

In the ensuing seven years, the committee met frequently, worked diligently both in and between meetings, worshipped together in a variety of forms, debated intensely, consulted with others, and ultimately in 1983 released an initial draft for review and testing. Following the testing period, revisions and other developmental tasks were undertaken. In 1986, the first edition of *Book of Worship United Church of Christ* was released.

A number of principles shaped the content of this book. Some were articulated at the outset. Others emerged in the course of our work together. All, I believe, were important in defining the final shape of the resource.

- First, we were intentional about honoring both the liturgical roots of the UCC and its predecessor bodies as well as the richness of the liturgical history of the ecumenical church. At the same time we understood our task would have a catalytic influence for the UCC as it continued to build its own liturgical shape and witness. We were, to coin a phrase, to be “liberal conservators:”

- (1) faithful to the traditions that had come before us,
- (2) enabling the shaping forces that had emerged in our life as a faith people in the 20 plus years since the UCC’s forming, and
- (3) open to the forces moving us into our future as a church.

- Second, we came to a broad understanding of the mandate for inclusive language. We were clearly committed to gender-neutral language, carefully avoiding exclusively male terms for God and working at diversity in the images used for the People of God. But we also chose language that was diverse as to racial and ethnic background, the stages of maturity from infancy to old age, and the power relationships within the human community. We firmly believe that liturgy, experienced week after week, is a curriculum that shapes people’s perceptions, attitudes and behavior. We wanted to ensure that this resource enabled a healthy, inclusive and just faith community within the United Church of Christ and among whom ever else might make use of it.

- Third, we were intentional in linking liturgy and ethics. Liturgy not only rehearses the acts of God in history, it is also an individual and collective reminding of God’s call to serve and act as

witnesses to the love, justice and peace that God intends in the worlds of today.

- Fourth, we believed that good liturgy is more than good language. It is also good drama, good choreography, good environment, good use of space, good use of the arts and music. To lead people, ultimately in singing God’s praises and telling God’s saving story in lyrical and dramatic ways, it needs to have rhythmic quality and a poetic tone.

- Finally we clearly owned the ecumenical understanding of liturgy as the “work of the people.” It must involve people, both up front and in the pews, in ways that both enhance the witness of the whole people and provide experiences that sustain the faith community over time.

It has been nearly twenty-five years since *Book of Worship United Church of Christ* emerged. In the years since the heady days of its creation, I have experienced worship in a variety of settings, while serving as a Conference Minister and on the national staff, as well as in my own local church. From those experiences, some observations.

*Book of Worship United Church of Christ* has:

- set a “liturgical standard” within the United Church of Christ. Whether pastors and lay leaders use the book in full or limited ways, the presence of the resource is now firm and fixed among us.

- raised consciousness about the shape and form of liturgy, especially among those members of our fellowship who were accustomed to little or no liturgical form. That does not mean that the forms used in churches have changed, but the understanding and content of the form used has been deepened.

- provided a binding thread among the churches and sense of identity for the denomination. When moving through churches of our fellowship, one can see and experience common elements of language, order, shape and content. Sometimes it is a familiar phrase, at other times the full use of an order. Either way, it connects us as members of the United Church of Christ.

- witnessed to the UCC’s full presence in the liturgical tradition of the ecumenical church.

Midway through the work of development, a colleague said to me, “You know, Bob, we’ve been a part of many things in our ministry to this point. But what we are doing here, in creating and releasing this book of worship resources, will have impact in the life of the UCC for a long time.”

After these many years, I can only agree.

*Robert Witham*  
UCC minister and denominational executive (retired)  
Portland, ME  
[RDW558@aol.com](mailto:RDW558@aol.com)



## PRESBYTERIAN HYMNAL PROCESS BEGINS



Commissioning of the Presbyterian Hymnal Committee  
September 23, 2008  
at Presbyterian Center Chapel in Louisville, KY

The 2004 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) authorized the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, the Presbyterian Association of Musicians, and the Office of Theology and Worship to begin research into the feasibility of a new Presbyterian hymnal. With the help of Research Services of the PC(USA), a questionnaire was developed and distributed to a nationally representative group of members, elders, and ordained ministers. The results of this research were presented to the 2006 General Assembly, which granted authorization for the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to research, develop, and produce a new hymnal. The Presbyterian Publishing Corporation is assuming all costs for the development and production of the hymnal, including the expenses of the Hymnal Committee.

