



# THE CIPHER

August 2021

**The Executive Committee of  
Grand Rapids AGO  
2021-2022**

**Officers**

[Julia Brown](#), Co-Dean

[Carol McNally](#), Co-Dean

[Chris Witte](#), *Treasurer*

**Council Members at Large**

[Matthew Jakubisin](#)

[Larry Biser](#)

[John Tiemstra](#)

[Miah Han](#)

**Members Ex-Officio**

[Dennis Buteyn](#),  
*Webmaster, Cipher Editor*

Kevin Soodsma  
*Membership & Directory*

[Peter Kurdziel](#)  
*Competitions*

[Rebecca Snippe](#)  
*Competitions*

**From Our Co-Deans**

Dear GRAGO friends and colleagues,

We are thrilled to have been asked to serve as your Co-Deans for the upcoming season. We thank our outgoing Dean, Kevin Soodsma, for his extraordinary efforts leading us through these very difficult past two years. We also thank Owen Tellinghuisen & John Dibble for their time on the board. We are especially indebted to Errol Shewman for his many years of service as Chapter Treasurer. We welcome Chris Witte, CPA, as our new treasurer, and welcome Larry Biser, John Tiemstra and Miah Han to the board.

Julia Brown



Carol McNally



## 2021-2022 GRAGO Board



**Larry Biser** has been organist for churches on the East Coast as well as here in Grand Rapids. He studied with Eugene Roan and later with Joan Lippincott at Westminster Choir College, and later with William Watkins and then Dr. Steven Wenthe at Concordia Chicago where he received his Master of Sacred Music degree. After serving churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Virginia, he was Director of Music and Organist for 40 years at East Congregational Church in Grand Rapids. Upon retiring from that position, he came to Trinity Lutheran as Director of Handbells, and became Organist as well following Dr. West's retirement. For 24 years he was the Conductor of the Chamber Choir of Grand Rapids. He has toured with that choir in Russia, Estonia and Finland as well as Austria and Hungary. He was honored to direct the Grand Rapids Chamber

Choir joined by Mormon Tabernacle Choir in the Temple at Salt Lake for their Sunday Morning Broadcast; the first non-Mormon to be given that honor since John Findley Williamson, the founder of Westminster Choir College, in 1945. He toured England with his East Church Choir singing in Bristol, Bath, Westminster, Ely Cathedrals as well as several parish churches. He is an Adjunct Professor of Music at Aquinas College, having taught both classroom Music History, Chamber Choir and Conducting as well as Organ. Since becoming half-time at Trinity Lutheran he now teaches only organ. He has been extremely active with the Grand Rapids AGO, having chaired the Program Committee for three Regional Conventions and served five terms as Dean.



**Julia Brown** (Co-Dean) is currently Director of Music and Organist at Mayflower Congregational Church. Born in Rio de Janeiro, Julia studied piano, harpsichord and organ in her native Brazil before receiving her MM and DMA from Northwestern University as a student of Wolfgang Rübsam. She moved to Grand Rapids after 20 years in Eugene, Oregon. She has been active in the AGO for many years, having held every office at the local level, and was on the Steering Committee of 2001 Regional Convention in Eugene, Oregon and several Pipe Organ Encounters. She was also a founding member and president of the ABO - Brazilian Association of Organists. As a new resident in

the area, Julia looks forward to getting to know the organists and organs of Michigan.



**Miah Han** moved to the Grand Rapids area in April 2019 to join her husband, who had started serving Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids as music director in January 2019. They were active as church musicians in the Metro Detroit area in Michigan before moving to Iowa, where they spent about 9 years in the Waterloo/Cedar Rapids, IA area. Miah had numerous musical events in Waterloo and Cedar Falls, including annual concerts, named "Miah and Friends" during those

years. Miah performed many organ concertos, as well as other programs with various instruments and vocalists. She is currently serving South United Methodist Church in Grand Rapids and also working at Grandville Middle School as a piano accompanist for choirs. Along with Taemin, her husband, she is a member of the Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. She is glad to join the board of the Grand Rapids AGO this year.



**Matthew Jakubisin** serves as the Director of Music and Organist at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew in Grand Rapids. He is originally from suburban Chicago and attended Saint John's University in Collegeville, MN where he received a B.A. and M.A. in Liturgical Music and studied organ with Dr. Kim Kasling. Following graduation, Matthew served as Music Minister at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Grosse Pointe Woods, MI and was an active musician in the Archdiocese of Detroit. He began ministry at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew in August 2019.



**Carol McNally** (Co-Dean) is currently the Associate Director of Music and the Arts at First United Methodist Church in downtown Grand Rapids. She is also the accompanist for the Chamber Choir of Grand Rapids and is looking forward to returning to rehearsing with them this fall. Additionally, Carol serves as musician at Clark Retirement Community offering music for their religious services.

