

The Executive Committee of
Grand Rapids AGO
2006-2007

Officers

Howard Slenk, *Dean*
(HowardS@stmarksepiscopalchurch.org)

Lois Ripma, *Secretary*
(lripma@netpenny.net)

Errol Shewman, *Treasurer*
(EShewman@hotmail.com)

Council Members at Large

Chris Dekker, 2007
(christopher.dekker@hope.edu)

Criss De Vries, 2007
(cdevries@sbcglobal.net)

Jonathan Tuuk, 2008
(mcmusic@mayflowerchurch.org)

Helen Hawley, 2008
(helenh@westminsterqr.net)

Dennis Buteyn, 2009, *Webmaster*
(dlbuteyn@sbcglobal.net)

Cynthia Bristol, 2009
(cbristol@grcc.edu)

Members Ex-Officio

Nancy Berger, *Pipelines Coordinator*
(sailsing@netpenny.net)

Emily Brink, *Cipher Editor*
(embrink@calvin.edu)

William DeVries, *Chaplain*
(billdv@sbcglobal.net)

Robert Houskamp,
Membership Coordinator
(bobjoan6387@sbcglobal.net)

Verlyn Schultz *Photographer*
(visgrm@aol.com)

THE CIPHER

The Monthly Newsletter of the Grand Rapids Chapter
American Guild of Organists

February 2007

From the Dean

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, where I am a member, recently appointed a Worship Task Force to investigate how it, with its traditional, formal, liturgical worship, could better involve teenagers in the life of the church. The group read and discussed eight books, consulted with six experts, and visited a number of churches that reputedly are successful in their efforts to involve teenagers in worship.



The task force discovered that many traditional churches believe they are not doing a good job of including teens in worship—"With very few teens attending their traditional worship services, they minister to their teens by large and dynamic youth programs and by alternative worship services for them. Other reportedly traditional churches were no longer traditional but contemporary in style, having decided that the only way to minister to youth is to adopt their youth culture in worship."

This is not news to members of the AGO. Many of us have discussed the recent alterations in traditional worship: the neglect of the great choral music of the Christian tradition, and the absence of the organ in worship. Since these are areas in which we "live, move, and have our being," the changes sadden us.

The final report from the LaGrave Task Force, however, tells a story which is unexpected to most readers and encouraging to us as church musicians. The remainder of this letter, like the second paragraph above, contains direct quotes from the report, dated August 13, 2006. "From a number of sources, we have learned that it isn't really style that captures the minds and hearts of teens; it is passion. Contemporary wisdom assumes that teens are turned off about traditional worship because of the music. According to our research, however, **that assumption is not true.** It is not so much traditional worship that leaves teens cold; it is "conventional" worship, predictable worship in which people seem to be simply going through the motions. Teens are looking for passion. As Dr. Jane Vann put it, 'Youth are heat-seeking missiles; they will go where there is fire.' It is therefore crucial that the leaders up front must be spiritually 'into' the worship."

Continued on page 2

February Meeting



Monday, February 19, 2007, 8:00 p.m. David Cherwien will present an AGO masterclass at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church entitled "Creative Tips for Helping the Congregation Sing." As usual, we'll gather for punch at 6:30, dinner at 7:00, and the program at 8:00. A member of the Executive Committee will be calling you on February 12 or 13 to take your dinner reservation. If for some reason you are not called, please call in your reservation to Errol Shewman (616-456-9232) by Wednesday, February 14. You may also make a reservation by email to EShewman@hotmail.com.

David Cherwien's specialty and passion is congregational song, with an improvisational/creative approach in order to encourage meaningful and vibrant participation. His ministry spreads across the country through his frequent hymn festivals, workshops, guest appearances, and over 100 publications.

David serves as editor of the [National Lutheran Choir Series](#) of choral music published by [Morningstar Music Publishers](#). He is a founding member of the [Association of Lutheran Church Musicians](#) and has served in its leadership in a variety of capacities, including as National President from 1993 to 1997. He is a member of the [American Choral Director's Association](#), [American Guild of Organists](#), [Chorus America](#) and [Choristers Guild](#). In addition, David serves as Cantor at [Mount Olive Lutheran Church](#) in Minneapolis, a parish known for its passion for creative high quality liturgy and music. As artistic director of the National Lutheran Choir, and as adjunct faculty for the Master of Sacred Music program at Luther Seminary.

David holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in organ performance and the Master of Arts degree in Theory and Composition from the University of Minnesota. In the Fall of 2000, he was honored as a "Distinguished Alumnus" by Augsburg College, Minneapolis, where he studied choral music education and organ performance as an undergraduate. David also spent two years at the Berlin Church Music School studying conducting, composition and organ.

Come and bring friends!

Dean's note continued from page 1

Under the rubric *Participation*, the Task Force makes the following recommendations: "Since we want teens to be passionate in their worship, we must give them opportunities to participate in that worship. Teens can help plan worship services. Teens must be able to relate to the music, which entails...variety enjoyed throughout...the year. Teens can participate up front by ushering or leading the processional, reading Scripture, leading in prayer, playing instruments or singing, or participating in liturgical dance. Finally, teens can become more involved in traditional worship if their feedback to the sermon or service is elicited in discussions with the pastor or other worship leader."

This welcome report reminds us that a passionate concern for our young congregational members is more important to the spiritual life of our church than our repertoire standards, our skill as a conductor, our keyboard technique, or our ability to get along with the clergy and the council. Not only the health of our congregation is at stake, but perhaps our very own professional future.

Howard Slenk

Rescuing Congregational Singing

Alice Parker

With the emphasis on congregational song at our February meeting, these thoughts from Alice Parker are instructive, even provocative; consider discussing this over dinner at our February meeting! ERB

Three times, recently, I was aurally assaulted in a church building, once at a concert, twice at services. The weapons were large pipe organs, and the penetrating device was most specifically 32-foot pedal pipes. Each time I had been invited to "sing along" as part of a group which then became engulfed, no, drowned in ear-splitting sonorities.

How does this come to be? Is not hymn accompanying a recognized form of musical endeavor? Where did this idea of pure volume come from? Is it that old "I can play louder than you can sing?" Or "You'll sing louder if I play louder?" Or, perhaps most realistically, "I really don't want you to sing: the show is all right here."

Don't get me wrong – I love organ music, well-played. But we need to rescue congregational singing from overwhelming accompaniments. The most radical way (and my favorite) is to rely on the congregation alone to supply its song. The next best is to train our organists to listen to and support the singing with varied, non-legato tones and textures. Perhaps it's time for a Congregation's Bill of Rights. Here are some basic tenets:

1. The organ shall encourage and support but never overpower the singing.
2. The registration shall reflect the nature of the song, the size of the group, and the acoustics of the building.
3. The tempo shall be suited to singing (rather than playing), and shall allow for both breathing and the articulation of text.
4. The organist shall not reharmonize the hymn except with advance notice.
5. The organist shall vary articulation for each verse (i.e., sing along).
6. The organist shall agree to at least one unaccompanied hymn at each service.

And this curmudgeon must add that there were other occasions for complaint, not only about organists but also pianists, other instrumentalists and even song-leaders. What's happened to the idea of steady tempo? Musicians know that finding the right tempo for any piece is key to its successful performance – so think what you want before you start, and then hold to it. We'd never listen to an orchestral performance that slowed down at the end of each phrase, or section. In fact, it's at junction times that it's most important to keep steady. Have you planned how you are getting from the end of one verse to the next? Have you practiced with a metronome to check your own work? Have you decided whether a *ritardando* is appropriate, and, if so, where it comes and how much does it slow? Would it be possible to dance to your tempo? Is it possible to sing expressively to it? If not, why not?

Our goal must be joining in worship that is worthy of the Creator. The first commandment is that we listen to one another, and the second is like unto it, that we contribute as best we can so that the music may unite our voices, hearts, minds and spirits. The ancients believed that music-making was a spiritual discipline. Let us work together to rediscover this truth, and bring it alive into our services.

-- Alice Parker, 2006

Reprinted from The Stanza, Fall 2006 © 2006 The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada www.thehymnsociety.org All rights reserved. Used by permission.

