

## MERCER UNVEILS TITLE AND SCOPE OF NEW BAPTIST HYMNAL

**ATLANTA** — More than 50 Baptist pastors, church musicians, composers, scholars and laymen from across the United States and Canada gathered at Mercer University's Atlanta campus Feb. 1-2 to begin fine tuning a new Baptist hymnal. Scheduled for release in 2009, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Baptists, the hymnal is a collaborative initiative of the Townsend-McAfee Institute Graduate Studies in Church Music at Mercer and the Mercer University Press.

During the opening session, the editorial committee unveiled the official title of the hymnal: *Celebrating Grace: Hymnal for Baptist Worship*.

"We want all Baptists to feel connected to this hymnal," said Dr. John E. Simons, coordinating editor of the project and director of the Townsend-McAfee Institute Graduate Studies in Church Music at Mercer University. "Grace is part of what it is to be a Baptist, to be a Christian. For all of our differences, grace is a point of common ground among all of us."

The three-year project has purposefully taken a grass-root approach to developing and designing the hymnal in order to be inclusive of all Baptists and to be open to new ideas for meeting the resource needs of churches.

"We began this project from ground level, without a predetermined agenda," said Dr. Milburn Price, an editor of the project and a retired dean of the School of Performing Arts at Samford University. "We have brought together creative minds, and we are listening to what is being said. The project will benefit greatly from this process."

The men and women participating in this project include nationally and internationally recognized authorities in hymnology in North America. "They are contributing their knowledge and talents to making this new hymnal the finest music and worship resource available to churches," said J. Thomas McAfee III, president and chairman of Hallmark Systems, who serves as the project chair. "We are all Baptists, and while we may not always agree, many want to come together on this and make it work."

Broad in scope and supportive of Baptist patterns of worship, the hard-bound hymnal will be published for congregational use, yet will provide planning and supplemental resources (printed and online) for church worship leaders. It will include traditional hymns, congregational songs, scripture songs, worship readings, and extensive indices. Organized in a user-friendly manner, the hymnal will feature expanded sections on such topics as baptism, the Lord's Supper, family, Advent Lent, Easter, corporate worship, and praise.

A core collection of 145 hymns has been selected for the hymnal through a survey of ministers of music across the country. To add to the core collection, committee members are reviewing and evaluating new music and hymns submitted for the hymnal. The total collection is expected to include 600 to 650 hymns, plus online resources.

"A clear distinction of this hymnal project is the new collection it will offer," said Dr. Price. "It is like no other at this time."

A distinction of this hymnal will be the combination of printed and online resources for worship and ministry. The first of their kind, these comprehensive companion resources will provide worship planning tools, responsive readings and litanies, as well as the history of the hymns and information on the composers and authors. It will have searchable detailed and Biblical indices. Printed supplemental musical arrangements, such as for piano and organ, instrumental and orchestral, and descants and codas of varying difficulties, will be available online for immediate purchase and download.

"This online resource is a vast untapped area. No one is offering the depth and breath of information and materials we have planned," said Dr. Stanley L. Roberts, an editor and director of Choral Activities at Townsend School of Music at Mercer University. "Churches of all sizes will benefit from having this tremendous addition to the hymnal."

For more information on the Celebrating Grace Hymnal for Baptist Worship, contact Dr. John E. Simons at [simons\\_je@mercer.edu](mailto:simons_je@mercer.edu) or (478) 301-2748.

