

2015 Faithful Servant Awards

The Faithful Servant Award was established by ALCM in recognition of and appreciation for those who have made extraordinary contributions to the worship life of the church. In January 2015 the Board of Directors identified three gifted individuals to receive the award for 2015: **Victor Gebauer, Wilbur Held, and Walter Pelz.**



Victor Earl Gebauer took a first breath on 13 October 1938 in Christchurch, New Zealand, but came to the USA a few years later due to wartime conditions in the Pacific. His early life took place near St. Louis, later in Chicago. After studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (M.Div. 1964, ordination 1970); he did advanced study at the University of Minnesota (Ph.D. 1976); the University of Chicago's Divinity School; and as a Fulbright Student at the Free University (Berlin, 1968-1969). Gebauer served for thirty years as Dean of Chapel, Chair of the Division of Fine Arts, and Professor of Music and Religion at Concordia University, St. Paul. In 1996 he was called as Executive Director of Lutheran Summer Music and retired from that position.

Formerly editor for *Response* (journal of the Lutheran Society for Worship, Music, and the Arts), his own writings have appeared in journals such as *Church Music*, *The Hymn*, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, *Cross Accent*, *Pastoral Music*, and *Dialog*. He has also contributed eleven entries for *Worship Music: A Concise Dictionary*, articles on American church music for *Key Words in Church Music* (2nd ed.), and twenty-one items for the *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (publication pending). His *Manual for Altar Guilds* was published by Augsburg Fortress, and he is a contributor to the forthcoming hymnal companion for *Lutheran Service Book*.

Along the way Gebauer also served as assistant music director at Mount Olive Lutheran Church (Minneapolis), part-time pastor at the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour (St. Paul), and interim pastor at several congregations. He also functioned as an adjunct faculty member at St. John's University (Collegeville, MN) and the General Manager of the Festival of Worship and Witness (1983). In 1994 he served as guest lecturer at Luther Theological Seminary (Shingal, Korea) and more recently, in the USA, as Convener of the American Church Music History Consultation.

Gebauer served the ALCM as editor of its newsletter *Grace Notes* and as associate editor for *Cross Accent*. He also wrote a regular column on "Cantors of the Church" in *Grace Notes* that is now being expanded online for the Center for Church Music. At home in Minnesota's Twin Cities, he has been blessed by half a century's marriage to his wife, Marilyn, also by four children and two grandchildren (with a third expected later this year). The Gebauers enjoy further grace these days as members of Mount Olive Lutheran Church (ELCA), Minneapolis, where they worship splendidly, bring the Holy Communion to the homebound, and sing in the choir. For all this they are grateful to God!



Wilbur Held, composer, teacher, and servant of God, died on March 24, 2015, in Claremont, California, five months shy of his 101th birthday. ALCM president Anne Krentz Organ notified Wilbur about the award in January.

A deeply thoughtful and meticulous musician, Held crafted elegant preludes, postludes and hymn settings published largely in themed collections. Because of their combination of substance and accessibility, they remain central to the repertoire of church organists around the globe. Held's musical language reaches back through the centuries and brings those

influences to bear in a style that is distinctively of our time. The tenor of everything he wrote, like the man himself, was that of humility.

A conscientious objector, Held spent time during World War II cooking food without vitamins for a path-breaking project on nutrition now known as the Minnesota Semi-Starvation Experiment. Its findings were later published as *The Biology of Human Starvation*.

In 1946 Held was named professor of organ at The Ohio State University and served as organist at Trinity Episcopal Church in downtown Columbus. After advanced study at Union Theological Seminary, he was able to significantly expand the church music program at OSU.

After his retirement, Held and his wife Virginia moved to Southern California. In addition to other artistic pursuits the couple began to collect Southern California Caliente Pottery, a style favored in 1930s and '40s that had by then fallen into obscurity. Held loved to tell stories about how he acquired fine pieces for pennies at local thrift shops. He went on to author a catalogue that revived interest in this indigenous style.

A few years after Virginia's death, Held moved into the Claremont Manor in that leafy college town. There he continued to compose. He also gave occasional recitals, and until the month before his death was at the Manor organ for virtually all Vespers and memorial services.

Concerning the latter, the saying around the Claremont Manor was, "First you go to the hospital, then you go to the Care Center, and then Wilbur gets you." Now, who gets Wilbur? None other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for the long and fruitful life of Wilbur Held, and for a musical legacy that will endure.



A renowned composer, choral director, organist and educator, **Walter L. Pelz** regularly performs recitals, dedications and hymn festivals and appears as a clinician for organ and choral workshops throughout the United States. He has composed several hundred compositions including verses and offertories, anthems, solos, cantatas, hymns, choral symphonies, and organ works — many with instruments. He is affiliated with nine publishers. Most of his compositions are the result of commissions from

colleges, churches, publishers, corporations and private individuals. Several of his hymn tunes and harmonizations are included in recent hymnal supplements. His works have also been featured on a CD “Joy is Sounding” for the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians (ALCM) which was released in 2002. His compositions have been performed in churches, colleges, and on radio and television in the United States and Europe.

A native of Chicago, Dr. Pelz studied organ at the American Conservatory of Music while attending and receiving his undergraduate degree from Concordia Teachers College — now Concordia University — in River Forest, Illinois. He received his master’s degree in organ and church music from Northwestern University. His doctorate in Theory and Composition was from the University of Minnesota where his organ instructor was Heinrich Fleischer and his composition instructors were Paul Fetler and Dominick Argento.

His position as a church organist goes back to his high school days. Early in his career he was a teacher in the Lutheran parochial school system where he also served as organist and choir director. He joined the Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, music faculty in 1969 and taught theory, composition, piano, organ, directed choirs and was the college organist. Here he was named the Billue-Burnett Distinguished Professor in Music, a position he held until he took early retirement in 1989 in order to devote more time to composing and performing. Dr. Pelz was named Kansas Composer of the Year by the Kansas Federation of Music Clubs. Another honor was bestowed in August 2001 when he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois, for his “outstanding contribution to Christian Education through scholarly research and publications which are widely recognized and appreciated in the church and nation.” He is a charter member of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians (ALCM) and the American Guild of Organists where he holds the Choirmaster Certificate. In 2012 he received the Artist’s Lifetime Achievement Award from the Lindsborg Arts Council in recognition of his outstanding work with Bethany College music students and various choirs as well as for his composing and performance skills in organ music.

During his retirement he continues to maintain an active performance and composing schedule. Most recently he has formed the choral group Bach at Bethany Singers who have presented yearly concerts at Bethany Lutheran Church in Lindsborg.

On June 10, 2015 he and his wife, Dolores, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. They have three married daughters, eleven grandchildren, and sixteen great-grandchildren