For more on this remarkable composer, teacher, and conductor, see <http://aliceparker.com/html/apbio.html>.

Upcoming Meetings for 2007

For pictures and comments on our earlier meetings,

see <http://www.grago.org/chapter/programs.shtml>)

Monday, March 19

AGO/Quimby Regional Competition for Young Organists at Park Congregational Church (Jim Metzler, host)

Monday, April 16

Paul Jacobs at Trinity Lutheran Church, in a joint concert with the St. Cecilia Bach Chorale (co-sponsored by the Grand Rapids Bach Festival) (Elizabeth Claar, host)

Lawrence, Kansas, January 4, 2007 — The Reuter Organ Company is pleased to announce the appointment of Ronald Krebs as Vice President of Sales.



Mr. Krebs leaves Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has served as Minister of Music for the past ten years. He was previously Director of Music at Second Congregational United Church of Christ, also in Grand Rapids. As a member of the American Guild of Organists, he served as Coordinator of the AGO Region V Convention held in Grand Rapids in 2005. He is currently a member of the AGO National Committee on Regional Conventions.

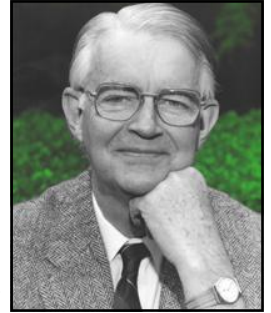
Mr. Krebs received both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the University of Michigan under the direction of Dr. Robert Glasgow. Following graduation he held an administrative position at the School of Music, and continued to work as choral conductor and organist in metropolitan Detroit.

Mr. Krebs was a guest soloist with the Grand Rapids Symphony, while concertizing in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. He has been a featured in a live performance on the National Public Radio Program *Pipedreams*.

Mr. Krebs will be joining the firm working in sales and communications as well as assisting in design and project oversight.

He will also continue in performance as artist in residence along with Bill Klimas, Artistic Director of Reuter Organ Co.

Daniel Pinkham (1923-2006)



The composer Daniel Pinkham, who for six decades played a central role in the Boston music community as a conductor, teacher, organist, and harpsichordist, died December 18, 2006 in Natick, MA. He was 83.

Other Events of Interest for February

Sunday, February 4, 3:30 p.m., at Mayflower Congregational Church, 2345 Robinson Rd SE. A free concert in their concert series, including the Fauré *Requiem* and *Cantique de Jean Racine*, and Friedell's *Elegy*. With the Mayflower Chancel Choir, members of the GR Symphony, Mark Webb, conductor, and Jonathan Tuuk, organist.

February 9-21, 34th Annual Celebration of the Arts Juried Spiritual Art Competition, First United Methodist Church, 227 E. Fulton. Open daily 10am-6pm; also including

- **Saturday, Feb. 10, 8:00 p.m. Embellish Handbell Ensemble**
- **Sunday, February 18, 6:00, First Church Organists Recital**, featuring the many talented organists at First Church

Sunday, February 18, 6:00 p.m., David Cherwien at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church. David Cherwien, well-known Lutheran church organist, composer, conductor, improviser, author, and music editor, will present a hymn festival entitled "The Lord Is My Song." David will both play the organ and conduct the LaGrave Chancel Choir and congregation in a variety of hymns, songs, and anthems.

Sunday, February 18, 8:00 p.m., St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Kenneth Sweetman, Organist and Choirmaster at historic Mariners' Church in Detroit will play a recital in the St. Mark's Concert Series. Mr. Sweetman served on the Organ Faculty at Interlochen while still a graduate student at the University of Michigan. He was the Organ Scholar at Chichester Cathedral in Great Britain, and continued on there as the Assistant Organist, participating in the daily round of choral services. Mr. Sweetman's program will be in honor of his four West-Michigan organ teachers: Alice Vander Hill, Howard Slenk, John Hamersma, and Catherine Loew. He will play compositions that he studied under the guidance of these individuals. The program includes works by Buxtehude, Bach, Brahms, Howells, and Franck.