

COMMUNICATING CHRIST VISUALLY: UTILIZING GRAPHIC DESIGN IN MINISTRY

BY

PHILIP J. WALDSCHMIDT

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ABSTRACT

Graphic Design is both an art form and a means of communication. It is a tool that both pastors and laypeople can utilize in the fields of worship, education, and evangelism. How can we communicate our message to members and visitors with the tools of graphic design that we have before us? How can we enable our members with opportunities to serve their Lord with their unique gifts and abilities? This thesis will demonstrate that it is beneficial for pastors to have a general, working knowledge of graphic design so that they can understand how graphic design can communicate their message and impact their ministry. I will give a history of graphic design through the lens of three design elements: imagery, color, and typography. I will then explore the blessings and challenges of utilizing graphic design using case studies of churches and organizations within the WELS. Finally, I will offer advice for implementing graphic design techniques in ministry, as they apply to pastors and laypeople skilled in graphic design.

INTRODUCTION

“He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers.” (Exod 35:35)¹ The construction of the tabernacle was a huge undertaking, not just from an architectural standpoint, but also from an artistic standpoint. It required the work of many different hands weaving and welding and hammering into place. However, God did not leave the job entirely to Moses. He equipped Moses with men and women who were willing and whose hearts had been moved to pitch in and help. God gave Moses two men in particular, Bezalel and Oholiab, who were equipped with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, and with all kinds of skills (Exod 35:33). Today, God not only gives us a physical space to build and design, but also a digital space, an online platform for ministry. One of the tools he gives us to beautify both of those spaces is graphic design. God does not leave pastors empty-handed either, but instead gives us skilled graphic designers, people who are willing and able to help us. How can we enable the Bezalels and Oholiab in our congregations with the opportunity to glorify God with their gifts?

Graphic design is an art form that is necessary in a world that is becoming more and more digital and visual. In an environment so heavily saturated with advertisements and social media content, people have come to expect a certain standard of production value in the information we process visually. I believe that the same standard is set for the church. We decorate our sanctuaries with beautiful banners, wreaths, and candles. We commission artists to carve intricate altars, pulpits, lecterns, and baptismal fonts out of wood and stone. Incredible stained-

1. All Scripture references will be from the NIV.

glass windows line the walls of the church, each one telling stories of the Old and New Testament in simple, visual ways. We as a church take great care cleaning the sanctuary, decorating it according to the seasons of the church year, and making sure it looks nice for the members and for any visitors that might come in. Are we putting the same amount of effort into making our digital space look presentable as we are with the physical space? What can we do to serve our members and visitors with the tools of graphic design that we have before us?

Not only does graphic design make your website and social media look presentable, but it is also a tool for communication. How can we communicate our message simply and clearly? Are there ways that a graphic or image could convey truth in a way that verbal communication cannot? What visual barriers are preventing people from digesting the information being taught? Could it be that the text is simply too small to be legible, or that your slide has both a dark text and a dark background? Although these details may seem small and insignificant, they could be holding learners back from a fuller and more effective learning experience.

The work of graphic design does not just fall on the Bezalels and Oholiab's of our day. So much of what a pastor does deals with graphic design in one way or another. Admittedly, some graphic design projects may be out of the pastor's hands because he has neither the tools nor the time to do the job. He is not professionally trained in graphic design. He probably does not have access to intricate software programs like Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator. On top of that, there are dozens of other things on the to-do list calling for his attention. But if we look at graphic design as a means of communication, every Bible class handout, every bulletin, every worship slide or Bible class PowerPoint involves graphic design to a certain degree. With that being said, how much should a pastor know about graphic design? How involved should he be in creating

and updating the graphic design of his church? What work can he delegate to the skilled graphic designers he has available to him?

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that it is beneficial for a pastor to have a general, working knowledge of graphic design so that he can better understand how graphic design communicates the message of the Church and impacts its ministry. First, I will give a historical overview of graphic design in the Church through the lens of three design principles; imagery, color, and typography. Then, I will explore the benefits and challenges of utilizing graphic design in ministry through case studies of different mission churches and established congregations within the WELS. Finally, I will offer advice for utilizing graphic design techniques in ministry, as they apply to pastors and laypeople skilled in graphic design.

What Is Graphic Design?

In her article “The 8 Types of Graphic Design,” Mila Jones Cann defines graphic design as “the creation of visual compositions to solve problems and communicate ideas through typography, imagery, color, and form.”² Those four components are tools in the designer’s work belt to compose art that is expressive and communicative. Graphic design helps to engage consumers or learners, promote creativity and innovation, and streamline information in a simplified way.

There are four areas of graphic design that specifically influence and affect a church's ministry: visual identity design, user interface design, marketing and advertising design, and publication design. These areas of Graphic design are practical tools that contribute to the disciplines of worship, education, and evangelism. Some graphic design work will naturally fall

2. Mila Jones Cann, “The 8 Types of Graphic Design,” 99designs, June 4, 2018, <https://99designs.com/blog/tips/types-of-graphic-design/>.

on the pastor as he generates materials for his congregation, other work he will rightfully delegate to someone more skilled in that area.

Visual identity design deals with the logo and branding of a church. A church's brand identity is what makes it distinct and recognizable to anyone who looks them up online or drives past the church's location. According to Deanna deBara, a company's brand is "made up of a few key elements: your mission (what's your 'why?'), your values (what beliefs drive your company?), your brand personality (if your brand was a person, what kind of personality would they have?), your unique positioning (how do you differentiate yourself from the competition?), and your brand voice (if your brand was a person, how would it communicate?)."³ Before a church forms a visual identity, it is important that the mission, goals, and core beliefs of the church are firmly established. In order to communicate the key elements mentioned by deBara, a church may include a meaningful logo, their name, and a slogan in their visual identity. The color scheme and typography incorporated in the visual identity also assist in communicating the mission and personality of the church.

User interface design involves the look and functionality of a website or app. According to Jones Cann, "UI design is the process of designing interfaces to make them easy to use and provide a user-friendly experience."⁴ Website design deals with the menu buttons or color scheme developed by a template. The pictures used and the information displayed also play a key role in the user experience. While other fields of graphic design have been utilized by churches for years pre-internet, user interface design is a relatively new field for both mission and established churches. Often visitors will google a church or check out their website before they

3. Deanna deBara, "What Is Brand Identity? And How to Develop a Great One.," 99designs, February 12, 2022, <https://99designs.com/blog/tips/brand-identity/>.

4. Jones Cann, "The 8 Types of Graphic Design."

even step foot into the physical threshold of the sanctuary. Are those online visitors greeted by user interface that is easy to use and understand? Are they able to easily find all the information they need to learn about the church and its ministry, like service times and church location? Can members and visitors alike use this website for a variety of purposes?

Postcards, business cards, ads, brochures, banners, PowerPoint presentations, and social media content all fall under the umbrella of marketing and advertising design.⁵ Churches use marketing and advertising design to invite the community to events, distribute information about the church, or expand on the core values that appear in their visual identity. With the rise of screens in worship and the classroom, good graphic design in PowerPoint is becoming more and more important.

Publication design involves anything with lots of information, designed for public distribution. In order to ensure an effective and engaging reading experience, publication designers must pay close attention to things like typography and layout. The synod at large works with publication design in the books and magazines they produce through Northwestern Publishing House, but individual congregations may also utilize this field of graphic design in the newsletters, annual reports, directories, and sermons they publish and distribute. Jones Cann writes, “Publication designers must possess excellent communication, layout and organizational skills. In addition to graphic design expertise, they need to understand color management, printing and digital publishing.”⁶

5. Jones Cann, “The 8 Types of Graphic Design.”

6. Jones Cann, “The 8 Types of Graphic Design.”

PART I: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: A HISTORY OF GRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE CHURCH

Imagery

The Church has always had a special care and concern for graphic design, especially when it comes to three elements of design: imagery, color, and typography. Research in shape psychology shows that shapes have a subconscious effect on emotions and understanding. For example, squares in graphic design help convey stability, reliability, and strength. Circles often symbolize lightness, happiness, and eternity. Organic shapes convey freedom, flow, and unpredictability. Use these shapes together and with purpose, imagery and symbolism are made. Visual symbolism in liturgical art has gone hand in hand with preaching and teaching in worship. In his book, *Christian Worship: God Gives His Gospel Gifts*, Johnold Strey comments on the appeal that Lutheran worship has on both the cognitive and affective sides of the brain:

The words of worship proclaim biblical truths and teachings about sin, forgiveness, the triune God, the work of Christ, and the power of the means of grace. The symbolism of worship in music, ceremony, and art impresses those same truths to us in a way that touches our emotions. As words and symbols are used side-by-side in public worship, we avoid the extremes of an overly intellectual church service on one hand and an exclusively emotional spiritual experience on the other.⁷

Imagery plays a key role in graphic design, not only because they appeal to the affective side of our brain, but because they are often used as subtle, yet effective communicative tools.

