

A “Wondrous Thing”

Giving Thanks to God for the First Ten Years of ALCM

Carlos Messerli

NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD
WITH HEARTS AND HANDS AND VOICES,
WHO WONDROUS THINGS HAS DONE,
IN WHOM HIS WORLD REJOICES.

When Martin Rinkhart wrote the text of the chorale “Now Thank We All Our God” in the sixteenth century, he of course could not have had in mind the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. And yet the text of the hymn chosen as the theme of the Tenth Anniversary ALCM Hymn Festivals of 1996 forms a fitting banner under which to contemplate the achievements of the first decade of the Association. Quite naturally for the baptized children of God, such reflection leads to doxologies of praise and thanks to the Holy Trinity for the blessings showered on the church and her musicians through the ministry of the members of the ALCM – a “wondrous thing” indeed!

In 1996 ALCM stands as a strong and successful service and professional organization, with membership approaching 2,000, dedicated to the cause of strengthening the ministry of music in the Lutheran church. It serves through a wide range of publications, conferences, and local, regional, and national events. ALCM is widely recognized as a significant force in Lutheran church music.

The path by which ALCM came to its present position is worth review.

Background

In 1985, when the first major step was taken to organize a national Lutheran church musicians’ group, there were divergent opinions about its structure, membership, and purpose. Some wanted a professional body for full-time church musicians. Others proposed a general membership open to all. Some saw an organization closely related to the structures of the major Lutheran church bodies. Others proposed an entirely autonomous group. Some wanted to include pastors, artists, and lay people. Others wanted to keep the focus on practicing church musicians.

A brief survey will clarify the background of these tensions and their resolution. This review includes pan-Lutheran events that prepared for and followed the creation of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, which in itself affected the creation of ALCM.

LSWMA

In 1958, at the time of the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Minneapolis, a group was formed that proved to be a predecessor of ALCM. Taking the name Lutheran Society for Worship, Music, and the Arts (LSWMA), Lutherans from all major bodies embraced the goal of

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furthering worship through a membership representing several related disciplines: theology, liturgy, music, architecture, literature, and the fine arts. The Society held annual conferences, published a major journal, a newsletter, study guides for parish worship leadership, papers, bulletins, and art reproductions. Daniel Moe, John Arthur, William Walters, and Carl Schalk were among its presidents. The landmark journal *Response* achieved high regard under the editors Walter Buszin, Gerhard Cartford, Warren Rubel, and Victor Gebauer. Active among its members were musicians Linden Lundstrom, Charles Anders, Donald Myrvik (who served as full-time executive), Philip Gehring, Carlos Messerli, Edward Klammer, Paul Foelber, Johannes Riedel, Carolyn Bliss, Ron Nelson, and L. David Miller. Incidentally, the name of the journal *Response* was suggested by Martin E. Marty, who later offered the name *Cross Accent* for the ALCM journal.

In the course of its history the Society achieved a membership of about 2,000, but financial problems and lack of participation by members contributed to its decline. Eventually, in 1981, LSWMA was absorbed into the Liturgical Conference, but during its more than twenty-year history the importance of music and the other arts and liturgy in the worship life of the church was strengthened and pan-Lutheran cooperation was initiated, developments that many agree led to the production of the *LBW*.

It was not coincidental that in 1966 the three major Lutheran church bodies created the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), for leaders in worship in the American Lutheran Church (ALC), Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) had in years immediately preceding begun to develop a collegial spirit of trust and respect, in part through the work of the LSWMA. This atmosphere helped to shape the theological, liturgical, and musical understandings from which eventually came in 1978 the realization of the ultimate goal of the ILCW, a common book for all Lutherans: the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

Lutheran Conferences for Worship

As the worship book was nearing completion and the work of the ILCW was nearly accomplished, a new body was created and identified with the unlikely acronym “Triple-C-Pickle,” or Coordinating Committee for Cooperative Projects in Congregational Life. Its purpose was to exchange information and undertake joint projects between the ALC, LCA, LCMS, and AELC (newly formed Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, a group of congregations that had withdrawn from the LCMS). Leadership was provided at various times by John Becker and Ralph Van Loon (LCA), Jerry Evenrud and Mons Teig (ALC), Theodore DeLaney and Frederick Precht (LCMS), and Mark Bangert (AELC).

