

Let's start a conversation. We want to hear from you! See questions on page 3.

In Praise of Church Musicians

Great leaders of congregational song attend to the new community formed every time a church gathers.

By Peter W. Marty

Much of the meaning we find in our personal lives stems from contributions by people we often neglect to thank. Individuals who impact us in untold ways inadvertently get overlooked. Some of the unsung heroes who've helped make me who I am are church musicians. Worship organizes my life and centers my soul in ways that you can only know by knowing me. But the music of worship is what has helped generate the particular kind of person I am.

Gifted church musicians know how to help people sing together. They're genius at helping a congregation get "lost in wonder, love, and praise," to borrow Charles Wesley's words, without simply getting lost. Week in and week out, these practitioners enlarge individual worlds, send chills up spines, and remind worshipers that singing is not an external option for our lives; it's an internal component of being fully human. This column is for all those who help congregations make music on a weekly basis but who might not often hear how much their work matters to those around them.

Every time a congregation gathers, a new community must form. Even if the assembly just met the previous week, its character has altered. Various component parts have shifted. Bodies have aged, however slightly. New joys have

walked in the door. Fresh sorrows have settled into a back pew. Two tenors from the choir are missing. An elder has died. A baby gets happily passed around. A funny bulletin typo has people whispering. One of the spotlights above the pulpit is flickering annoyingly.

It's the musicians who must pay attention to all of the nuances of this new community. They have the job of listening closely to everything that's going on. They must assume responsibility for helping the boundaries and distinctions of this diverse group of people relax enough to become fresh solidarity. This is hard work that requires no small degree of faith, skill, and humility. But if it's successful, a bonding of people will occur. A thickness of congregational spirit will emerge. A weight of mystery will fill up the interior dimensions of people's lives. Those who thought they couldn't sing, or who don't want to sing, suddenly find themselves enveloped in lovely ways by the resonant voice of the church singing together.

Excellent church musicians—whether they play piano, lean into an organ, lead a band, compose music, or direct a choir—are theologians in their own right. They're people convinced that the glory of God is central to honest worship and not just some Jesus-y feelings that can well up inside the bellies of hungry

worshippers. They're busy fighting for the congregation to find its voice, yearning for each and every soul to discover that singing is sacred duty. Church musicians who have given the greatest shape to my life are those who appear to delight more in getting music into my soul than just out of theirs. Yes, the talent of their hands, feet, and vocal cords may be awesome, which is beautiful. But the way they deploy their abilities determines whether the rest of us feel bigger or smaller than when we arrived.

Eugene Peterson suggests that song is the result of excess energy. "When we are normal, we talk," says Peterson. "When we are dying, we whisper. But when there is more in us than we can contain, we sing." The next time you find yourself in worship experiencing more joy than you can hold inside yourself, sing



like your life depends on it. And then, flag down your music leader on your way out the door to let them know of your gratitude.

Copyright © 2024 by the Christian Century. Reprinted by permission from the April 2024 issue of the Christian Century.

www.christiancentury.org

In Praise of Musical Clergy

Great pastors know good congregational music is essential for worship.

By Charlotte Kroeker

Church musicians know a priest or pastor can make or break the effectiveness of music for worship. This article is meant to thank those clergy who, while given responsibility for worship by their denominations, respect and enjoy a good working relationship with their musicians. Musicians in these optimal situations have been heard saying things like this:

- “My pastor often quotes the texts of hymns we sing in sermons.”
- “My priest works closely with me to make certain I understand theological themes for the day so I can choose music to enhance and expand the impact of worship.”
- “Our planning process begins 3-6 months out so our choir has enough time for rehearsal and is prepared to offer quality music.”
- “Our church uses music everywhere, in children’s education classes, as part of devotions in vestry meetings, when we gather for church potlucks. Music pervades our church community.”
- “I was asked to teach a course on hymnody! What an opportunity!”
- “I’m never forced to choose music just because someone likes it – not even the pastor’s favorites. We choose music because it fits the liturgy for the day.”
- “My church prioritizes children and youth music programs knowing they are critical to the future of the church.”

Clergy with vibrant music programs know which music is important to their congregations. Dr. Mel Bringle, editor of the Glory to God hymnal, describes music most meaningful to congregations as their “heart music.” Words of “heart music” are cemented in memories - the music helps remember them. These hymns, songs, Psalms and service music are sung heartily and with conviction. They appear at weddings and funerals where they bring tears of sadness or joy. These congregations share a corporate memory, built over years of worshipping together, that is tapped for touchstone moments in their lives. Clergy who are musical theologians build this heart music into worship planning knowing how important it is to spiritual growth.

Clergy and musicians who think both theologically and musically pack a wallop into worship services. They listen to their congregations both during and outside worship and use what they hear to create transcendent worship. They listen for differences between simple gratification and meaningful spiritual experience. They give time in worship to allow final sounds of musical offerings to linger. If an unfamiliar piece of music is used, reasons for inclusion of the new music are given. The congregation is introduced to it thoughtfully. The congregation knows music is chosen with purpose and respond by doing their part.

In these transformative congregations, clergy and musicians work together to create a varied and significant repertoire that spans the liturgical year. Children, youth and new members learn a core repertoire of music to sing with the congregation. The congregational family acquires a musical repertoire to accompany their corporate and individual faith journey at every stage of life.

Clergy in these congregations understand music as essential to their preaching, presiding, and pastoral ministry, a vital tool for developing spiritual growth over the lifetimes of their congregation. They work as a team with musicians who also are beneficiaries of theological depth from their clerical partners. These musicians grow their own faith and ability to impart spiritual meaning via music. The team is a partnership for the greater good.



