

New Hymnal - The Worship Project

LifeWay Worship Music Group Developing "Ultimate Worship Resource"

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- The landscape of church music has changed drastically since the release of the latest edition of The Baptist Hymnal in 1991. www.lifeway.com

<http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2Ca%25253d163426%252526m%25253d200917%2C00.html?>

While the beloved standards still resound in many churches, their words are more often splashed across giant screens than held hardbound in pews, and are often bracketed by electronic-fueled modern choruses.

LifeWay Worship Music Group of LifeWay Christian Resources is embracing the challenge of meeting the worship needs of churches by embarking on an innovative venture to couple an updated Baptist Hymnal with modern technology.

Dubbed The Worship Project, the endeavor consists of two components, the first being a downloadable audio hymn and worship song repository from which an updated, hardbound Baptist Hymnal will be drawn.

"Every 15 years or so we have produced a hymnal," said Mike Harland, who took the director's chair at LifeWay Worship Music Group in 2005. "When I arrived at LifeWay, I knew one of the first questions we would need to begin asking is 'What's the next Baptist Hymnal going to look like?' We are convinced God is doing something special through LifeWay Worship Music Group."

A history of hymnody

In researching the needs of churches, Harland said the overarching question was whether the usage of hymns was still prevalent enough to warrant a new hymnal. "From my experience as a worship leader in churches and from talking to worship ministers across the denomination, the answer is yes, we need a new collection of hymns," he said.

Almost 70 percent of Baptist churches describe their worship services as having a blend of contemporary and traditional hymns, Harland said. Hymns are used in 90 percent of the churches and 45 percent claim that lack of musicians is the biggest challenge to their music ministry.

"As we looked at what vehicle we needed to deliver this music resource, it was obvious that it needed to be electronic," Harland said. "Looking at what the '91 hymnal cost, we realized we could record this project for not much more. After all, everything we do in print today is done digitally. No hymnal has ever been recorded, so this represents a revolutionary step for church worship music."

Music tools for the church

LifeWay Worship Music Group's plan "is for an online hymnal with an initial collection of 1,000 recorded titles that will be available at the launch of the project in 2008," Harland said. He added that at least 100 songs will be added to the collection each year, making it "ultimately, the last hymnal anyone will need as we will constantly be updating the repository."

At the heart of the project will be the second component, a worship planner available through an online portal at LifeWayWorship.com
<<http://www.lifeway.com/common/clickthru/0,1603,Link%253D232441,00.html?X=/article/?id=164819>>.

"We're putting tools in the hands of our carpenters," Harland said. "They'll be able to search for songs by theme, Scripture or topic. They'll have everything they need to build a complete worship experience." With the majority of Southern Baptist churches having lean staffs and less than 100 members, "pastors are often the ones arranging everything. This project will help their process immensely."

The Worship Project Web site will be a perfect tool for small churches without musicians and for larger churches needing complex arrangements as well as for overseas missionaries without access to music and instrumentation, Harland added.

Because The Worship Project is not stylistically driven or geared to one size of ministry or location, "We will preserve the best of our past hymnody, and we will use technology to build a bridge to the gifted and anointed writers in the church today," Harland said.

"Pastors will love this because it gives them a tool in their hands to plan worship and find resources," he said. "They'll be equipped just as well as a huge church with a full orchestra. Anyone at any level will be able to utilize this. We even envision missionaries on foreign fields - who don't readily have access to music resources - utilizing this resource."

This will be the "ultimate worship resource that is as stylistically diverse as church music is today," Harland said. "There's nothing like it. People have thought of different aspects of it, and have produced various components, but no one has had the wherewithal to undertake this type of commitment to worship. Not only is LifeWay capable, but we are willing and excited about this."

In Nashville, Harland said arrangers and composers are already preparing for the launch of the recording project, which will be felt across the industry. "Think about it," he said. "In the next 10 months we will be recording 1,000 songs. This is going to be one of the biggest - if not the biggest - recording projects ever done."

"Because of the Internet, "the shelf life of today's music is shorter than it's ever been," Harland said. "We will make music available in virtually any format that it's needed."

Whether a staff of a large church or leading a small home group, we are seeing that more and more are buying their music and arrangements through the Internet."

Through the online portal, The Worship Project will offer options with the recordings of the songs, such as traditional hymns recorded in a variety of styles, Harland described.

"LifeWay Christian Resources is the one resource provider that is equipped with the corporate strength and commitment to make this a reality," Harland said. LifeWay's President and CEO Thom S. Rainer agreed, telling the organization's trustees during a recent semiannual meeting that this project represents a "blue ocean" of ministry and business to which the organization needs to steer to meet the needs of churches.

Harland said LifeWay Worship Music Group is already in an "aggressive production process" and the first portion of the project - the printed hardbound hymnal - will release in the second half of 2008, with the debut of the digital portal following shortly after.

For more information about the Worship Project, visit LifeWay's website: **The Worship Project About Russ Rankin** <http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D164819%252526M%25253D200735%2C00.html?emid=390> russ.rankin@lifeway.com <http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D164819%252526M%25253D200735%2C00.html?emid=390>