Triple-C-Pickle, working through its Joint Committee for Worship, scheduled annual Lutheran Conferences for Worship at a number of locations across the United States and Canada from 1975 to 1986. These built upon similar Lutheran Institutes for Church Music that had been held primarily for musicians since the mid-1960s. The new conferences were well-funded and publicized and achieved great success in familiarizing clergy, music leaders, and laity with liturgy and music proposed or prepared for the new book. The actual outcome of these popular week-long festivals was a church-wide increase of interest in liturgy and music, both new and old. A liturgical and musical renewal was underway in the church.

The First Association

Meanwhile, with the disappearance of the LSWMA as a specifically Lutheran organization, church musicians were discussing among themselves the possibility of creating their own body. Yvonne Kuhlman reports that at the national convention of the American Guild of Organists in 1980 in Minneapolis, a group of Lutheran musicians talked about forming an association that would be comparable to those of other church bodies. In 1981 a list of objectives for the proposed group was framed, but much time was to pass before an organization was formed.

On October 13, 1984, a group met in Mason City, Iowa, to form the first Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. Yvonne Kuhlman was elected president, objectives were adopted,

by-laws were discussed, committees were formed, and invitations were extended to the first conference of the Association. It was scheduled for August 19 and 20, 1985, at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. Although reservations were subsequently received, this meeting was eventually cancelled in deference to other developments that were taking place.

Organizing Meeting

In 1985 the Joint Committee for Worship of Triple-C-Pickle, responding to a groundswell of encouragement by musicians over a period of time, extended invitations nationwide to a meeting of professional church musicians in Columbia, South Carolina, on October 14-16, 1985. This effort to create a formal church musicians' organization was directed by John Becker, Jerry Evenrud, Ralph Van Loon, Mons Teig, and Mark Bangert. Columbia was selected as the meeting site because the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians of South Carolina was already organized and had for several years offered a schedule of worship, workshops, and programs in that region.

About 140 church musicians from across the United States and Canada responded to the invitation and gathered at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary with L. David Miller as host. Mark Bangert and Gordon Lathrop were featured speakers. Other leaders included Bruce Bengtson, Marty Cloninger, Rodney Gehrke, and S. Anita Stauffer.

The excitement and tensions of creating the new organization resulted in lengthy and heated discussions, both in the plenary body and in committees. It was finally decided to name the organization the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. Membership was to be open to all Lutheran church musicians and the group was to remain structurally independent of the official church bodies. A constituting convention was scheduled for August, 1986. Larry Christensen was elected president and Maureen Jais-Mick secretary to serve until the 1986 meeting. Committees were formed: Long-range Planning, Lori Herman, chair; Communications, Mark Sedio, chair; Constitution, Mark Bighley, chair; 1986 Conference Site, Marty Cloninger, chair; and 1986 Conference Program, Margaret Sihler-Anderson, chair. Larry Peterson was chosen editor of the newsletter *Grace Notes*, which was to appear first in January, 1986. An invitation was extended to all to become Charter Investors by contributing \$100 for the formation of the ALCM.

Constituting Convention

The Constituting Convention of the ALCM, held at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, August 11-13, 1986, was attended by more than 200 church musicians from across the U. S. and Canada. Officers were elected (see the box), a constitution was adopted, and goals were approved. Equally important, because these qualities have become hallmarks of ALCM events, throughout the convention a high standard of excellence, a warmth and collegiality of spirit, and an elevated sense of mission in worship, program, and musical performance was maintained.

At the Northfield meeting independence of structure was affirmed, with support secured by member fees, grants, and self-generated projects. Nevertheless, liaison with church bodies was to be maintained. Membership was open to all professional church musicians, full-time and part-time, and to others who share the goals of the body.

The U. S. and Canada were divided into four geographical areas for better regional participation. National and regional conferences and election of national and regional officers were scheduled for alternate years. Publications were projected and three areas of special concern – ecclesiastical, educational, and professional – were assigned to elected directors (see the box).

In identifying the tasks to be assumed by the Association, eleven goals were hammered out, goals that have remained remarkably relevant over the past ten years. These goals, in somewhat abbreviated form, were:

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1. Strengthen our Lutheran liturgical heritage
 2. Define the role of the church musician
 3. Espouse professional standards
 4. Encourage spiritual growth
 5. Foster professional exchange
 6. Prepare guidelines for employment
 7. Serve full-time and part-time church musicians
 8. Advocate college and seminary training in liturgy and music
 9. Strengthen communication between clergy and musicians
 10. Create liaison with church bodies
 11. Create publications of high quality

The ALCM was born – legally created for its noble purpose – amid much rejoicing and eager anticipation. What follows will survey a decade of the resulting areas of service and organization: officers, membership, conferences, publications, finances, and special projects.