7. Johnold J. Strey, *Christian Worship: God Gives His Gospel Gifts* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2021), 203.

Jonny Levanier writes, “Shapes are the building blocks of everything we see, and the meaning of shapes speaks fundamentally to how we understand our world. They are so universal most visual artists first learn how to draw through construction or breaking down images into basic geometry. But shapes are more than just practical, constructive tools: their meanings are what allow designers to communicate visually.”⁸

Our brains are conditioned to act or feel instinctively when we see a certain shape or symbol. For example, how does the sight of an eight-sided polygon have us putting our foot on the brake without really even processing it? How does the skull and crossbones in a triangle have us backing away from whatever is ahead? Somewhere along the way, we were taught what those symbols meant and now it has become second nature to see those symbols and act accordingly. Shapes and symbols are not only an integral part of our surroundings out in the world, but also the church and home. How can two perpendicular lines, one longer than the other, have such deep meaning for Christians? How can three equal interlocking circles remind us of the eternal and equal nature of the triune God? Whether it’s a symbol as simple as the *Ichthus* fish or as ornate as the *Agnus Dei*, our minds learn to draw meaning from the symbols that the Church uses to communicate truth.

History of Christian Symbolism

The Christian Church has historically regarded visual symbolism as important for several purposes. From the time of the Early Church Fathers to the era of rich Medieval religious art, symbols have been used as communication in the sanctuary and the home. In his book *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, Thomas Stafford explains that the Reformation took the

8. Jonny Levanier, “The Meaning of Shapes in Design,” 99designs, May 10, 2021, <https://99designs.com/blog/tips/meaning-of-shapes/>.

Protestant Church in two different directions when it came to Christian art and symbolism: those in the Calvinistic camp who chose to rid themselves of most of the rituals and art of the Church prior, and the Lutherans who saw the value in “venerable ecclesiastical forms and symbols which in their judgment were not inconsistent with the Reformed confession of faith.”⁹ Luther warned against fanatical image breakers and made it clear that he did not condemn proper worship in the Church. In his writing *An Order of Mass and Communion*, Luther writes, “It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use.”¹⁰ Symbolism, when used in a way that glorifies God instead of distracting from him, beautifies worship and aides in instruction.

According to Ernest Fremont Tittle, the various symbols of the church served a motivational and pedagogical purpose. “In the early Church, during the dark centuries of persecution, symbols of the resurrection and the life everlasting helped to mightily maintain morale. In subsequent periods, the Church’s teaching and worship inspired the making of other symbols to bring Christian ideas home to the minds and hearts of men.”¹¹ Whether reminding people under persecution of the hope found in Christ or teaching important scriptural truths in a visual way, symbols served for the benefit of the people, as well as the church at large.

The Early Christian Church used symbolism not only for education and motivation but also to identify themselves in subtle ways under the heavy hand of Roman persecution. Stafford notes, “The fish symbol was probably used by the persecuted Christians as a means of avoiding

9. Thomas A. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 1st Edition (London: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1942), 7. Ernest Fremont Tittle wrote the introduction to this book.

10. Martin Luther, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther 1520-1523*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, First Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967), 384.

11. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 23.

unpleasant attention of the Roman police. When displayed outside a pagan home, it indicated that a funeral banquet was being held for the dead, but when it appeared outside a Christian home, it was a sign that the Lord's Supper would be celebrated there, at night, in secret."¹²

Another place for finding early Christian symbolism was often at burial sites and catacombs, as Stafford explains. "In the catacombs of Rome and other ancient Italian cities, some of the earliest symbols of our Lord may be found. These underground passages contain a vast number of niches that were used as burial vaults. On the slabs of stone or marble used to seal the niches containing the remains of Christians, it was customary to place Christian symbols and inscriptions."¹³

The Meaning of Christian Symbols

The following section is an explanation of the various symbols frequently used by the church throughout the centuries in its liturgical art, along with any possible ties to Scripture. Some symbols are still widely employed by the Western Church in the 21st century. Others have fallen into antiquity but nevertheless, convey scriptural truth. This is not an exhaustive list, but it does include many of the significant symbols used in art and worship.

Representing God the Father

God the Father is often represented by the *Manus Dei*, a hand emerging from a nimbus cloud, arrayed with three rays going out from it. Sometimes the hand is open, otherwise, it may appear with the thumb and first two fingers extended as a sign of blessing (Num 6:24). The hand extended conveys God's providence (Matt 5:45), while the cloud may allude to his dwelling

12. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 38.

13. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 36.

place in heaven (Ps 115:3), or his guidance for the people of Israel in a pillar of cloud (Ex 13:21). Another symbol for God is the Hebrew letter *yod*, the first letter in *Yahweh*, enclosed in an equilateral triangle, representing the trinity.¹⁴ He may also be depicted as the Ancient of Days, as in Daniel 7:9-10.

Representing God the Son

God the Son is represented in a number of ways. Most commonly, the *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God, is presented in Christian art as a symbol of Christ (John 1:29, Rev 5). The *Agnus Dei* is often seen laying on the Book of Seven Seals or standing and carrying the Banner of Victory. Similar to the *Manus Dei*, the head of the *Agnus Dei* is also surrounded by the three rays going out from it.

As mentioned, the *Ichthus* symbol was used by early Christians to identify places where the Lord's Supper was being celebrated. *Ichthus*, the Greek word for "fish," stands for *Iesous Christos Theou Huios Soter*, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." Stafford writes, "Tertullian, in his treatise on baptism, linking the symbol of salvation (a fish) and the symbol of baptismal rebirth (water) says, 'we are little fish, and like our Fish, Jesus Christ, we are born in water, and we are not safe in any other way than by remaining in the water.'¹⁵ Still today, the *Ichthus* is one of the most popular symbols of Christianity, second to the cross.

Another animal representation of Christ is the *Pelican-in-her-piety*. This pelican symbol gained popularity in the liturgical art of the Medieval age, although it had been previously

14. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 35.

15. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 39.

mentioned by Saint Augustine,¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas,¹⁷ and the author of the early Christian book, *the Physiologus*.¹⁸ In Medieval art, it is often featured in scenes of Christ's passion. During times of food scarcity, the pelican was believed to have torn a hole in her breast to feed her young with her blood. Whether or not this is true, the pelican serves as a reminder of Christ's atoning sacrifice (Heb 9:11-14) and the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:28).

In her book, *A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art*, Gertrude Grace Sill writes, "In Catacomb wall paintings Christ emerged as the Good Shepherd, an idealized classical youth, beardless and curly-headed, with a lamb slung over his shoulders. Gradually the figure of Christ as a teacher and king with dark hair, a beard, and penetrating eyes develops."¹⁹ Jesus as the Good Shepherd reminds Christians of Christ's providence, care, and comfort. He goes out to find the lost, defends the weak from danger, and leads his flock to quiet water and green pastures (Matt 18, John 15, Ps 23).

Representing God the Holy Spirit

By far, the most used symbol of the Holy Spirit is the dove, often descending with three rays shining from the head. This comes from the account of Christ's Baptism (Matt 3:16). Often the dove is paired with tongues of fire, symbolizing the events of Pentecost, or drops of water, symbolizing the Holy Spirit's work through Baptism. According to Stafford, lesser-known

16. Jonathon Jong, "Christian Symbolism: The Pelican in Her Piety," St Mary Magdalen School of Theology, <https://www.theschooloftheology.org/posts/essay/symbols-the-pelican-in-her-piety>.