An open application process was developed in order to encourage applications from anyone interested in serving on the Hymnal Committee. The first application was received in early March 2008 and by the deadline of July 11 there were 220 complete applications. These applications came from 39 states and included 58 from pastors. A group of eight representatives from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, the Office of Theology, Worship and Education, and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians reviewed all applications before selecting a committee of fifteen. The committee includes eight men and seven women, two Asian Americans, one African American, two individuals under the age of twenty-five, a seminary president, two pastors, a professor of theology, an internationally recognized hymn text writer, and an acclaimed composer. Six members of the committee serve as faculty members at seminaries, colleges, or universities, and six are members of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians.

### Members of the Hymnal Committee are:

*Mary Louise Bringle* (Chair)

Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Brevard College • Brevard, NC

*Chi-Yi Chen*

Choral Associate  
Princeton Theological Seminary • Princeton, NJ

*Adam Copeland*

Master of Divinity Student  
Columbia Theological Seminary • Decatur, GA

*Alfred Fedak*

Minister of Music and Arts  
Westminster Presbyterian Church • Albany, NY

*Stephen Fey*

Co-director of Music Ministries  
First Presbyterian Church • Bristol, TN

*Charles Frost*

Minister of Music  
Sea Island Presbyterian Church • Beaufort, SC

*Karen Hastings-Flegel*

Organist and Director of Music Ministry  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Concord, CA

*Beverly Howard*

Professor of Music  
California Baptist University • Riverside, CA

*Paul Junggap Huh*

Assistant Professor of Worship and Director of Korean American Ministries  
Columbia Theological Seminary • Decatur, GA

*Mary Beth Jones*

Director of Music Ministries  
Northminster Presbyterian Church • Troy, MI

*Eric Myers*

Pastor  
Frederick Presbyterian Church • Frederick, MD

*Chelsea Stern*

Music and Arts Intern  
Highland Park United Methodist Church • Dallas, TX

*Edwin Chr. van Driel*

Assistant Professor of Theology  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary • Pittsburgh, PA

*Michael Waschevski*

Associate Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church • Fort Worth, TX

*Barbara Wheeler*

President  
Auburn Theological Seminary • New York, NY

### Ex Officio Members:

*Alan Barthel*

Executive Director  
Presbyterian Association of Musicians

*David Gambrell*

Associate for Worship  
Office of Theology and Worship • PC (USA)

*David Maxwell*

Senior Editor  
Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

### Staff:

*David Eicher*

Hymnal Editor  
Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

*Robin Howell*

Hymnal Project Coordinator  
Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

The Hymnal Committee met for the first time September 22 and 23, 2008, at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, KY, to get to know one another and dream about the project. Paul Westermeyer, Professor of Church Music at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, was an invited guest for the first meeting. He made two presentations to the committee about the current landscape of congregational song and the challenges that lie ahead. Also present as a guest was Melva Costen, Chair of the 1990 Presbyterian Hymnal Committee. Dr. Costen spoke to the committee about her experiences working on the current Presbyterian hymnal.

For the new Hymnal Committee the highlight of the first meeting was a service of commissioning that took place in the Presbyterian Center Chapel. Attended by almost 100, the service was led by Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) and Melva Costen. Paul Westermeyer was the preacher and Rhshell Hunter, Director of Racial Ethnic and Women's Ministries/

Presbyterian Women presided at the table.

The Hymnal Committee will now begin its work in earnest. One of the first items of business will be to develop a theological vision for the hymnal. Members of the committee volunteered to begin work in several areas of interest, giving due attention to the lectionary and the liturgical year.

The journey toward the next Presbyterian hymnal has begun. The Hymnal Committee treasures the prayers of the whole church that the work we are undertaking may help renew our congregations with worship that “offers a foretaste of the fullness of God’s Reign.”

For more information on the Presbyterian Hymnal project, go to: [www.presbyterianhymnal.org](http://www.presbyterianhymnal.org).

David Eicher  
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[deicher@presbypub.com](mailto:deicher@presbypub.com)



### INVITATION TO CHRIST: FONT AND TABLE



How do we welcome people into relationship with Jesus Christ while preserving the integrity of the covenant community? How do we nourish and sustain the life of the faithful members of Christ’s body, while whetting others’ appetites for a taste of God’s grace?