Carol is a graduate of Grand Valley State University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in music as an Organ Performance major. While at Grand Valley, she studied organ with George Shirley and piano with Julianne Vanden Wyngaard. She has done graduate work at Michigan State Uni-



versity where she studied with Corliss Arnold.

Carol and her husband are the parents of eight children and ten grandchildren. In her spare time, she enjoys photography, documenting the important many mile-stones in her family's lives with her camera



**John Tiemstra** has been a church musician in the Grand Rapids area for 40+ years. Currently, he works as an assistant organist at Calvin CRC and Third Reformed, and occasionally at Trinity Methodist and Second Congregational. He has served as council member, treasurer, sub-dean, and dean of the AGO chapter, and worked on two regional conventions. As a high schooler, John studied organ with Richard Billingham of the University of Illinois and later with Haskell Thomson at Oberlin as an undergrad. John taught economics at Calvin College, retiring in 2012.



**Chris Witte** (Treasurer) grew up in Grand Rapids, attended Calvin College, and graduated with an accounting degree in 2012. He is a member of LaGrave Avenue CRC. Chris is a CPA and works locally as a senior tax manager for the public accounting firm Plante Moran. Chris enjoys the organ as a hobby. He learned to play while in college and has served as a volunteer worship planner and service organist for his previous church, as well as substituting for other churches on an occasional basis. Chris brings both financial

acumen and passion for the organ to his role as Treasurer.

## YEAR OF THE YOUNG ORGANIST

National AGO has named 2021 “Year of the Young Organist.” This means that any young organist (defined as under 30) can join the guild or renew their current membership for free. This is the perfect time to engage more young organists in our chapter. More information about the membership subsidy can be found at [agohq.org/free-membership](http://agohq.org/free-membership)

With this in mind, we are busy finalizing this year's programming and are hopeful that we can return to in-person activities, with some protocols in place. Below are some of the highlights of our upcoming season, so you can mark your calendars and plan to join us in person. More details will be in next month's newsletter.

## PROGRAMS FOR 2021-2022

**September 20** – Installation of New Officers and Handbell program with Larry and Carla Sue at Calvin University Chapel

**October 18** – AGOYO Recital at the Cathedral of St. Andrew, with 8 local young organists performing

**November 14** – Renee Anne Louprette recital at Trinity Lutheran Church

**December 31** – New Year's Eve Concert at Central Reformed Church, featuring Gregory Hand from University of Iowa

**March 21** – a program with composer John Dixon at Second Congregational Church

**May 15 and 16** – Scott Detra performs the complete organ works of Cesar Franck in two recitals, at the Basilica of St. Adalbert and at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS DUE NOW

If you haven't already joined or renewed your AGO membership via ONCARD, now is the time to do so. To renew or become a Grand Rapids Chapter AGO member, just go online:

<https://www.agohq.org/membership/>

If you have questions, or need assistance, you can call (212) 870 - 2310. If you would rather send a check, it can be mailed to:

American Guild of Organists  
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1260  
New York, NY 10115

Current member categories are: Regular Member (\$105), Young Organists (FREE this year), Special, 65 and older (\$80). Chapter Friends are \$35.

## HYMN SOCIETY AWARD

The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada is pleased to announce the winner of its 2021 Hymn Tune Search. Of the 213 entries submitted, the committee chose a tune by Larry Visser, Minister of Music at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Visser's tune, entitled EMBRACE, is a setting of "With open arms Christ welcomes you," a text by Thomas H. Troeger, FHS.

This year's search sought a new hymn tune for one of five texts written by recent Hymn Society Fellows, all related to the theme of the Society's 2021 Annual Conference, "Singing Welcome?"

In his announcement during The Hymn Society's Annual Meeting on July 16, President Benjamin C. Brody noted that Visser's tune has "a lovely melody, well-crafted and well-harmonized. The tune is simple to learn but has lots of harmonic color which provides interest. The selection committee appreciated the ways the simplicity of the tune matches the theme of Christ welcoming all in the hymn text."

Given the large number of excellent entries, the committee has also awarded honorable mention for two other composers: John Behnke for his tune WELCOME, also created for Thomas Troeger's text; and Ephrem Feeley for the tune COOKSTOWN, a setting of Ruth Duck's text, "We gather here in Christ set free."

Each year The Hymn Society conducts a search for a new hymn text, hymn tune, or song. These searches are made possible by gifts from Mary Nelson Keithahn, Life Member of The Hymn Society, and the estate of Loryne H. Koebele.

### ONLINE RESOURCES:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/GuildofOrganists/playlists>

National AGO has produced and uploaded many useful and interesting videos which are available on the link above. You'll find masterclasses, recitals, organ crawls, workshops, videos on professional development and technology and much more.

In addition to the above, you can still view OrganFest, a virtual event in lieu of Regional Conventions available on [agohq.org](http://agohq.org).