17. In his hymn, *Adoro Te Devoto*, Aquinas writes, "O loving Pelican! O Jesu Lord! Unclean I am, but cleanse me in Thy blood!"

18. Jong, "Christian Symbolism."

19. Gertrude Grace Sill, *A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 58.

symbols of the Holy Spirit include a seven-tongued flame (Acts 2:3-4), seven doves surrounding a circle,²⁰ and seven lamps (Rev 4:5).²¹

Representing The Trinity

The trinity is often represented by several geometric shapes, sometimes overlapping with each other. Theologians for centuries have debated endlessly over the doctrine of the trinity. The complexity of the triune God could not possibly be fully explained in a symbol, because the trinity transcends human understanding. However, these symbols reflect the harmony and eternal nature of the Godhead without overstepping the bounds of human reasoning. The most common representation of the Trinity is a simple equilateral triangle. A variation of this symbol is two triangles with the Latin word *Sanctus* on each side, based on the words of Isaiah 6:3. Another symbol is three equal and overlapping circles. This symbol comes with two variations, the trefoil (the overlapping parts are cut out) and the triquetra (*just* the overlapping parts of the circles forming three leaf-like points). Sometimes a circle is included with any of these symbols to represent the eternal nature of the trinity. The Shield of Faith, which can be useful for instructional purposes, has the words “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” in the three corners, with “God” in the middle and the words “is” and “is not” in between the persons.

Two more historical symbols of the trinity from Irish and French culture are the shamrock and the *Fleur-de-lys*. The story behind the shamrock dates back to the fifth century A.D. when Saint Patrick appeared in front of the Pagan High King of Ireland and confessed his belief in the Triune God. According to legend, he picked a sprig of the shamrock and said, “Here

20. Based on the seven gifts of the Spirit found in Isa 11, starting at verse 2 and following.

21. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 45.

is a perfect leaf with three perfect parts.” This story caused the shamrock to become one of the most famous symbols of the Trinity in Ireland. The Fleur-de-lys, or “flower of the lily,” doubled as an emblem of the former royal family of France and as a symbol of the Trinity, due to its three pedals.²²

The Cross and The Crucifix

Christ has turned a symbol of gruesome torture and death into a symbol of God’s great love and mercy. It is no wonder the cross has appeared inside and outside of countless worship places for centuries. There have been many iterations of the cross used by different church bodies. This paper will observe only the most common versions for the sake of brevity. The most common iterations of the cross are the Latin cross, the Greek cross, the Jerusalem cross, the budded cross, the Papal cross, and the Slavic cross.²³ Stafford advises against the use of the Papal cross and the Slavic cross for Protestants because they have been claimed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox church, respectively.²⁴

The body of Jesus on the cross is a crucifix. Apparently, some at the time of Luther had objected to having the body of Christ be visible on the cross because they thought it took meaning away from the Resurrection. Luther offered this rebuttal:

I know for sure that God would have us hear and read His works, especially the suffering of Christ. But if I am to hear it or think about it, I cannot possibly do so without picturing it to myself in my heart. For whether I want it or not, the picture of a man hanging on a cross arises in my heart when I hear about Christ, just as water naturally reflects my face when I look into it. If, then, it is not sinful but good to have a picture of Christ in my mind, why should it be sinful to have it in my eyes? After all, the heart means more than

22. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 52-3.

23. See Appendix A for an infographic regarding the crosses mentioned. I created this graphic using Canva.

24. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 54.

the eyes, and, as the real seat of dwelling of God, should be less sullied with sins than the eyes.²⁵

Luther calls to mind the importance of having symbols in the first place: to communicate visually, to stir up emotions inside of us, and to drive scriptural truths home. Often symbols are passed by and not given much thought, but if someone could have the same reaction as Luther taking to heart the meaning behind the symbol, then the message behind the symbol has been effectively communicated.

Monograms

Monograms have been used to represent Jesus from very early on in the Church. The “Chi-Ro” is the oldest monogram used with reference to Christ. *Chi* and *ro* are the first two letters in the Greek word *Christos*. Notably, Constantine used the “Chi-Ro” on the banner carried by the Roman cavalry, probably as a good omen for battle. The story goes that the “Chi-Ro” appeared in the clouds right before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312.²⁶ Today, the “Chi-Ro” is widely used in Christianity. For example, the symbol is used on the 1993 and 2021 editions of the WELS Lutheran Hymnal *Christian Worship*. Other popular monograms include IHS (*Jesus Hominum Salvator*), IHC (three capital Greek letters as the initials for Jesus Christ), INRI (*Jesus Nazarenius Rex Iudaeorum*), and the Alpha and Omega (Rev 22:13).

The Four Evangelists

25. Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, 16th edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 180.

26. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 57.

The Four gospel writers often are represented by four different winged creatures, based on Ezekiel 1:10, Ezekiel 10:14, and Revelation 4:7. According to some commentators,²⁷ each of the symbols alludes to a chief characteristic of Christ emphasized by the four gospel writers.

According to Stafford, The winged man is the symbol of St. Matthew, because the genealogy of our Lord emphasizes Christ's manhood. The winged lion is the symbol of St. Mark, alluding to the office of Christ as King. The winged calf is the symbol of St. Luke, as Luke emphasizes Christ's atoning sacrifice. The eagle is the symbol of St. John, emphasizing the divine nature of Christ.²⁸ Whenever these four appear in art, the four gospels somehow play a role in the analysis of the story being told.

Animals

The lamb, pelican, fish, dove, ox, eagle, and lion have already been mentioned as Christian symbols. Other notable animal representations are the deer and the peacock. The deer represents Christians longing for God (Ps 42:1). Sill explains, "As symbols of solitude and purity of life, hinds often appear in pairs drinking from the flowing waters of Paradise."²⁹ The woodcut for Luther's Deutsche Messe features four deer, symbolizing the Christian life. The peacock was a common symbol of the resurrection and immortality because of its hard flesh and beautiful feathers, which grow even more beautiful after the peacock molts.

Application

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27. Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, ConC (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2005), 60.
28. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 101.
29. Sill, *A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art*, 21.

Stafford explains the similarity between the early Christian use of symbols and the use of symbols today:

“In the early Christian Church, symbols were freely used as convenient fixatives of doctrinal points for the many Christians who could not read and, during periods of persecution, as a secret language. In our day, symbols are used on church windows and furnishings for the purpose of indicating pictographically the cardinal elements of Christian faith, tradition, and teaching by presenting to the eye an interesting and valuable supplement to preaching and religious education. When well understood, they are very effective for this purpose and are quite agreeable to our constant use of symbols in everyday life.”³⁰

Although we no longer need to use secret language under the blessing of religious freedom, we still use symbols as a language to communicate what we teach and believe. In the area of visual identity, we proudly bear symbols like the cross, the anchor, the dove, and the shepherd’s staff on our signage to bear witness to the community around us. Those images are placed in prominent spots on websites and advertisements to grab the attention of anyone who might see it. In publication design, we use pictures and infographics to summarize and instruct certain visual truths. One example of this can be found in the 2017 edition of *Luther’s Catechism*, where the editors frequently utilize symbols like the *Manus Dei* to represent God the Father, the crown of thorns to represent God the Son, and a descending dove with flames to represent God the Holy Spirit. These symbols are strategically placed next to headings like Preservation, Redemption, and The Church so that readers associate the topic with the person of the God-head.³¹

The ancient symbols of the church can certainly find their place in church graphic design today. Many churches use a cross in some way in their logo. If the goal of visual identity is to communicate what you teach and believe, an excellent place to start is the cross. Paul spoke of

30. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 18.

31. Martin Luther and Stephen Geiger, *Luther’s Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, New International Version (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017).