In 2006 the Sacraments Study Group of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) released *Invitation to Christ: Font and Table, A Guide to Sacramental Practices*. The study was written in response to a number of overtures to the General Assembly concerning participation in the Lord’s Supper—specifically, the question of whether people who are not baptized ought to be invited to the Lord’s Table. Determining that “the underlying issue which needs to be addressed is the relationship between baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” the Office of Theology and Worship agreed to facilitate a “full and substantive study of the sacraments both within the Reformed tradition and in the ecumenical context, in order to help the church discern the history and theology of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as well as their appropriate relationship” (*Invitation to Christ*, 8-9).

The ensuing study paper, *Invitation to Christ*, offers to the church a wealth of insight on the sacraments in an engaging and accessible form and resources for further study. The study includes:

- biblical material on the sacraments in the Old and New Testaments, as well as an overview of the biblical rationales for and against “open table” practice;
- historical background on the practice of the sacraments in the early church, the Medieval period, the Reformation, and the ecumenical Liturgical Movement;
- theological reflections on how the sacraments relate to our understanding of God, humanity, the covenant community, and the Christian life;
- consideration of the dynamic relationship between the sacraments and contemporary culture;
- questions for small group discussion and
- an extensive bibliography on sacramental theology and practice.

After all their research and conversation, the Sacraments

Study Group put forth an imaginative proposal. Rather than recommend a particular constitutional decision to the General Assembly, the group called the entire Presbyterian Church (USA) to a two-year period of intentional practice and reflection on the sacraments. Specifically, they invited churches to do five simple things:

- (1) Set the font in full view of the congregation.
- (2) Open the font and fill it with water on every Lord’s Day.
- (3) Set cup and plate on the Lord’s Table on every Lord’s Day.
- (4) Lead appropriate portions of weekly worship from the font and from the table.
- (5) Increase the number of Sundays on which the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.

The study group’s hope was that these practices would provoke deeper dialogue around the understanding and celebration of the sacraments in our denomination’s liturgical life.

Indeed, in the two years that have passed since the publication of *Invitation to Christ*, 543 congregations have responded to that call, with most pledging to take up some or all of the five recommended sacramental practices. It seems clear that a season of sacramental renewal is flourishing in our churches, with worshipers seeking to rediscover the meaning and mystery of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Office of Theology and Worship has set up a web site ([www.pcusa.org/sacraments](http://www.pcusa.org/sacraments)) to promote ongoing discussion of *Invitation to Christ*, where Presbyterians are eagerly sharing stories about sacramental life. An electronic newsletter related to the sacrament study has 592 subscribers. The study paper has been translated into Korean, and was distributed to all the participants at the 2008 Korean Worship and Music Conference, “Invitation to Christ: Baptism and the Christian Life.” Numerous conferences of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians related to sacramental themes are further indications of the impact *Invitation to Christ* has had in the Presbyterian Church.

Now a new phase of the study begins. As churches conclude the two-year period of sacramental practice and reflection, they will be encouraged to offer feedback on what they have learned and experienced through this time of discernment. Preparations are underway for a denominational survey of sacramental theology and practice in February 2009, through the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s Office of Research Services. The results of this second phase of the study, as well as recommendations for the future, will be presented at the 2010 General Assembly meeting in Minneapolis. As the process of discernment and research continues, the Office of Theology and Worship will develop a response to the presenting issue of who is invited to the Lord’s Table. In the meantime, it is encouraging to see the groundswell of enthusiasm and support for the renewal of our sacramental life.

To learn more about *Invitation to Christ*, visit [www.pcusa.org/sacraments](http://www.pcusa.org/sacraments), where you may download the study guide free of charge or order the printed publication for \$5.00.

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**NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN**  
*Contemporary Worship in a Mainline Church*  
(The first in a three part series)

**The Place**

First Presbyterian Church, Harrison, Arkansas is nestled in the heart of the Ozark Mountains. Harrison is the county seat of Boone County and the only place to buy provisions in the area. So Harrison is a busy place for a town of 13,000 but its mentality is definitely more smalltown than big city.