Officers

Membership in ALCM has grown steadily from the attendance of 200 at the constituting convention. By 1988 there were 600 members; 800 in 1989; 1,100 in 1991; 1,300 in 1992; and over 1,800 today. Membership is drawn from all major Lutheran bodies with the largest number, quite naturally, coming from the ELCA. Regions I and III (see the map for regional boundaries) have had the largest number of members because of the greater population of Lutherans in those regions. More than 130 guest memberships are given to appropriate church leaders. Special membership is granted on an exchange basis to officers of the Association of Anglican Musicians.

Conferences

The highlight of activity for ALCM members each year, as well as the most visible function of the organization, is the national or regional conference, held in alternate years (see the box). The sites of national conferences are selected on a rotational basis by region, and regional conference locations are chosen carefully to cover various parts of each region. The boldest selection of a conference site was that of Seattle, with its relatively small Lutheran population, as the first national conference location. The success of the Seattle meeting affirmed the national character of ALCM. The most unusual conference site was the Caribbean Cruise Conference of Region II in the winter of 1996.

ALCM conferences have provided worship and music opportunities of high quality and varied content. Distinguished keynote and other featured speakers have included M. Alfred Bichsel, Walter Bouman, Dan Reuning, Don Saliers, and Paul Westermeyer. Workshops and other sessions are designed to meet the many divergent interests and needs of those attending.

Grace Notes

Grace Notes was designed from the beginning to be a newsletter announcing and reporting events of the Association. From 1986 to 1990 it appeared quarterly; there were five issues dated 1991. Since 1992 it has appeared bimonthly. Altogether, 52 issues have been released (see the box for a list of the editors).

In recent years special attention has also been given to a number of special articles on a variety of topics: composers of the church, hymnody, cantors of the church, theological foundations of church music, children's music and worship, bibliographies, cross-cultural concerns, and music reviews. Beginning in December, 1993, *Grace Notes* included the "Resource Center" insert, edited by Lorraine Brugh, which provides practical seasonal aids, including original music, for coming Sundays of the liturgical year. This feature has proven to be one of the most welcome aspects of the newsletter.

Cross Accent

The greatest single financial commitment of ALCM was made when the journal *Cross Accent* was approved in 1991. Bearing a name suggested by Martin E. Marty, the first issue appeared in 1993, with Philip Gehring as editor. Eight issues have appeared thus far on a semiannual schedule. The journal has attracted wide attention because of the excellence and diversity of its contents and because of its innovative, yet classic appearance.

Beginning with the January 1997 issue Tom Leeseberg-Lange will become editor of *Cross Accent*.

Other Publications

In order to ensure the quality of occasional publications and to provide professional service to members, an agreement was made with Morning Star Music Publishers of St. Louis in 1987 to print and sell items authorized by ALCM. The occasional publications of the Association have included papers, pamphlets, CD recordings, and other items.

"Papers" were originally intended to be presentations of lasting value that did not fit into the format of the newsletter. Five have been produced so far. "Pamphlets" are of greater length than papers. The pamphlets, *The Cantor in Historical Perspective* by M. Alfred Bichsel and *Evangelicalism and the Liturgical Movement and Their Effects on Lutheran Worship* by Charles J. Evenson, both grew out of ALCM conference papers.

ALCM has also produced a striking 11" x 17" poster consisting chiefly of calligraphic art suitable for framing and entitled "The Role of the Cantor."

A major effort to stimulate parish growth in understanding and appreciation of worship and music is reflected in *The Parish Education Series*, which consists of material designed for presentation in three hour-long sessions on the topics, "The Church Year," "Hymnody," "The Organ," "Psalmody," and "Liturgy." The authors are Thomas Schattauer, Paul Westermeyer, Philip Gehring, Carl Schalk, and Ralph Smith. Donald Rotermund served as editor for the series.

More recently *Guidelines for the Employment of Musicians in the Lutheran Church* by Kate Adelman has been issued to fill a long-felt need for a statement on the theological, economic, and practical aspects of the employment of Lutheran church musicians.

ALCM president David Cherwien has nurtured two highly successful hymn festivals in the recorded Congregational Song Series. Each has been released on compact disc. In October, 1994, John Ferguson led a congregation of 2,000 at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. At the July, 1995, national ALCM conference, Donald Busarow led a standing-room-only crowd in a spirited hymn festival in cavernous St. John's Cathedral in Denver.