“Christ Crucified” as the summation and center of what we preach (1 Cor 1:22-23). However, if you were looking to go a different direction while still communicating your message, here are a few suggestions based on this study of symbols in liturgical art. The *Icthus*, *Pelican-in-her-piety*, and *Agnus Dei* all serve as fine symbols of Christ and bear their own specific teaching about the Son of God. Churches named after one of the four evangelists might consider incorporating a lion, an eagle, an angel, or an ox into their logo, perhaps accompanied by a cross, to bring out the *gospel*-centered focus of the church. I believe this is appropriate because the proposed meaning behind the four beasts all point back to Christ. If a church called Eternal Life Lutheran Church³² were looking for a logo, they might consider using a peacock, the symbol of eternal life used in early Christian art. The fact that these are not used often in church logos may open the door to further conversation.

Even if a church is not ready to commit to having one of these symbols as the logo of their church, they can be useful for instruction and communication still today. Here are some suggestions for use outside of visual identity. When a certain topic or lesson comes up in the worship readings, having art that features these symbols on the cover of the bulletin can be edifying and instructional.³³ You or your team could create social media content that includes these symbols, either in a picture or an illustration, paired with a Bible verse connected to the topic it represents. This is beneficial at any time, but especially when a symbol pertains to a certain time in the church year.³⁴

32. There are currently no WELS churches with the name, “Eternal Life Lutheran Church,” but there is an LCMS church with that name in Mesa, AZ.

33. Ian Welch, graphic designer and owner of liturgical art company *Paramentics*, has graphics and illustrations that feature many of these symbols available at <https://paramentics.com/symbols-1>.

34. See Appendix B. I created these graphics for use on Instagram using a Canva Premium account. The first graphic could be used on Trinity Sunday. I used the second and the third graphics on the Shepherd of the Hills, Las Vegas Instagram page with a prayer for the graduates of Martin Luther College.

It should be noted that without taking the time to explain these symbols, they may become meaningless and purely ornamental. Liturgical art and graphic design are not Gospel and ministry in and of themselves, they are meant to support and aide Gospel and ministry. Stafford quotes W. and G.A. Audsley by writing, “It is at all times better to introduce one symbol with propriety than a dozen for the sake of ornament.”³⁵

Color

Another important element in graphic design is color. Just as there are studies done in shape psychology, color psychology also suggests that color can evoke certain emotions and behaviors in people. Warm colors evoke feelings of energy, happiness, and optimism. Cool colors can be calming and relaxing. Brands use colors to persuade you to use their products and services by attempting to tap into the parts of our brains that want to feel those emotions. The classic example is that fast-food chains use red and yellow to make you hungry by combining the feeling of comfort with the feeling of being impulsive.³⁶ We live in a world saturated with design. With the amount of visual stimuli we take in, this kind of visual communication is all around us. Needless to say, it is *not* the mission of the church to brainwash people with subtle marketing techniques. It is true, however, that humans associate certain emotions with color. Just as shapes function as tools for communication, color is also an effective and subtle way to convey Scriptural truths.

The church has used color as a tool for communication and worship for centuries. Most notably, colors have been used in sanctuaries and worship spaces to mark the different seasons of

35. Stafford, *Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches*, 31.

36. Chris Urie, “There’s a Sneaky Reason Why You Always See Red and Yellow on Fast Food Logos,” *Insider*, <https://www.insider.com/fast-food-colors-make-you-hungry-2018-9>.

the church year. Purple, blue, white, green, red, and black have all been used in conjunction with a season of the church year. This portion of the paper will provide the history behind the use of these colors, an explanation of their meaning, and application when it comes to church graphic design.

History of Liturgical Colors

In his book, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, C. C. Rolfe points back to the time of Moses, when God commissioned the use of five colors for the priestly garments and for the ephod.³⁷ God commands, “Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen” (Ex 28:5). Rolfe calls these the five sacrificial colors (gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and white).³⁸ This command from God is seen faithfully carried out in Exodus 39:1. Douglas Stuart notes that the material and colors used for the priestly garments and ephod have a striking similarity to those used for the inner curtains and entrance curtain of the tabernacle itself.³⁹ It seems as though God is using this purposeful choice of materials and colors in the tabernacle and priestly garb to communicate deeper meaning.

The New Testament does not mention the details of ritual worship in the Early Christian Church’s beginnings. However, there is sufficient evidence to assume that the use of the five sacrificial colors carried on through the time of Christ in the first century. Rolfe quotes the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who described the ritual worship of the Jews in his day.

37. Clapton Crabb Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors* (Oxford and London: Parker and Co., 1879), 10.

38. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 18.

39. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 2006), 605.

Josephus writes about the garment worn by the high priest, “embroidered with five rows of various colours of gold, and purple, and scarlet, and also of fine linen and blue, with which colours we told you before the veils of the Temple were embroidered also.”⁴⁰ Rolfe comments on the transition of ritual worship from the Old Testament believers to the New Testament believers in the first century:

We may infer from the Bible itself, and from the lives and writings of the Saints of old, that it is the greatest possible mistake to imagine the principles of the ritual worship of the Christian Church are diametrically opposed to those of the ritual worship of the ancient Jewish Church. It is well known that when our Lord was upon the Earth founding His Holy Catholic Church, He was continually in the Temple with His disciples, joining in the Temple ritual. Even after His Ascension, and after the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, the faithful continued daily, as before, to frequent the Temple services.⁴¹

Jesus Christ himself models how to carry over *some* aspects of worship from the Tabernacle and Temple to the new Christian Church. He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). There are aspects in Old Testament Jewish worship that have rightfully gone away, like sacrificing animals and observing the Sabbath. These practices only served as shadows of the things to come and have now been fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:17). Rolfe correctly makes the point that things like the use of color in Old Testament worship are quite useful to carry over into Christian worship today.

There is little known about liturgical or ritual worship in the second and third centuries, as Christians worshipped wherever and however they could. They were forced to worship in catacombs, in deserts, and in secret places to avoid persecution.⁴² The next important testimony about liturgical vestments comes from St. Jerome in 396. He states that “the old agreeth with the

40. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 19.

41. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 20.

42. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 38.

new,”⁴³ and that “without... the different colours ... [the Bishop of God] neither can enter the Sanctuary nor assume to himself the name of Bishop.”⁴⁴ From this, we can conclude that the five sacrificial colors made it through the era of persecution and were incorporated into liturgical vestments.

The earliest use of altar cloths is seen in the Church of England in the fifth century.⁴⁵ At first, it was just a purple cloth spread across the altar, along with a white cloth only used for Eastertide. The other colors were used in the service during the Medieval age in the Church of England, although they were not yet assigned to a season of the church year. Black and green were added to the vestments and altar cloths of the Church of England in the twelfth century.⁴⁶

In his 1197 treatise *De Sacro Altaris Mysterio*, Pope Innocent III (at the time named Lothario Conti) assigned colors, white, red, black, and green, to different festival days. In a summary of the treatise, John Fauser writes, “Lothario's rules are more or less those still in effect today: white is the festive color (in seeking a reason he even referred to the whiteness of the clouds on the day of Christ's Ascension); red is for martyrs' days and Pentecost; black is for days of penance and of the Masses for the dead; and green is for days without a festal character.”⁴⁷ With the addition of blue and purple for advent and lent, most Lutherans and Anglicans follow Lothario's order to this day.

43. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 51.

44. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 53.

45. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 55-6.