Some would say the locals in this area are “set in their ways”. Being a homegrown Arkansan, I would state that a little differently: where possible, we still hold on to the ways of our ancestors. Many of us can vegetables, smoke meats (much of which is wild game), and hunt and fish throughout the year. There are many people who can name most every plant that grows in the mountains as well as tell you their medicinal and/or culinary uses. There are four distinct seasons, of which fall is my favorite. However, that may be because it happens to be autumn as I write.

What is so amazing in this beautiful place, with its unique lifestyle, is the nearness of God’s sacred presence—as close as one’s breath. Beautiful mountain streams with gorgeous waterfalls, rivers with magnificent bluffs, deep hollows that are home to plants and animals that are as unique as the people, and a front porch hospitality that most always includes the breaking of bread and sharing of wine (or at least lemon ice box pie and sweet tea) are all part of everyday life.

**A Little Liturgical History**

As far as its liturgy, sacraments, and familial dynamics, this First Presbyterian Church could be anywhere in the United States. It was less than a decade ago that this church moved to monthly celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. Even then the practice and theology was, as Fred Anderson describes it, the Last Supper, not the Lord’s Supper, and definitely not the joyful feast of the people of God.

The table and font were pieces of furniture reserved for special occasions. These practices, or lack thereof, isolated the sacraments onto special days, into a special place (the sanctuary). Communion was a meal in the shadow of the cross, baptism wasn’t widely understood as a lifelong pilgrimage but as a self-contained event; and preaching was always the primary liturgical event.

Several years ago the church decided to begin a contemporary worship service. The motivation was to attract new members, especially younger people. The service was at 8:30 AM, in the fellowship hall, with breakfast provided. Music and preaching were the primary liturgical actions. Offering bowls were placed at the two entrances with signs designating them as such.

In the beginning there was no sign of water, wine, or bread save the occasional communion service. Words of songs, and the scripture lesson were projected onto a screen. Two years ago, when I first experienced this service, there was little or no advance planning by the praise band and—if there were any connections between the songs, scripture passage, and liturgical season—it was a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

With its power to shape and to form, the liturgy practiced in this congregation was fostering anemic sacramental practice and understanding. This was true for both their “traditional” and “contemporary” services. Save for the sermon, there was faint intentionality to make a connection between the liturgy and God’s presence in everyday life. That is to say, sacramental liv-

ing would be a new concept to this community. And this had to make sense to a people who lived in this environment, yet who had been shaped and formed by years of practice that rarely, if ever, made sacramental connections to the world outside the walls of the church.

**Making the Connection**

What I understood as the greatest challenge for this community was not isolated to a particular worship service, but much deeper. While folk in the Ozark Mountains realize that this is a special place with a special lifestyle, what is missing is the consciousness that this is fertile ground for a deeply sacramental life. How might we make connections with the water, word, wine and bread of the Lord’s Day assembly to everyday life in the Ozark Mountains.

My hope has been to deepen sacramental practices in our liturgy while making connections to the sacred mysteries that were already all around us. Liturgy, where God’s Spirit gives our sacramental life shape, substance and vision had to be coupled with a lot of reflection and education. The challenge was to educate while at the same time practicing a fuller expression of the liturgy both at 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m.

The words we use to describe the place where we live echo those in the Book of Deuteronomy. We say that this is the land God has given us, the land God swore to our ancestors, a land where we are stewards of sacred mysteries. And with sacramental eyes one can glimpse those things that remind us of God’s mysterious presence in the fog that fills the hollows in the morning, or the glow worms that light up the banks of creeks deep in the woods, late at night, this time of year.

After almost a year and a half of very intentional sacramental practice and education, many in this community, especially those of us whose soul dances with the mountain breezes, have begun to see this place is holy ground. Daily prayer, the liturgical year, and weekly sacramental practices became for us the practices that would introduce a new way of life in these mountains.

Our sacramental eyes are opened by God’s Spirit through the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine. The connections of the water that falls down the mountain to our baptism has to be made through water and words present each Sunday morning. The re-remembering (*anamnesis*) of the ancient stories (like Deuteronomy) with their connection to our lives, this land and our future are given meaning through the Holy Spirit not only in the sacraments but in the full liturgical expression of a sacred rhythm of life.

**Future Articles**

In the next two installments of this series I’ll discuss how this community moved to these deeper sacramental practices. Through this story of a specific place and time, I hope to encourage others to make similar connections in their locations. God’s mysterious presence grounds our lives, found both in the place where we live and in the Church catholic where we are all one, “Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body, for it is of one loaf of which we partake” (1 Cor 10: 17).

