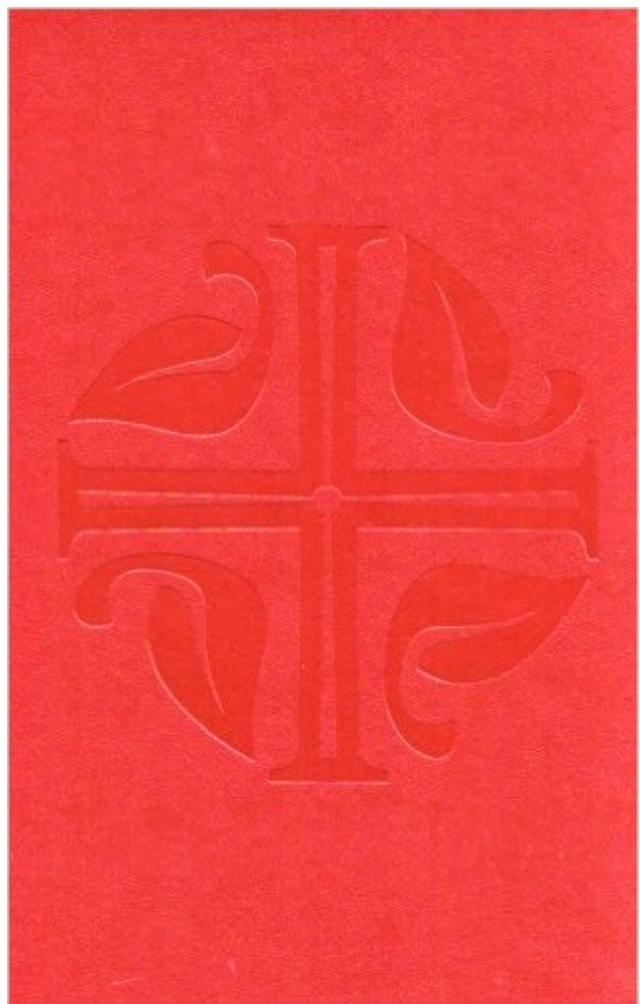


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Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pew Edition



Synopsis

Church hymnal

Book Information

Hardcover: 1211 pages

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Customer Reviews

I am not a musician and I can't read music, so I'll leave it to the more musically qualified to weigh in on the merits of the hymns and service settings in this new Lutheran worship resource. But I am a Lutheran, I love a sung service, and I enjoy singing hymns. Just published, Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) is intended to replace the Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW or "green book") published in 1978 which had been serving as the primary worship resource of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for the past two decades. What I like about ELW is its abundance of choices, its completeness, and its transparency. Unlike the LBW, this new resource is designed to facilitate private worship as effectively and fully as public worship. The section for the Propers for Sundays and Principal Festivals is clearly laid out, including for those Sundays beginning in Pentecost when churches have the option of pursuing "complementary" or "semicontinuous" Old Testament readings. Unlike the old, two-year Daily Lectionary, the Daily Lectionary in the ELW follows a three-year cycle, making it easier for the worshipers to integrate their private devotions with what the larger church is doing on Sundays. Another important improvement is the inclusion of all 150 Psalms, not just the "safe" or "polite" ones. The first piece of service music, which immediately follows the last Psalm, is numbered #151. This is significant. It is a way of reasserting the Psalter's rightful place as the Church's primary collection of worship music. The numbering

helps us remember that the Psalms are not to be treated as texts only. They pre-date the church, in fact, and from the beginning have served as important works of musical and spiritual expression. Also important for private devotions is the inclusion of Martin Luther's "Small Catechism" and a short article explaining the Scriptural basis of worship (where the precise verses are identified for all the key phrases that form the skeleton of our worship service). More than its predecessor, ELW gives the motivated Lutheran worshiper the chance to prepare ahead of time for Sunday worship, and to reflect upon it afterwards--a reminder that being a Christian is not just what we do, think, and say on Sunday. What I mean when I praise ELW's "transparency," is that those who prepared this volume have taken pains to explain why we worship the way we do, to present the logic and rationale behind the options available to us. Each section of the book is introduced with a brief explanation of what is being presented and what makes that element of worship noteworthy. Similarly, there is ample use of rubrics to call attention to worship options within the various settings and services. I even appreciate that they have added a footnote to the Nicene Creed to remind worshipers that the phrase "and the Son" is a later addition to the Creed. Even more so than the LBW, this hymnal is sensitive to the diversity of the church and demonstrates a sense of joy about embracing all lands and cultures. Likewise, it recognizes that the laity is capable and ready to take greater leadership in the "work" of the church; the text distinguishes between "presiding ministers" (i.e., ordained clergy) and "leaders" and "assisting ministers" in a way that is empowering rather than restrictive. I look forward to exploring the new settings for Communion as part of my Sunday worship. And I encourage all Lutherans to obtain a personal copy of ELW and begin using it as part of your personal devotions.

This review is of the pew edition of EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP, the "cranberry" red service book and hymnal compiled by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA, the largest Lutheran denomination in the USA) and first published in 2006 by the denominational publishing house, Augsburg Fortress. In my opinion much of it is excellent, but some of it has an uneven feel. On the plus side, along with the kind of German and other European entries one would expect in a Lutheran hymnal, and a full chanted Psalter, are a good representative sampling of American hymns, including "Rock of Ages," "Amazing Grace," "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," and "Leaning On the Everlasting Arms." (Also, "In the Bleak Midwinter" reappears after a long absence, having last been published in 1958's SERVICE BOOK AND HYMNAL.) Overall, worshipers won't find the wide range of vernacular tunes of, say, the CELEBRATION HYMNAL or the UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL, but there are enough to give the book a friendly ecumenical

feel. I do feel, though, that "Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer" (no. 668) is an unnecessary modernization of "Guide Me O, Thou Great Jehovah." The continued use of Taizé® chants and songs is welcome, as are new lyrics furnished by modern talents like Ruth Duck: no. 314, for example, her "Arise, Your Light Is Come," uses the same tune (FESTAL SONG) as the better-known "Rise Up, O Saints of God" at no. 669. A number of Norwegian and Swedish-origin hymns show the original-language lyrics (a good point) but do not indicate them as such (sloppy). I was sorry that the hymnal contains only three hymns captioned for Epiphany and that an obvious entry, "We Three Kings," does not appear among them. While most of the hymnal section is satisfying enough, there are aspects of the service-book portion of EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP that I find regrettable. Since the book gives full Lectionary cycles for years A, B, and C, and a schedule of minor festivals as well as major ones, would it have been asking too much to include a perpetual calendar of moveable feasts such as Easter? I also agree with the prior reviewers who found that, with ten communion settings, nos. three through ten require too much flipping back and forth to be complete. I am baffled by some of the pseudo-folk art that graces the pages of this book: such drawings are not a standard feature of church hymnals, much of it does not seem directly connected to the themes and topics it abuts, and some of it is truly ugly. The hardbound pew version is of good manufacture but the stitching could have been more pronounced. Warts and all, though, this EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP is enough of a welcome updating that I have no trouble assigning it four stars. However, congregations that are still making do with the old green LUTHERAN BOOK OF WORSHIP from 1978 can be forgiven their conservatism.

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