

Inside This Issue

Text, Music, and Context

“Text, music, and context” is the chosen theme for the May 2026 issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters*, the journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, now in the thirty-third year of publication. Professor James Marriott of Concordia University Texas, an expert in the field of church music with years of experience as a pastor, conductor, organist, and professor, served as special issue editor. The editorial committee is grateful to Dr. Marriott for proposing this theme of contemporary relevance to the mission and ministry of the church and for bringing together competent authors and preparing this issue for publication.

This issue includes several research essays, mission observers, and presentations at the 2026 Multiethnic Symposium held on the campus of Concordia Seminary St. Louis on May 5 and 6. The journal is privileged also to include a summary of the presentation by the Rev. Aaron Putnam and Rev. Dawit Bokre, speakers at the LSFM Banquet on May 4. Under the topic “New Life Through New Leaders: A Vision for Replanting in a Changing Culture,” Putnam and Bokre lay bare the fact that many Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations are fading as they fail to recognize the changes taking place in their own immediate neighborhoods. Using Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Hayward, California, as an example, Putnam and Bokre stress the importance of appreciating the new generation of immigrants who navigate life between two worlds of faith and culture. They are a gift God has sent to our shores as a new mission opportunity, people who have gifts and abilities that may revitalize existing congregations. The full video of the presentation is available on the LSFM Website (<https://www.lsfm.global/>).

The major essays inside this issue interpret worship and worship styles, their composition and performance, and their effectiveness in communicating the gospel message in meaningful ways.

Editor James Marriott’s essay on Context as a framework for analyzing text and music has the goal of equipping worship leaders and congregations to make their own assessment of worship materials. Marriott posits that the intercultural dialogue that music fosters within the LCMS and the church at large acknowledges a subjectivity of perspective. This dialogue promotes diversity and encourages unity, acknowledging that uniformity is not a required norm. Musical forms in the service of the gospel must be framed with an understanding of context and culture to benefit those who participate in Christian worship.

The Marriott essay is followed by Robert Kolb’s substantive essay on Martin Luther’s appreciation of music as an essential of culture. In fact, Luther calls music “mistress and governess of human emotions.” Lutherans must therefore interact with the varieties of cultures, music, and liturgy so that they serve as a bridge for worshipers to connect directly with the God we worship. Kolb goes on to explain culture as God’s

creation where “the combination of God’s gifts of time and place constructs the setting in which each one of us experiences all His other gifts.” [This essay was a part of a keynote presentation at the Seminary’s Multiethnic Symposium.]

Veteran missionary, seminary professor, and anthropologist Greg Klotz contends that worship behaviors are present in *all* human activity. Rites and rituals are common cultural objects, and all languages capture and achieve transcendence in the sphere of the natural knowledge of God. With a clear Lutheran theological perspective, Klotz examines the structural nature of, and the ontological need for, ritual worship as a human phenomenon (anthropology) used to transcend mundane earthly existence, as part of an innate quest for an in-depth understanding of the Creator (theology) who is also the Redeemer of the whole cosmos. In his words, “a Lutheran framework illuminates the anthropology of worship as both diagnostic of the Fall and prescriptive of redemption, underscoring mission as the restoration of created relationality.”

Sally Messner asserts that a common lectionary helps to unite all Christians in worship as a common witness before the church and world. Liturgical worship connects the worshiping community to the larger biblical story and energizes worshipers to bear witness boldly to the one Gospel. Luther has observed that if Scriptures are the cradle where Christ is laid, then liturgy is the nursery.

This issue then turns to the work of Samuel Deressa, a faculty member at Concordia University St. Paul, and a member of this Journal’s editorial committee. He writes on “Singing the Gospel,” illustrating how storytelling through song is an effective way of communicating the truth of the Gospel. Deressa’s observations report his research in his native Ethiopia, analyzing Oromo oral traditions. Songs are highly significant in Oromo culture. In a culture rooted deeply in the past, the Oromo use storytelling songs, both secular and religious, to maintain their cultural identity. This cultural medium was quickly adapted by Oromo Christians to spread the gospel in the early years of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia.

Another example from the Global South, is Marcell Silva Steuernagel’s work examining how the role of the composer is essential for the life of the church today to give Christians a voice in their own time and place. In this research essay, the author demonstrates the ongoing need for hymn writing with attention to context for successful Gospel communication. Steuernagel enables readers to see the community (congregation) as a living organism that responds in real time and is in constant dialogue with the music during its worship experience, making music and liturgy relevant and worship meaningful.

The Mission Observers section shows examples of how diversity of music and worship style depend on the investigation of context both in the United States and in faraway lands. Music is an expression of heart language. The people of God make use of this unique gift to always sing to the Lord a new song (Ps 33:3).

At the Multiethnic Symposium, Zank and Preston from the Center for Worship Leadership (CWL) at Concordia University Irvine presented various ways to assist worship planners in the careful selection and integration of songs and liturgies,

tradition, and innovation as a matter of confession and faith formation. In this article, they introduce Weave as a tool to aid worship leaders in tracking and selecting appropriate music to fit a certain time and place.

David Mennicke, professor and choir master, leads the reader on a global experience with his team as it bears witness to Jesus Christ in the world—including Minnesota and distant countries. Their message shares the spirit of reconciliation, racial integration, healing and hope, even for those suffering the threat of deportation. Mennicke shows that under the cross of Christ, music has the power to inform and transform lives, to unite in hope, love, and peace. Church musicians have been given these gifts of music, people, and faith. With those gifts, guided by the Spirit, we can join in Christ's mission to the world.

Adam Fosse, who serves with the Mission of Christ Network, observes that music in the mission of the Gospel is a divine gift to beautify the proclamation of God's Word, facilitate its retention, and amplify human response to all the blessings of Christ. In Christian communities, this unique gift must be utilized fully in the service of the gospel. He suggests that Christian people can appreciate the diversity of meaningful musical expressions of faith which are found through investigation of our human contexts.

Miriam and Richard Carter served as volunteers in Mongolia, and they reflect on three main areas of Lutheran and Christian mission in Mongolia: the work of foreign missionaries, the life of new believers and ministry workers, and the blessings that come with ministry in Mongolia. They show that Christian mission in the present generation is mainly one of partnership and encouraging local leaders to take ownership of Christ's mission to reach people and celebrate the new life God offers for all.

We conclude this issue with the homily that Dean of Ministerial Formation at Concordia Seminary, Professor Timothy Saleska, preached at the Theological Diploma Service at the seminary May 17, 2026. Saleska's text was John 16:23–33, and the message focused on the centrality of Jesus' love in all we do as His people, serving others in word and deed. In a world which is in desperate need of the love God lavished upon all people in Jesus Christ, His people must show love and proclaim the love of God as the gospel message in our present world.

Sharing the love of God for all in Jesus Christ in the service of the Gospel is the overall theme of *Lutheran Mission Matters*, and this issue focuses on the role of music in that task. We pray the essays, presentations, and mission observers represent that theme as we grow in faith and share the one true faith throughout the world.

Victor Raj, Editor