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## ASSOCIATION FOR REFORMED & LITURGICAL WORSHIP

Annual Report 2008



The Association for Reformed & Liturgical Worship (AR&LW), meeting on the campus of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, inaugurated the first year of its three-year plan focused on “how worship leaders are formed and to imagine how they might be.”

### Fifth Annual Meeting

In keeping with its commitment to continuing education in liturgical studies, AR&LW held its 2008 annual meeting in tandem with the Summer Scholars Week of the host seminary, July 28-30. The program, entitled, “Baptism and Eucharist: Ancient Practices in a Time of Renewal,” was presented by Samuel Torvend, Associate Professor of Religion, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington.

At the AR&LW meeting proper, July 30-August 1, forty-five members and friends, including fourteen seminary representatives, were present. In the business meeting, Gregg Mast, presiding member of the steering committee, announced that grants from several sources, and a contract with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, assure the \$45,000 budget needed to launch the three-year initiative, “To Strengthen the Church in Forming Leaders for Worship.”

The members reelected Gregg Mast as presiding member and Kimberly Bracken Long as assistant presiding member. Priscilla Kimery and Kerry Westerwick were elected to an additional term on the steering committee in the class of 2011. Gail Snodgrass, chair of the nominating committee, was recognized for five years of exemplary service on the steering committee. Martin Tel was appointed to fill her unexpired term. The newsletter and web site were reviewed and deep appreciation was expressed to those who make them possible.

The focus this year was the key covenant role played by seminaries in the formation of worship leaders, along with judicatories and local congregations. The second year of the initiative will turn to congregations and the third to the task of writing a report to be broadly shared.

Worship was central to the life of the gathering and guided by a Worship Book printed for the occasion and rich in ecumenical resources. From the incense of evening prayer, reflective of Psalm 141, to the abundant presence of light, water, the food of the holy table and the sacramental word of preaching, the gathering enacted in practice the ordo that it affirms.<sup>1</sup> The music, shepherded by Martin Tel, offered diverse treasures from ancient and contemporary sources. The high intentionality of preparation demonstrated by the leaders of worship brought dignity and humility together in acts, words and gestures making each service credibly the work of the people of God.

After her comprehensive keynote address, Kristin Saldine, Assistant Professor Homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, humorously asked why the story of AR&LW is not better known. In a panel discussion, she noted the excellence of the worship resources provided by the organization and suggested, as a “pun,” that maybe she and the group needed to form a “secret worship society with a coded password, t-shirt, identifying handshake and face book page to get the story told!” More seriously, she said of AR&LW, “I love the idea that it is already happening.”

### Ecumenical Guests

Three ecumenical guests participated fully in the gathering. In a panel discussion, Alan Detscher, a Roman Catholic priest, echoed the counsel of Kristin Saldine. “If you want to be effective,” he remarked, “you have to be seen, visible, linked with partners like your seminaries that are not your enemies!”

Todd Johnson, a member of the Evangelical Covenant Church and a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, raised concern about Reformed “identity.” He asked, in the light of ecumenical diversity in most seminaries, “how can Reformed renewal happen in the mixed identity context where formation takes place?”

Thomas Schattauer, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and professor at Wartburg Theological Seminary, asked for specifics. “What can seminaries do, beyond replicating what is already in place, in order to play into the change you envision?”

The minimal courses and programs of many seminaries, including denominational ones, for the formation of leaders of worship, raised difficult questions for the gathering. Consistently, this reality was faced not as an opportunity to blame or judge but as an invitation to cooperate in improving and expanding what is offered.

### What’s Next

Considerable work was done in small groups as a means to develop generative questions for future use. The steering committee will process the data and prepare succinct questions for the deliberation of regional cluster groups (8-12 persons) that are being formed throughout the nation. Kerry Westerwick, a member of the steering committee, is the coordinator of the cluster group process outlined in the three year plan. She invited names of persons who may respond favorably to an invitation to participate in a cluster group. For more information on the cluster groups go to: <http://arlw.worshiprenewal.googlepages.com>

<sup>1</sup> “Mission Statement.” AR&LW, 2004. <http://www.arlw.org>

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