Musicians and congregations give thanks for these musical theologians with whom we are privileged to share our religious journey. If you are a musician or congregation member with clergy who have these characteristics, you will understand. We give thanks and praise to God for these important clergy.

Let's start a conversation. ←

As you reflect on the words of Rev. Marty and Dr. Kroeker, CMI wants your feedback. Email responses to the following questions along with your comments to ckroeker@churchmusicinstitute.org. A composite of readers' thoughts will appear in a future communication.

- 1) How do clergy and musicians fulfill different but important roles in worship?
- 2) What unique gifts does each bring to worship?
- 3) What is the role of the congregation in worship, and how can clergy and musicians best enable their worship?
- 4) Why is it important to choose music carefully for worship?
- 5) What music is important to you? Can you name hymns/songs/Psalms that have enriched the spiritual journey of your congregation?
- 6) What else would you like to say about music and worship?

Events

Erik Routley: His Impact on Modern Church Music

A lecture by Dr. Nancy Graham

Saturday, April 27th 10:00 a.m. CDT

Join us for this entertaining, informative, and stimulating discussion about a man who continues to speak for our time. Dr. Nancy Graham recounts the life and impact of Erik Routley on church music, the church, and theology in a stimulating lecture about the man considered the most significant hymnologist of the 20th century. Dr. Graham, a noted hymnologist, musician and author, will explore a powerful article Routley wrote in 1951 that continues to resonate with church leaders today. As Michael Hopkins of Westminster College, Cambridge says: Routley's "contributions to church life, chaplaincy, and theological education were immense, but dwarfed by his incredible contribution to church music and hymnody." Following her lecture, you will be able to pose your questions in a Question-and-Answer session with Dr. Graham. It will be worth your time.

To register and get additional details go to:

<https://www.churchmusicinstitute.org/event/erik-routley-speaks-for-our-time/>

If you can't join us, register and receive a link to view later.

Music In Christian Worship ~ Online Course June 10-21

Are you looking for ways to make your Sunday music inspire greater spirituality and engagement while maintaining its rich sacred heritage? Consider enrolling in this graduate level course designed specifically for clergy and church music professionals.

This is a foundational course for clergy and musicians about the church's music, covering theological underpinnings in various traditions, various worship streams and how music relates to them, congregational song, choral song, music leadership, language, service planning, and staff relationships.

Dr. Charlotte Kroeker, executive director of the Church Music Institute and recognized sacred music scholar, is the organizing professor. Classes will be taught by professors well known for their expertise in the particular topic of the day. Each day's classes will begin and conclude with services using the music studied that day which is applicable to current worship. **Deadline to register is May 1st.**

This course provides 3 graduate level credit hours through Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University or can be audited. For the Prospectus, Course Outline, and Registration information go to:

<https://www.churchmusicinstitute.org/event/music-in-christian-worship-course-3/>

CMI Summer Intensive and Retreat 2024

Intensive August 2th-3rd & Retreat through

The *Summer Intensive* is a workshop of latest resources, methods and ideas built on established practices. It's an opportunity to learn from and engage with invited experts, and seasoned and new musicians alike. Come "build" with colleagues and plan your 2024-25 program year!

The *Music & Worship: Imagine and Explore Summer Retreat* begins with the Summer Intensive and extends through August 6th. Join the CMI and early career musicians in a retreat that focuses on church musicians in the beginning stages of their careers. These sessions will inspire and prepare you to lead meaningful worship whether you are serving in a small or large congregation. A project specific to your interests and work setting will result. Scholarships are available.

For More information and to register go to:

<https://www.churchmusicinstitute.org/event/church-music-institute-summer-intensive-2024/>

CMI Has a New Home!

The Church Music Institute has moved to the campus of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Dallas, Texas, which will provide new office, library, and meeting spaces for CMI. Additionally, St. Luke's is welcoming CMI constituents to share its beautiful chapel and sanctuary, complete with fine organs, which will enable CMI to enhance services offered.

"We are very excited to welcome the Church Music Institute to our campus and look forward to a cordial relationship and collaborations that will enrich the liturgical and musical life at St. Luke's," Fr. Gama said. Fr. Gama's training as a classical opera singer along with his love of the liturgy and music of the church will be an added benefit for our partnership. We have already established a strong working relationship with St. Luke's staff including: Archdeacon Rosemary Trei, Director of Sacred Music Donna Clavijo, business manager Susie Pepitone, and facilities director Juan Chavez.

"Considering a move was something we took very seriously, and we are grateful to God for opening the door to this new partnership with St. Luke's Episcopal. They understand that, though we are housed in a church of one denomination, we are committed to serving the larger Church, enhancing the song that continues to be sung through the ages," said Rev. Andy Odom, CMI board chair.

The Church Music Institute is also grateful to our former landlord, Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, for 7 1/2 years of partnership, during which we have grown from a regional organization to one now serving members nationally and internationally. Saint Michael's collaboration, along with the Dr. Paul Lindsley Thomas' music and archives, have made CMI a stronger resource to the church community worldwide.

Please make note of our new contact information below and visit us soon.

Did you know?

A CMI membership gives you access to our extensive, carefully curated repertoire searchable by scripture, hymn tune, composer, and more! To become a member, sign up at www.churchmusicinstitute.org/membership/

Let's Connect!

@churchmusicinstitute on Instagram, as well as on Facebook and Twitter, to keep up with the latest CMI happenings!

CMI is a proud partner of the American Choral Directors Association, the American Guild of Organists, the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, and the American Federation Pueri Cantores.



Dr. Charlotte Kroeker, Executive Director
214.751.7669 | info@churchmusicinstitute.org
5923 Royal Lane, Dallas, TX 75230
churchmusicinstitute.org

Dedicated to the advancement of the best liturgical and sacred music for Christian worship, serving clergy, musicians, and congregants.