46. Rolfe, *The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors*, 127.

47. Fauser, John J. “De Sacro Altaris Mysterio.” *Masterpieces of Catholic Literature in Summary Form I* (January 1965), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,cpid&custid=ns101346&db=lkh&AN=43628850&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

The Meaning of Colors Used in Scripture and in Worship

Throughout Scripture, white is associated with purity and, consequently, with God's presence. In Daniel 7, the Ancient of Days is pictured with clothing as white as snow and hair as white as wool (Dan 7:9-10). Back in biblical times, it was a rare thing for something to be completely white and clean. Envisioning the Ancient of Days with pure white hair and clothing must have been a sight to behold for Daniel. Because God is sinless and pure, the color white embodies a sense of purity and righteousness. Again in the book of Isaiah, the Lord demonstrates the stark contrast between sinfulness and holiness using color, "Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa 1:18). Regarding the use of the color white in worship, Timothy Maschke writes, "White is associated with key events in the Lord's life, particularly His birth and baptism and the Easter season. It is also used for days dedicated to non-martyred saints. The Latin word for white, *alba*, is the name for a liturgical gown worn by worship leaders, a gown that is reminiscent of the traditional baptismal dress. White is, therefore, associated with baptism and confirmation, as well as with Trinity Sunday."⁴⁸

Blue signifies hope in anticipation. Therefore, it is commonly used during the season of Advent. The color of the sky naturally conveys that message, as we wait in joyful anticipation for the Lord to return. Douglas Escue comments, "Our Christian faith rests on the hope that Christ,

48. Timothy H. Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2003), 169.

who came in history assuming our flesh, will also return on the last day of time from that same blue sky he ascended long ago.”⁴⁹

Purple is a sign of royalty and self-disciplined responsibility. The color purple was difficult and expensive to produce because it had to be extracted from the “blood” or mucus of a snail. The extraction process took much skill and self-sacrifice. Evan Andrews explains the laborious process, “dye-makers had to crack open the snail’s shell, extract a purple-producing mucus and expose it to sunlight for a precise amount of time. It took as many as 250,000 mollusks to yield just one ounce of usable dye, but the result was a vibrant and long-lasting shade of purple.”⁵⁰ Purple also signifies repentance and solemnity, which is why it is used primarily during the seasons of Advent and Lent.

Green represents growth and life. The picture of nature and ripening fruit easily comes to mind. It is used in the times after Epiphany and after Pentecost to represent Christ’s physical growth in his life and ministry and our spiritual growth in Christ through faith. Green is a neutral color, meant to distinguish the non-festival season from the festival season. Some church bodies use different shades of green, a lighter green in the summer and a darker green in fall, so that the green does not appear “drab” as the seasons change.⁵¹ Escue notes the spiritual significance of that change, “Variety and change in shades of this color would go a long way in keeping the

49. Douglas Escue, “The Colors of the Liturgical Seasons - LCMS Worship - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” <https://www.lcms.org/worship/church-year/colors-of-liturgical-seasons>.

50. Evan Andrews, “Why Is Purple Considered the Color of Royalty?,” HISTORY, <https://www.history.com/news/why-is-purple-considered-the-color-of-royalty>.

51. Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 169.

season fresh and ‘green.’ Changing the paraments every six weeks would complement the Sundays following Pentecost and their emphasis on personal faith that is living and growing.”⁵²

Red is commonly associated with the work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost because of the presence of fire. It also represents the Church and its ministry. A darker shade of red, scarlet, may be used during Holy Week, especially on the Sunday of the Passion, because it signifies the deep red color of blood. In the account of the passion, we envision the scarlet blood dripping down the face of our Savior and the scarlet robe he was given as a mockery of his kingship (Matt 27:28). Maschke notes the other uses of red in the church year, "Red is used for Pentecost and for days dedicated to martyrs. It is also used for festivals of renewal in the Holy Spirit – such as the Reformation and missions – and often for ordination rites (though some denominations use white).”⁵³

As the absence of light, Black represents mourning, death, and ashes. It is most often used one day a year on Ash Wednesday. It is common to strip the altar of any paraments or candles on Maundy Thursday for Good Friday, but if the altar is not stripped, black may be used. During these two days, we are reminded of the punishment of death that we have brought upon ourselves (Rom 6:23) and that Christ took on for us (Isa 53:9).

Like purple, gold is another color that reflects royalty and honor. It represents the glory and majesty of Christ the King. It can be used as an alternate color for white on the celebration days of Christmas and Easter. Gold also has significant meaning for us, as it reminds us of the crown of life bestowed on us by Christ the King (Rev 2:10).

Application

52. Escue, “The Colors of the Liturgical Seasons - LCMS Worship - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”

53. Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 169.

Seeing the history behind the colors of the church year shines a light on the rich traditions we have in liturgy and worship. Even if your church does not use paraments or vestments, there is still value in using these colors in worship. Graphic design allows for this to happen. You could make the background of your slides match the color of the church year. It does not have to be the brightest and most basic shade of that color. You could adjust the hue to make it easier on the eyes and more palatable to today's color trends.

As mentioned, color plays a subtle role in communicating the mission and personality of the church in its visual identity. Since the liturgical colors carry their own emotional meaning, it may be difficult to pick one color to represent the overall personality of the church. It may be beneficial to observe how the rest of the commercial marketing world uses color to represent their brands. According to Johnny Levanier, red logos represent excitement, passion, and anger. Yellow used in logos reflects youthfulness and friendliness. Because green represents life and vitality, many eco-friendly and nature-focused brands choose green. Blue logos represent trustworthiness and reliability. Black brings a slick, modern, and luxurious personality. Levanier suggests reviewing your mission and core values and picking a color that most reflects your brand identity.⁵⁴

Just like with imagery and symbolism, using color in worship becomes meaningless unless it is paired with instruction. We can use these colors intentionally by taking the time to instruct the people on what truths these colors reflect. Color, when used with instruction and purpose, can have an emotional effect on people. Black paraments assist in making Ash Wednesday a time of sorrow and contrition. White paraments reflect the righteousness and purity

54. Johnny Levanier, "Logo Colors: What's Best For Your Brand?," 99designs, December 17, 2021, <https://99designs.com/blog/tips/logo-color-meanings/>.

that Christ has given to us, instilling in us a sense of joy on those special celebration days. The same is true of any graphic design content utilizing these colors.

Typography

As mentioned, graphic design not only deals with art in terms of color and imagery but also with the presentation of visual information. Publication design deals with how large amounts of information are formatted to be easy to see, read, and digest. The layout of a long-form piece of communication greatly affects the readability of that piece. In order to give a history of publication design in the church, with an emphasis on typography and layout, we need to zoom in on one area of church history in particular: The Lutheran Reformation. In his book *Brand Luther*, Andrew Pettegree writes, “Luther’s movement opened up a new era in the history of cheap print. It was a commercial as much as a theological revolution.”⁵⁵ The invention of the Gutenberg printing press completely changed the way people communicate on a large scale.

Luther spent a great deal of time and effort in making sure his works were not only theologically sound but aesthetically pleasing. For that, he looked to the help of printers in Wittenberg and all across Germany. Pettegree comments on Luther’s concern for the practical side of printing: “When Luther walked into a printing shop, he did not do so as the native academic who imagined that the creative process ended with the completion of his manuscript, but as a practical man, well-grounded in the harsh economics of profit and loss, and the disciplines and dangers of a business run on credit.”⁵⁶

55. Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe--and Started the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 53.

56. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 11.

Martin Luther's relationship with printers highlights the symbiotic relationship between writers and designers, those who have content to share and those who help put that content out there. Wittenberg's printing press helped Luther become one of the most influential people in Germany and Western culture as a whole.⁵⁷ In turn, Martin Luther changed the small town of Wittenberg into a major hub for the printing industry that rivaled the titan printing cities of Germany at the time.

The rate at which the Wittenberg printing press produced Luther's various works was quite impressive. Pettegree notes, "Between 1502 and 1516, five successive printers published a total of 123 books, an average of 8 a year. ... Between 1517 and 1546, on the other hand, Wittenberg publishers turned out at least 2,721 works, an average of over 91 per year."⁵⁸ This level of production took time, skill, and effort on the part of the printers.

Much of Luther's concern for design is seen in his interactions with printers. This paper will start by observing the work of one printer in particular: Johann Rhau-Grunenberg of Wittenberg. At first, Luther was hesitant to even publish some of his lecture notes on the psalms, because he knew that Rhau-Grunenberg would be the one printing them. Rhau-Grunenberg's publishing was functional and unimaginative. His work would be "nothing fancy," printed in a rougher typeface.⁵⁹ Pettegree gives some insight into the aesthetic nature of Rhau-Grunenberg's work:

"You only have to examine a sample of Rhau-Grunenberg's work to realize that Luther had a point. Take a typical early product of his press, an oration given by Filippo Beroaldo. The book was a small quarto of twenty-four leaves, a steady week's work for a well-managed press. The text is presented as an undifferentiated mass in a medium

57. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 11-2.

58. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 23.

59. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 43.

