



SPACE TO GROW

The **Worship Greenhouse** helps Covenant worship leaders connect.

Liz Mosbo VerHage

Are you a worship leader or songwriter looking for refreshing and solidly “Covenant” songs for your church? Would you like to know more about a Taizé style prayer service or see an example of how to structure a service of humbling and lament? Or maybe you have questions about copyright laws or where to go on the web to boost your church’s worship resources. Then visit the Covenant Worship Greenhouse, a website dedicated to developing Covenant worship leaders and resources. (To reach the Greenhouse, log onto www.covchurch.org and go to “Resources.”)

The initial framework of the Worship Greenhouse was created by Andrew Thompson, who recently graduated from North Park Theological Seminary. The idea was to encourage Covenanters to create new worship resources that reflect the Covenant’s theology. The site features original submissions and practical worship helps

submitted by Covenanters throughout North America. It also allows contributors to critique worship resources and offer suggestions for improvement.

“The Worship Greenhouse is meant to be like a garden nursery,” says Thompson. “There are many ideas planted—some ideas may need to be pruned substantially before they can grow; others ideas will thrive. It’s a safe place where Covenant worship artists can share what God has laid on their hearts—and a place where the community can affirm their work, as well as play a role in shaping it further.”

Thompson, who has been called to start a church plant in Wenatchee, Washington, is a songwriter, pianist, vocalist, and performer who has published six contemporary Christian music albums. He has also focused on helping congregations worship and on encouraging Covenanters to create and develop their own resources for that purpose.

“Worship is the primary task of the church,” says Thompson. “Therefore,

encouraging quality in corporate worship should be among our highest values. Developing a lay accessible worship resource website encourages our churches to become increasingly deliberate in pursuing excellence in this area.”

The website is meant for churches and Covenanters at all levels of worship planning and/or song writing. On the “Idea Exchange” page, visitors can participate in forums discussing questions like how to lead worship for a small group, or join a “worship planners” or “songwriters” email group. The “Articles” page contains reflections on worship as pastoral care, Trinitarian worship, interviews with musicians, information on copyright laws, and a beginner’s guide to online worship resources. A “Readings” page includes prayers of confession, calls to worship, and a thematic listing of the psalms. The “Service Planning Resources” page contains suggestions for how to plan specific services for Easter, Advent, or how to hold a Taizé style prayer service using material in the Covenant hymnal.

About fifty original worship songs are listed on the “Songs” page, with details such as theme, mood, Scripture reference, contact information for the author, lyrics, and downloadable sheet music (sometimes in multiple keys), for each song. There are also audio samples of songs that range from upbeat with driving percussion, to meditative harmonies with a simple guitar backgrounds—and all are Covenant in their theology, says Thompson.

“Since the time of its formation, the Covenant’s unique distinctives and values have been seen very clearly through its hymns,” says Thompson. “Just as early songwriters like [Carl Olof] Rosenius and [Lina] Sandell actively shaped the Covenant by publishing and sharing hymns among conventicle groups, today we can share local church worship resources that reflect our beliefs and heritage via electronic, print-

ed, and recorded mediums that reflect our beliefs and heritage.”

And Thompson sees worship music as a “concrete way” that congregations express their theology. “If a congregation sings a song over and over during the year,” he says, “the words of that song and the content that it is sung will impress certain priorities on the congregation.”

This motivation to view worship resources as theology affects how Thompson crafts his own worship songs as well. “I try to use plural pronouns in my songs to reflect how tied to community we Covenanters are, instead of just focusing on individualized faith,” says Thompson. “We also

need worship songs that engage the whole person. If we only sing about positive, happy times of faith then we come to believe that we can only communicate to God with happy language—but what about the Psalms? Songs of doubt and songs of pain are also part of our walk.”

Paul Lessard, founder of the Worship Center at Covenant Bible College-Midwest, says that Thompson’s emphasis on theology in worship songs “is critical.”

“Currently, all the attention seems to be on music in worship—and for some music is synonymous with worship,” says Lessard, who recently joined the staff of Hope Covenant Church in Strathmore, Alberta. “But the particular means of expression will fade in importance as has happened before us and our particular myopia. To that end we do well to have worship teams and congregations that understand the

intent of worship, God’s hopes for us, and how it is that people truly encounter God.”

Though Thompson has been writing and performing since he was in high school and has recorded six albums, in recent years he has focused specifically on worship leading. “My primary musical identity is as a worship leader,” he says. “So I think about how music can engage a community in worship and how it can provide language for a congregation.”

Three key questions have shaped the Worship Greenhouse, says Thompson. They are: What makes for good, authentic worship? How can we be faithful to the gospel and the tradition

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while at the same time be authentic to the church community and our own cultural context? How do our Covenant distinctives affect that way we plan and engage in worship?

These questions, Thompson says, “free us up to talk

more about quality than marketability. We can think more about ‘What is good?’ instead of just ‘What will sell?’ because it is built to serve a very specific community.”

“It is important to realize that local churches are increasingly being defined by their worship style,” he says. “Worship is a hot topic for both discussion and division in our churches. It is therefore important that we equip local leaders, both clergy and lay, to thoughtfully address worship issues.” □

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