

During a Time of Silence...
Church Music and Church Musicians

by Rev. Dr. Paul Westermeyer

The Church is a gathering of people in song at a weekly worship service on the Lord's Day, around Word, Font, and Table. We gather with song, hear the Word with song, come to the Table with song—the Font too if there are baptisms—and are sent out with song. Service to the world emerges from this central gathering. Song about the love of God in Christ through the Spirit infuses the Church's life. This song persists in the midst of occurrences beyond human control and in the midst of the brokenness and sin in the Church and in the world. It embodies the Church's message of forgiveness, health, wholeness, and salvation that God gives in Christ through the Spirit.

A summary like the previous paragraph accurately describes the life of a faithful church and its members. However, it is impossible to describe this life specifically unless focusing on one particular church. Even then it is deeper than words can describe. This is no surprise since the Church is not a generalized spiritual phantom. The body of Christ takes flesh in a particular people with various ages from birth to death and with various proportions of ethnic, linguistic, and other identities. And the song in any of these particularities is not only what comes from that single group. It includes singing what other groups from many times and places across the history of the Church

have sung—from the Hebrew Old Testament through the Greek New Testament, and then through various peoples with their various languages and identities in the world for the next twenty centuries. This mix provides checks and balances on the blind spots every group has, and then the song itself transcends all of it.

In addition, the Church sings its message of the Gospel no matter what challenges it faces. The song convicts and comforts us. It does not do this alone, however. It carries the whole story in tandem with the more visible Word and Sacraments in their readings, proclamation, and actions at pulpit, font, and table—connecting specific themes across the Year to our journeys of joy and pain.

Our pandemic in 2020 has made the importance of music more obvious as we observe Church musicians doing all sorts of creative things to keep the praise, prayer, proclamation, and story of the Gospel before us with the gift of music, even when we are deprived of the gift's living nature in live sound among a gathered people. This substitute of the virtual for the alive can trick us into thinking that what we are seeing and hearing online is the “real thing.” It is the “real thing” in the sense that the Word is the “real thing” no matter what. We should not minimize the importance of our online “gatherings.” We should be very grateful for them.

But the “real thing” of the gathering is deeper. It's also deeper than concerts or performances of music which are more easily appreciated in recordings because the listener is different from the worshipper. It's also deeper than group singing that is not associated with Word, Font, and Table. And it's deeper than seeing music on a page because music is sound passing through time which helps us understand what Luther meant when he said that the Church is a “mouth house.” A musical leader may lead us without being seen because music travels through time and can be led by sound alone. But this should not trick us into thinking that the image of online worship is the same thing as the in-the-flesh singing together of the body of Christ in large or small gatherings.

We Church musicians lament how music is given short shrift and how musical programs of study can be ignored more easily than programs of study for other leaders in the Church. Our laments are legitimate. Paradoxically, however, music's importance is hidden in its very nature. Musicians in turn are hidden in the song which is not seen but persists. Music and musicians can be overlooked even though the Church sings in the most difficult of circumstances. Faithful pastors and lay people continually call able musicians, thank them, and testify

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to their importance for the community and its individuals. Even though bad things happen, and even though resources differ widely along with musical talents, abilities, and training, the Church continues to sing, no matter what.

The Church's song reminds us that God sustains the Church. For that, for the Church Music Institute, for the Center for Church Music (on whose website an earlier version of this article is Reflection 15),

and for all similar groups and efforts which help us sing, let us give thanks.

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2020 Was an Unusual and Exciting Year for CMI

It was not the year CMI anticipated, and yet, looking back, it perhaps became one of CMI's best years. By transitioning to online delivery of courses, workshops, and music, CMI reached more people than ever. CMI's extensive online libraries—accessible anytime, anywhere—became a bedrock for delivery of services to congregations seeking music in new formats for online worship. CMI was up to the challenge; our members determined the direction for programming. Teamwork!

Highlights from 2020

January 7-29 – *A January Songfest*: Four-week course “The Congregation Sings,” taught by CMI’s Drs. Robert Mann & Charlotte Kroeker in Denton & Dallas, TX

January 24-25 – Hymn Festival and workshop, “Music for Organ & Choir: Lent through Epiphany,” led by David Cherwien at Zion Lutheran Church, Dallas, TX

January 27 – Online Choral Music Webinar offered with the National Catholic Education Association and CMI, by Dr. Charlotte Kroeker

May – Four new clergy/musician teams and congregational representatives from Colorado, Texas, and Connecticut selected for 2020-2021 Lilly Peer Learning program. See churchmusicinstitute.org – Worship & Music Project.