Roman type. There are no decorated initials; rather, the first capital is a small character in the same font used for the rest of the text, set in a space that would normally be assigned to a woodblock initial (as if, as in the first years of print, it would subsequently be painted over by an illuminator). The text is poorly aligned and heavily abbreviated. Rudimentary side notes cling awkwardly to the text body. The title page is two simple lines in the same text type, again in a style more reminiscent of the 1470s. It is as if the intervening forty years of title-page development had simply not taken place.”⁶⁰

Not only was Rhau-Grunenberg’s printing less than satisfactory, but he was also notoriously slow. This was unacceptable in a theological race between Luther and his opponents to get the information out there as fast as possible.

No one could ever imagine that Wittenberg would be able to compete with the other major printing presses at this rate. Pettegree notes, “The larger print shops could marshal a range of typefaces in different styles and sizes. These were used to lead the reader through complex texts, differentiating the body from notes, signaling section breaks and significant places in the argument.”⁶¹

However, as Luther and his writing started garnering national attention, he caught the eye of Germany’s most reputable printers. Melchior Lotter in Leipzig, Silvan Otmar in Augsburg, Adam Petri in Basel, and Friedrich Peypus in Nuremberg all would come to print Luther’s works. For example, Adam Petri, who had previously printed indulgence certificates as part of the campaign to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica, would be one of the first to print Luther’s ninety-five theses in 1517. Pettegree writes, “There is little room for sentiment in commerce. The church had been an excellent client until Luther became a better one.”⁶²

60. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 43.

61. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 41.

62. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 60.

Luther was eventually able to work with Melchior Lotter in Leipzig, who proved to be a better match for Luther's standards than Rhau-Grunenberg. Luther was quite impressed with Lotter's ability to work with different typefaces.⁶³ Lotter was too established in Leipzig to move to Wittenberg, but Luther was able to continue working with his son, Melchior Lotter, Jr., who set up shop in Wittenberg in 1520.⁶⁴

Another skilled craftsman available to Luther was Lucas Cranach, artist and woodcut designer in Wittenberg. Cranach offered a contribution to the printing industry that had hardly been done up to this point: large single woodcut designs as the main title page of a document. Before Cranach, only the largest and most expensive books had a single woodcut as the main title page. His woodcuts served as decorative title pages for many of Luther's writings. Pettegree writes, "Thanks to Cranach's decisive intervention, the Wittenberg press was catapulted from the back to the front of the pack in terms of aesthetic appeal."⁶⁵

Application

Brand Luther highlights the important relationship between pastors and laypeople, writers and designers. Luther allowed people like Cranach and Lotter to excel in their craft, and in doing so, they became important contributors to the Reformation in their own way. In a similar way, some graphic design projects allow laypeople to shine. There are plenty of laypeople skilled in graphic design who can use their time and talents to serve the Lord and help the church. Keep an eye out for people in your congregation who are willing and able to help in these areas.

63. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 112.

64. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 114.

65. Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 159.

There are also plenty of opportunities for graphic designers to use their gifts in the church and school. It does not necessarily have to be a long-term rebranding plan or a giant Christmas service ad campaign. A person interested and skilled in graphic design could create a graphic for the cover of a minor festival or mission fest bulletin. They could curate worship slides for a new sermon series or slides for a six-week Bible class. They could create a variety of content for social media. There is a wide range of opportunities in which a graphic designer could serve, even if they do not have much experience.

Luther's attention to detail also serves as a reminder that visual presentation is important. He saw the value in communicating clearly and effectively, not just in the content of his message but also in how it is presented visually. In Pettegree's assessment of Rhau-Grunenberg's work, all of the little things (typeface, spacing, lack of visual appeal) added up to one big mess. Taking time to format a bible class handout or PowerPoint may seem tedious, but doing so will help your people learn. Even the seemingly insignificant things like spacing and font go a long way in assisting your communication.

PART II: GRAPHIC DESIGN WITHIN THE WELS

Methodology

In order to approach this part of the research, several interviews were conducted. I talked with pastors and laypeople from mission churches and established congregations to explore how they regularly utilize graphic design projects in their distinct ministries. The pastors I interviewed have had experience taking on a branding or rebranding project or have dealt with graphic design in at least one of the four areas of graphic design. The laypeople I interviewed all had at least some design training or experience with graphic design and were either graphic designers, directors of communication, or social media coordinators.

With each interview, I sent the interviewee a list of questions I was hoping to ask, serving as a springboard for conversation.⁶⁶ Along with this list of questions, I also included an informed consent form. This form gave a brief overview of what this thesis is exploring and detailed how this information might be used. The interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. I used the recording only for personal notetaking, which I transcribed through a feature on Microsoft Word.

My initial thought process for this portion of the thesis was to take on each church or organization as a separate case study. However, as the research developed and as I interviewed more and more people, I saw both common threads between interviewees and specific aspects that were unique to certain ministries. This discovery resulted in the formation of the following section: a look into several challenges and blessings that arise when implementing graphic

66. See Appendix C.

design techniques into ministry. The topics that will be covered in this section are arranged under the following subheadings: Graphic Design as a Tool of Outreach, Graphic Design as a Tool of Inreach, and Gathering Research from the World Around You.

Body

Graphic Design as a Tool of Outreach

Intown Lutheran Church is a mission congregation in a neighborhood of Atlanta, GA. Being a mission congregation, creating and sharing their visual identity was an important step in establishing a presence in the community. In an interview with Pastor Lucas Bitter, he explains that early on in the process of starting Intown Lutheran, there was a weekend-long seminar called Church Planters Intensive that covered necessary topics like picking a name and logo. Bitter explains the process of forming a visual identity, as covered in that seminar, “The idea is that you would get a lot of feedback from not only your core group but your community as well. You only get to pick a name and a logo once, so it is really important to spend the time figuring out not only what your principles are as a group, but then really making sure that it resonates and makes sense to the people that you're trying to reach.” Intown Lutheran’s logo is a circular design, with their name in the foreground and the skyline of Atlanta in the background.⁶⁷

In order to get community input on their logo, Pastor Bitter made a survey of different options and brought it with him when he canvassed through neighborhoods and traveled in the airport. He explained that this survey served a triple purpose, in raising awareness for the up-and-coming mission church, in getting honest and genuine opinions on the logo, and in opening up the conversation for further evangelism. Once they settled on the circular cityscape logo, they

67. Lucas Bitter. Interview by author. November 12, 2021.

used it everywhere. They had it painted on the brick wall of their newly acquired storefront location. They had the logo printed on a tent, taken to community outreach events. They handed out coaster-like cardboard postcards with the logo on the front and the church's information on the back. Using the church's logo so frequently helps solidify in people's minds what the church believes and teaches, or at the least causes them to recall the impression the pastor or congregation member gave.

May River Lutheran Church is another mission congregation in Bluffton, SC. When asked if he saw an uptick in visitors from the community, Pastor Erik Janke explained that feedback from the community may be intangible, but that does not mean that it is not worth putting in the work. Younger generations may not say upfront, "I came here because the logo looked really good," or "this place really has a fresh new look to it," but that is almost what is expected in a digital and marketing world that keeps changing and evolving. Janke comments, "Quality is expected these days. The quality of graphic design, like decent copywriting, a presentable sanctuary, dressing professionally, etc. all makes small, subtle impressions. Quality won't wow a none into attending church; mediocrity, however, will give him a reason not to."⁶⁸

Graphic Design as a Tool of Inreach

If you were to walk into Victory of the Lamb's facility in Franklin, WI, you would see their logo almost anywhere you look. The orange circular design featuring a cross on Calvary can be found on windows, doors, business cards, on any signs or announcements posted, in the middle of QR codes on the back of the seats. I believe that this strategy can help strengthen the bond between

68. Erik Janke, interview by author. Zoom Interview. Nov 9, 2021.

members in a subtle way. Not only are members reminded of the central message of Victory of the Lamb, but they are also made to feel as though they are a part of a group.