A new reference publication will appear in the summer of 1996. *Guide to Basic Resources for the Lutheran Church Musician*, featuring several prominent authors, will be edited by Carl Schalk.

Finances

As with most church-related non-profit organizations, finances have always been a concern for ALCM. The early financial history of the Association reveals that the 1985 Columbia meeting was supported by staff and funds from the sponsoring church bodies, a grant from Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), and registration fees. The contributions of \$100 each by charter investors covered the period before the constituting convention the next year.

By the time of the December 10, 1985, meeting of the Steering Committee, the secretary-treasurer reported that \$3,725 was in the ALCM checking account. By January 1, 1986, there were 60 charter investors and a balance of \$5,159. Two months later, the February 28 report revealed a balance of \$6,625 and 100 charter investors and contributors.

From these modest beginnings, ALCM has grown to a membership of over 1,800 with a gross income of \$319,678 in 1995. While most of this sum has come from membership fees and member supported activities, grants (especially from AAL) have played an important part in funding special projects.

Special Events

The early years of the Association were almost totally occupied with organizational and procedural matters. Major achievements of these years were providing the organization with a basic structure, vehicles of communication, and public conferences that would serve the profession and attract a supportive national membership.

The middle years of the past decade showed a substantial growth in membership and the selection and consolidation of processes most helpful to the Association.

Most recently, ALCM has undertaken significant new projects designed to serve the membership and the church. In 1987 a major effort was made to communicate to all Lutheran seminaries the need for a clergy better trained in worship, liturgy, and music. Encouragement was given to these institutions to add qualified staff and course requirements in these fields for future pastors.

A similar project was undertaken in 1991 as leaders of Lutheran church bodies were formally encouraged to staff and strengthen their national church worship and music offices.

The beginning of a professional placement service was made by the ALCM in 1988 with the appearance of vacant position announcements in *Grace Notes*. High demand for this service resulted in the subsequent expansion to the form of an independent ALCM publication. 1988 also saw the beginning of a synergistic relationship with Lutheran Summer Music, the national Lutheran high school music camp, in the formation of the Church Music Apprenticeship program sponsored by the two bodies.

In 1988 Jane Hill of Kingsport, Tennessee, submitted the winning entry in the competitive nationwide search for an appropriate logo to give the ALCM a needed visual identity.

In addition to well-attended national and regional conferences, ALCM sponsored a winter colloquium for church music composers at Luther Seminary in St. Paul in 1994. A second colloquium was held the following year at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago on "Culture and Worship." Both meetings received welcome support from AAL.

Activities and needs of church musicians in Europe and Australia attracted the attention of ALCM beginning in 1994. Through the Eastern European Church Music Project, colleagues in Slovakia have received limited assistance from ALCM.

In the desire to further communication within the ALCM and better serve its growing membership and other church musicians, the secretary initiated an 800 telephone "hot line" in 1994.

Because funding for ongoing and new projects has always lagged behind needs, an Annual Fund Appeal was initiated in 1995 by the ALCM Development Committee.

One of the most popular and innovative projects of the Association has been the series of Rural Church Music Workshops. In 1995 four were held in Canada and six in the United States. These were so well received that in 1996 Canada will see six workshops and the United States nine. The events are designed to address the needs of small (especially rural) parishes that often have less than adequate church music resources.

Since 1987 seven leaders in Lutheran church music have been designated Honorary Life Members of ALCM in recognition of their accomplishments and contributions to the profession (see the box).

And finally, Tenth Anniversary Hymn Festivals are to be led at nearly 100 locations across the U. S. and Canada by members of the ALCM under the guidance of Robert Hobby on October 6, 1996. The theme of these festivals, "Now thank we all our God," expresses the gratitude of the Association for the blessings it has received and been privileged to give to others over the course of the last decade.

In evaluating the work and influence of ALCM over the past decade it is helpful to look beyond the lists of leaders and accomplishments of the organization. Rather, contemplate the extent of the effects of membership. Those who have been nurtured and inspired by their membership in the Association have in turn inspired many others by their weekly service in the parish.

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Therefore, the chief accomplishment of the first decade of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians remains the impetus given to each member to excel in the exalted task of leading members of the Body of Christ in praise of their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. All the achievements of ALCM – organization, publications, meetings – pale in comparison to that great and eternal task of praising God. The “wondrous thing” which God has so richly favored in the work of the ALCM these past ten years simply prepares us all for our eternal task. What a blessing!



Soli Deo gloria

Carlos Messerli retired this year as Executive Director of the Lutheran Music Program. He was President of ALCM from 1989 to 1993.