June 22-26 – Online course “Music in Christian Worship,” with Lilly Scholars and students across the U.S., offered by CMI in conjunction with Brite Divinity School faculty, Rev. Dr. Paul Westermeyer, Dr. Christopher Anderson, and Rev. Dr. Michael Joncas.

August 7-8 – Online Workshop “Until the Vaccine Arrives,” facilitated by Dr. David Arcus and Dr. Don Horisberger as the Paul Lindsley Thomas and Hal Hopson Lecturers. Attendees returned for an “Afterwords” session to plan Saturday morning sessions for September, October, and November.

September 19 – Online Session “Navigating the New Normal: Honoring Copyright,” presented by Mark Lawson, MorningStar Music

September 26 – Online Session “Singing Together, Far Apart: Technology to Bring Us Together,” presented by Rosanne Penner Kaufman, Kansas City, KS

October 17 – Online Session “Organ Music for Ordinary Time,” presented by Dr. Margaret Harper, Dallas, TX

October 24 – Online Session “Choral Music for Upcoming Seasons,” presented by Dr. Don Horisberger, New Glarus, WI

November 7 – Online Session “Organ Music You May Not Know for the Winter Seasons,” presented by Dr. Margaret Harper, Dallas, TX

November 14 – Online Session “Best Ideas: Music & Worship in This Most Unusual Time,” ideas from musicians across the U.S. moderated by Dr. Tim Sharp (ACDA) & Dr. Michael Bedford (AGO) (More information on p. 3)

2020 Fun Facts

Arrived in July 2020: “The United States Library of Congress has selected your website for inclusion in the historic collection of internet materials related to the Professional Organizations for Performing Arts Web Archive. We consider your website to be an important part of this collection and the historical record.” Thank you to the Library of Congress!

CMI's online Sacred Music Libraries had a 230% increase in use in 2020. (continued p. 3)

CMI started its fall fundraising with its best ever Giving Day on September 19, with gifts from many first-time donors. Particularly in this unusual time, CMI is able to continue to serve congregations. Matching funds continue through December 31. Thanks to all who give!

CMI formalized a new agreement with the 21,000-member **American Choral Directors Association** for joint membership, mirroring the 2019 partnership with the 14,000-member **American Guild of Organists**.

Attendees of CMI's Online Summer Workshop and Fall Saturday Sessions tuned in from myriad locations across the United States (fig. 1).

Thousands of titles were added to CMI's Sacred Music Libraries, including music from the personal/professional collections of Katherine Morris (church musician), Daniel E. Gawthrop (composer), Michelle Grimm (church musician), Jamie Petrone (THISAbility Executive Director/Founder), Dr. David Music (Professor Emeritus, Baylor University), Hal and Martha Hopson (composer and church musician), Donald E. Dillard (composer, professor, and church musician), and Dr. David Knighton (physician).

CMI is now on Instagram! Follow us @churchmusicinstitute.

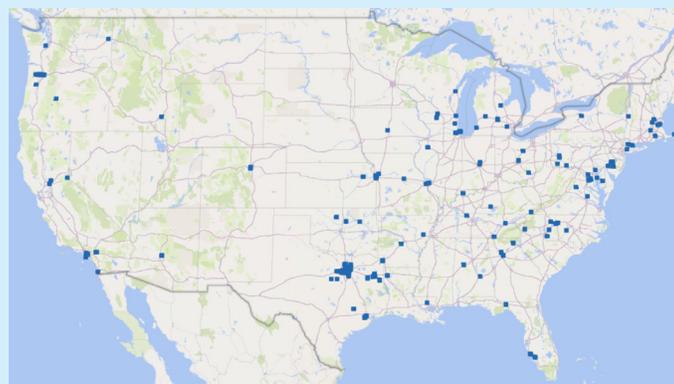


Figure 1: Locations of 2020 Summer Workshop and Fall Saturday Online Session Attendees

“Best Ideas: Music and Worship in This Most Unusual Time”

On November 14, CMI hosted “Best Ideas: Music and Worship in This Most Unusual Time,” a Saturday session exploring contributions from practitioners across the country. Facilitators Dr. Tim Sharp (Executive Director, ACDA) and Dr. Michael Bedford (President, AGO) presented ideas submitted from all participants of the course, and led a straw vote in each of the 7 categories for attendees’ favorites. Tallies were close, and everyone agreed that choosing was difficult; the complete list of ideas can be viewed at www.churchmusicinstitute.org/best-ideas-review. Here are a few of the favorites and their origins:

“We make a weekly video report from the choir room that includes announcements, joys and concerns, birthdays, a short music lesson, and a devotional. We use the app Mixcord for ensemble singing—singers record separately, but the app mixes it instantly.” – Benton, AR

“My choir enjoys Zoom rehearsals that have a social element, like trivia, a scavenger hunt, sharing of joys and concerns, etc. They especially enjoy singing along to previous recordings and following along with the sheet music on a shared screen. I have also recruited volunteers to sing call/response with me on Zoom. We typically end the session with a sing-along to a popular secular or sacred song that is well-known and uplifting (“Bridge Over Troubled Water,” “The Storm Is Passing Over,” “Lean On Me,” etc.).” – Glen Ellyn, IL

“Many congregations are not allowing any singing, even with masks; others allow ‘humming’ along. I suggest selecting specific stanzas of hymns (with emphasis on text) and using the organ to play variations on the

tune. Meanwhile, show the corresponding stanza texts in print for the assembly (either in hard copy or on a screen), and invite them to meditate on the text.” – Mechanicville, NY

“We are doing a ‘12 days of Hymn-Sing’ gift to our congregation. Beginning December 25 and continuing for 12 days, we will email a link to one virtual quartet or audio recording of our congregation’s favorite hymns to sing along with at home.” – Spokane Valley, WA

“To help congregations at home, I send out in the Thursday church electronic newsletter a link to a YouTube audio-visual clip for each hymn to be sung the coming Sunday.” – Fort Worth, TX

“We meet at the usual choir time (holding choir night steady on the church calendar and in members’ lives). Everyone enters through one gate, has their temperature taken, and takes their place in a carefully-spaced

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horseshoe formation outside. Each person brings their own 'choir bag,' which contains their folder, hymnal, booklight, pack of tissues, mechanical pencil, and singer's mask. We've become acclimated to our new singing/listening environment, using only the hymnal so far. We've made a few video recordings that will cheer our congregation via our Facebook page and YouTube channel in December. Further down the COVID road, I hope to be allowed to issue an all-come invitation to our congregation as a means of recruiting new choir members." – Stillwater, OK

"The minister and I are joining together to record a weekly devotion with organ meditations. We then will email the video to church members. The video will also be posted to the website. It's just another way of reaching out to our congregants who cannot be in worship." – Longview, TX

"I've been working on a 'Virtual Advent Lessons & Carols' service since Dr. Horisberger's session last summer. Local leaders who have not been available for reading in person before have been happy to provide videos for us this year. Lots of individual recording sessions plus archival recordings have provided carols that match nicely." – Tuscaloosa, AL

"Offer a virtual 'Favorite Hymn' Sing, where congregants email their requests early, and the musicians record a sing-along of those requested." – Fort Worth, TX

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Looking Forward to 2021

CMI is looking forward to an exciting and busy year! Additional events will be announced regularly through email, social media, and the website. Here are some things to anticipate:

Saturday Online Sessions will continue throughout the year.

Saturday, January 23 - *Organ Music for Meditations with Eric Birk*

Online, limited in-person, and non-existent worship scenarios present organists with extraordinary challenges and opportunities. NYC organist Eric Birk will demonstrate ideas and approaches for both selection and presentation that provide deep meaning and spiritual engagement for worshippers hearing organ music, whether they listen online or attend in-person worship.

Book Discussion Series: People and Ideas that Shape Church Music

Mondays in February - *Church Music and the Christian Faith* by Erik Routley

Erik Routley was a tall figure in the field of worship and music in the 20th century, inspiring clergy and musicians alike to ask the questions necessary to meaningful congregational worship. Are his ideas still relevant? Are the questions he posed those we should be asking as 21st century worship leaders in a pandemic? Join us for an **online book study** of Erik Routley's *Church Music and the Christian Faith*, led by Chris Brunt, former Routley student and Dean of the Dallas AGO, and Rev. Tim Morrison, Custer Road United Methodist Church, Plano, TX.

April – Collaborative webinar with American Choral Directors Association to explore CMI online choral library

June – Online "Congregational Song" course, presented in cooperation with Brite Divinity School, featuring Dr. James Abbingtion, Dr. Mary Louise Bringle, Rev. Dr. Michael Joncas, and Rev. Dr. Paul Westermeyer

August – Virtual Summer Workshop

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