Another way that Victory of the Lamb utilizes graphic design for inreach is their use of worship slides. Pastor Bill Limmer comments that they had used bulletins for some time, but decided to use only the PowerPoints to guide worship because the visitors would simply throw the bulletins away at the end of the service. While this decision simplified preparation for worship in one way, Pastor Limmer admits that the pressure is then put on the production team to produce quality slides.⁶⁹ However, the benefit of only using slides in worship is that the entire congregation is focused and on the same page throughout the service. Before and after the service, a QR code is displayed, directing the members to the church website, where they can give electronically, sign into the friendship register, and keep up with church events. I believe this is an excellent way to utilize techniques in PowerPoint design and user interface design, while also engaging members in congregational life.

Gathering Research from the World Around You

When it comes to publication design, evaluating similar resources from other church bodies or organizations may prove to be beneficial in the formation of the work you produce. Early in the eight-year process of designing *Christian Worship 2021*, Caleb Bassett and Ian Welch put together a 180-page document, researching most of the major Lutheran hymnals and other worship books; *TLH*, *CW93*, *The Lutheran Service Book*, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELCA), *Common Worship* (Church of England), and *Glory to God* (Presbyterian hymnal). Bassett and Welch evaluated what the other hymnals did well as far as design and what they

69. Bill Limmer. Interview by author. In-person interview. November 14, 2021.

could improve on. Then, they observed what hymnals have done for centuries, and how hymnal design has changed in the last hundred years or so. This informed many of the early design decisions of *Christian Worship 2021*.

After observing the typography trends of other hymnals, the time came to create an early draft of what the new hymnal might look like. Bassett and Welch chose about ten fonts that could be potential candidates to test drive. These fonts were a combination of both serif and sans serif fonts. Noting that hymnals have by and large chosen to work with serif fonts, the initial candidates were more serif than sans serif. Welch explains, “I think if sans serif fonts were in the hymnal, people would be more taken aback by that, at least in our circles.”⁷⁰ Sometimes, a change from the familiar turns into a visual barrier for people, to the extent that they are focusing more on the look of the words than on the content itself.

In order to test drive the fonts, the committee created worship folders for 25 congregations to use four weeks in a row. Welch concedes that that may not be enough time for the congregations to get accustomed to the changes, because they are so ingrained with what they have used, but at least it was able to provide initial feedback. With feedback from both the 25 congregations and the technology and executive committee of the hymnal project, they were able to widdle it down to the Meta font. This font was favored because of its legibility and the fact that it has had longevity since its creation in 1990.

In doing research and survey work, it is important to welcome opinions while still being able to make a concise decision. People want to feel included in the decision-making of the project, but may be offended if they feel their opinions have not been considered. Welch explains that the careful framing of questions helps him to navigate that careful balance, both with his

70. Ian Welch, interview by author. Zoom meeting. November 12, 2021.

work on the hymnal and work on logos for various churches. Instead of asking more direct questions (i.e., “Do you like this font?”), a prompt that has them choose from a list of qualities (i.e, elegant, legible, creative) may give you the necessary feedback without weighing too heavily on the person’s choice or preference.

There is also a difference between reaching out to the congregation for initial impressions and opening the floodgates for hundreds of opinions to come pouring in. While those opinions may spark an interest and make the congregation feel a part of this process, that makes decision-making near impossible. Welch suggests forming a small committee that may include the designer and making executive decisions only within that small group.⁷¹

Aside from his work as the designer for the new hymnal project, Welch has also designed a rebranding project in 2018-2019 for Trinity Lutheran Church, Waukesha, WI. Before Trinity went forward with their new brand identity, they did extensive research on the brand identities of the other Waukesha area churches. Welch included a description of the colors, logo, typeface, and website, while also offering his evaluation of each visual identity. Welch comments that this type of research is helpful in “differentiating Trinity and seeing what works and what doesn’t.”⁷² Before diving into a branding or a rebranding project, I believe it is worthwhile to do some extent of research on the other businesses and churches in the area to compare commonalities and decide how to appropriately stick out from the crowd.

71. Ian Welch, interview by author.

72. Ian Welch, interview by author. Email transcript.

PART III: UTILIZING GRAPHIC DESIGN IN MINISTRY

Know Who You Are

Knowing who you are as a church and what message you are conveying is paramount to creating a brand identity that is specific and meaningful. For some businesses, coming up with a message to communicate along with their brand may be difficult. How do you get people to care about what services you offer? Donald Miller lays out a seven-part framework for businesses to follow when creating what he calls a “StoryBrand.” The seven-part StoryBrand framework mirrors many film and literary plotlines and goes as follows: (1) A Character (2) has a problem (3) and meets a guide (4) who gives them a plan (5) and calls them to action (6) that helps them avoid failure (7) and ends in success.⁷³

There are parts of that StoryBrand framework that fit quite well into the message of the Bible and some parts where they contradict. Every “character” the church reaches has a problem, the deadly problem of sin. The first part of Romans 6:23 declares that this problem will surely lead them towards “failure,” eternal death. With steps 3-5 in the framework, your business swoops in to save the day. This is where the message of the Bible differs. Instead of offering a step-by-step guide for the client to dig themselves out of the hole they are in, the Bible presents the solution found in Jesus. The second half of Romans 6:23 declares that God offers eternal life (“success”) through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Everything we believe and teach as a church, everything we would want to convey to the community around us,

73. Donald Miller, *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*, Illustrated edition (HarperCollins Leadership, 2017), 20.

revolves around Christ himself. Regardless of whether or not the Bible’s message fits exactly into the StoryBrand framework, having a clear and concise message to convey is the key to producing effective graphic communication. Miller comments, “If we pay a lot of money to a design agency without first clarifying our message, we might as well be holding a bullhorn up to a monkey. The only thing a potential customer will hear is noise.”⁷⁴

When May River Lutheran Church was deciding on a logo, they first nailed down what message they wanted to convey to the community around them. Erik Janke explains that they wanted these three concepts to be driven home with May River’s logo: clarity, certainty, and comfort. “Those three are kind of Lutheran distinctives. Clarity in the Word goes back to the Reformation. We talk about the promises of God a lot. And then comfort, we let the gospel predominate.”⁷⁵ With those distinctions in mind, they settled on a cross that doubles as an anchor completing the circle around it, with waves flowing around the anchor. The two main colors used blue and teal, both conveying certainty and comfort.

Know Where You Are

Incorporating your location into your visual identity helps people to see your church as a functioning part of the community you live in. It shows that you are here to serve the people. Especially for mission churches in communities where no one knows what a WELS Lutheran is, it shows that you are not just a foreign organization here to serve a certain, select group of people. Both mission and established churches have taken the approach of incorporating their location in the logo and have shared just how impactful it can be. For example, Grace Downtown’s logo just contains a skyline of Downtown Milwaukee, often next to the logotype,

74. Miller, *Building a StoryBrand*, 4.

75. Erik Janke, interview by author. Zoom meeting, November 9, 2021.

“Grace Lutheran Church.”⁷⁶ Intown Lutheran uses the skyline of Atlanta with their name under the skyline to communicate their dedication to the city. When May River Lutheran decided to go with the cross/anchor, it also made sense because they are located in coastal South Carolina. Including something like the skyline of a city or a famous landmark may communicate that this is a church dedicated to serving the local people, not a corporate entity rolling into town to capitalize on a certain neighborhood.

Content is King

One principle to keep in mind when working with any graphic design project: the content ultimately decides how you design it. This applies to all four areas of graphic design, whether you are deciding on a logo, coming up with a post to put on Instagram or Facebook, putting together worship slides, or formatting a Bible class handout. What message are you trying to convey? What kind of imagery, color, or layout would be appropriate for the message in front of you? Does this design fit with your identity and message? When you observe graphic design trends, often you will see content that may be more fitting for a clothing design company, up-and-coming brewery, or trendy coffee shop. There is a fine line to balance when creating content that is captivating and appealing to your audience, while still recognizing the nature of the message you are communicating as a church.

Resources Available

If you are looking to take on a branding project and need a graphic designer, there are a number of routes you could go. It would be preferable if the person has some training in graphic

76. Laura Bernarde and Amanda Schumacher, interview by author. Zoom meeting. November 12, 2021.

design and knows the specific details about your congregation. Graphic designers will often ask about the demographic of both your congregation and the community. It would also be beneficial for them to have an idea of what your mission is as a church.

In regard to choosing a graphic designer, Ian Welch explains, “Hiring a professional designer is almost always the best route to go when considering graphic design projects. Not only do they have knowledge and expertise, but from a church's perspective, you can build a long-term relationship with a designer who gets to know your congregation and its values.”⁷⁷ If God gifts your congregation with someone who is skilled in graphic design and willing to take on this project, they might have the best idea of what the visual identity of the church would be. Another alternative is someone within the church body who has worked with church logos before. They may not know your congregation as intimately as a member would, but they would have some expertise in creating content for WELS churches. Online graphic design companies that crowd-source your work to freelance designers may seem like a cheap and easy route, but often the result is sub-par and rarely communicates your message the way you want.⁷⁸

It is important to set a budget for your branding project, just as you would for a building project, floor repair, or new chairs in the sanctuary. Welch says that you can expect a good professional logo to cost \$1200-\$5000 from a studio or freelance designer.⁷⁹ If a member in your congregation wants to do it *pro bono*, it would be wise to still give them something for their time and effort. Creating a logo takes time, both in research and development. Giving your graphic

77. Ian Welch. “Graphic Design for Worship & Outreach.” Ian Matthew Welch. <http://www.ianmwelch.com/archive/2015/11/12/graphic-design-for-worship-outreach>.

78. Welch, “Graphic Design for Worship & Outreach.”

79. Welch, “Graphic Design for Worship & Outreach.”

designer time to work, while also letting them know your timeframe, will result in both parties being satisfied.

As far as user interface design is concerned, there are functional website builders out there that will not necessarily break the bank. One recommendation is the popular website builder *Squarespace*, which offers fresh and modern templates that are customizable. Their plans range from \$18-\$40 a month for businesses.⁸⁰ Brady Shearer of *Pro Church Tools* specializes in church graphic design. His company runs a website builder called *Nucleus* that is specifically designed for church websites. Their web plan runs for \$99 per month. While that may be significantly more expensive than *Squarespace's* monthly plan, *Nucleus* does offer a sermon manager and enables podcast hosting.⁸¹ Finding a website builder that features an excellent mobile version helps cater to churchgoers looking for your address and service times.

Many of the people I interviewed suggested using *Canva* for all small graphic design projects. This could be used for social media content, flyers, PowerPoints, and more. There are hundreds of ready-made templates created by graphic designers that are customizable to fit your project. *Canva* allows the user to choose from countless graphics, fonts, and colors to incorporate into your project.⁸² There is a free trial of *Canva* that is still quite functional, as well as a premium version. I recommend the premium version because it allows you to use and download graphics that are not watermarked by *Canva*.

As mentioned, good typography is important to publication design. There are many good fonts available for purchase online that go beyond the fonts that are default in Microsoft Word. If

80. "Squarespace Pricing - All Pricing Plans," Squarespace, <https://www.squarespace.com/pricing>.

81. "An Affordable Church Website, Online Giving, and Media Platform. Get 30 Days Free!," Nucleus, <https://www.nucleus.church/pricing>.

82. See Appendix D. I created this on Canva for use in a catechism class.

you are looking for a quick and easy alternative without spending money, Google Fonts offers many downloadable free fonts that are still creative and appealing.

CONCLUSION

Although I am certainly not proposing that all pastors should get graphic design degrees or take on the workload of a professional graphic designer, I believe that it is beneficial for a pastor to have a general knowledge of these things so that they understand that the small details go a long way in communicating effectively. Having some knowledge of imagery, color, and typography helps the pastor to understand and appreciate the work of skilled graphic designers available to them.

It is important to remember when utilizing graphic design in your ministry that it is meant to be the icing on the cake, not the cake itself. It is meant to make your hard work in ministry *presentable* and *appealing*. Proclaiming the gospel will always be the number one priority for the Church and its ministry. Graphic design is a tool that can help the church greatly in proclaiming that gospel. Finding ways to intentionally incorporate the liturgical symbols and colors used for centuries, keeping your mission in mind, and letting your content decide will all help you to effectively communicate visually.

Appendix A

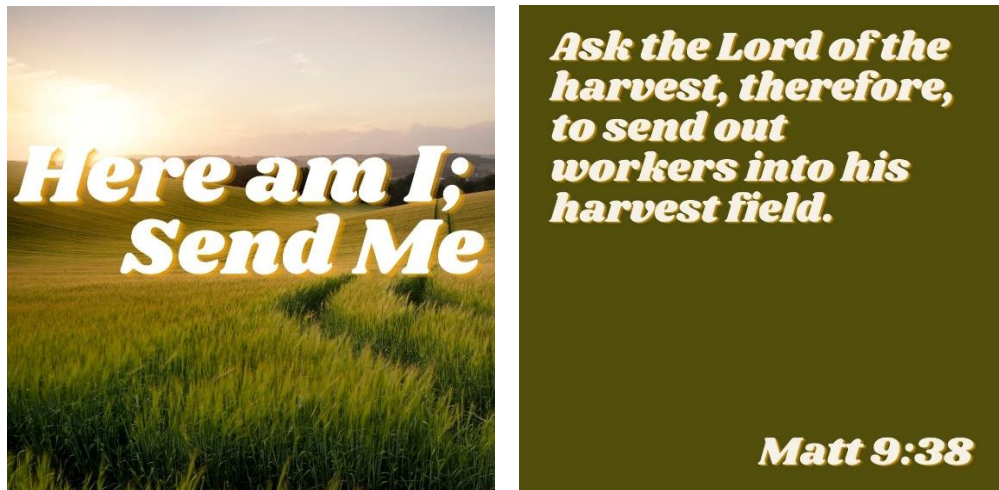
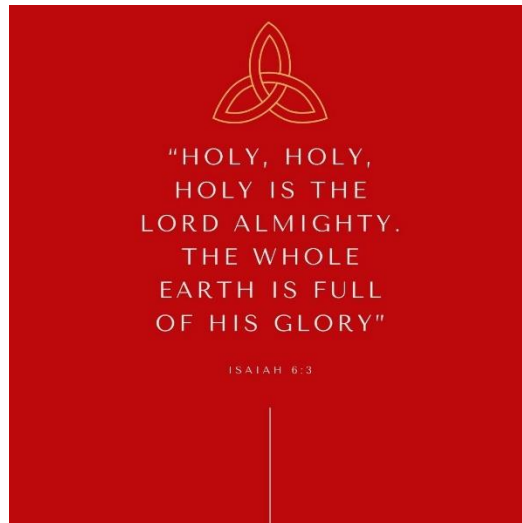
POPULAR CROSSES

Used in Christianity



Figure 1. Template by Andrew Pixel. Created on Canva.

Appendix B



Figures 2, 3, 4. Created on Canva.

Appendix C

Questions sent to pastors:

1. Please briefly describe what your church has done in these areas of graphic design, where applicable. (When was it was created/updated? What resources did you use?)
 - Logo:
 - Outside Signage:
 - Website:
 - Postcards, invitations, flyers:
2. Did you notice a positive response from your congregation on any or all of these projects? Did you notice an uptick in visitors from the community with your branding project?
3. When could you see your church updating these projects in the future?
 - Logo:
 - Outside Signage:
 - Website:
 - Postcards, invitations, flyers:
4. Do you feel like your logo accurately reflects and communicates your identity as a WELS Lutheran church?
5. How much time would you say you put into the format, font, and spacing of your email newsletters, bulletins, Bible class materials, powerpoints/worship slides, or anything with lots of information?

6. Would your council consider including in the budget a subscription to media creating software like Adobe, Canva, or Igniter Media?

Questions sent to laypeople:

1. How do you feel your logo communicates what your church believes?
2. What tools did you use to complete your project, and do you feel like a pastor on his own could easily navigate those tools?
3. What trends are you seeing right now in graphic design right now? How willing are you to buy into trends, knowing they'll change in a couple of years? How do you create a brand that has longevity?
4. Are there any design principles or rules that you are willing to break to cater to your audience?



Figure 5. Template by Marketplace Designers. Created on Canva.

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