



## GRAND RAPIDS

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Grand Rapids AGO  
2025-2026

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# THE CIPHER

March 2026

## Dean's Letter

Dear friends,

If you were unable to attend February's meeting at Thom and Judy Gouwens' home to experience their new Wahl pipe organ, you missed a real treat. The little tracker instrument plays like a much bigger instrument and is beautiful to look at and to listen to. If you're reading this newsletter right when it is sent out, I hope you'll make an effort to get out to Grand Haven tomorrow (March 1 at 4pm) to hear Chanmi Kim's recital. This is a great way to support our friends out at the lakeshore and to hear a wonderful young organist! You can see that in May we will host Andre Knevel at Calvin University in conjunction with the University's year long celebration of their 150th anniversary. It's shaping up to be quite a wonderful concert. Please plan to attend this final event in our program year. You also have your pick of many other musical events over the next few weeks. We live in a remarkable musical community here in Grand Rapids. I hope we don't take that for granted! Thanks also to Dennis Buteyn, our webmaster and CIPHER editor for showcasing some voices from the past in our chapter with two articles taken from various points in our chapter's history.

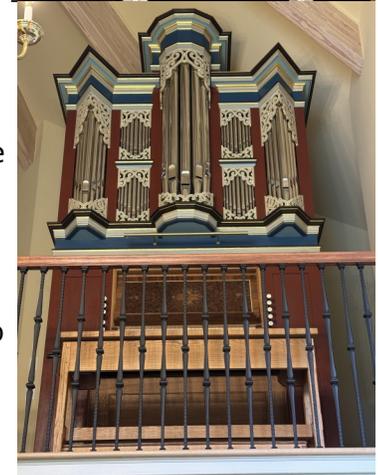
Rob Hobgood, Dean



## Report on February Event

On Monday, February 9, Thom and Judy Gouwens graciously invited chapter members to their home to see their recently installed pipe organ. The 9-stop, two-manual instrument was custom built in Appleton, Wisconsin, by Wahl Organ Builders. The organ is designed with mechanical key and stop action. There are two 58-note keyboards and a straight, 30-note pedalboard. The Gouwens' selected their house with an organ in mind, and the elegant, classically inspired organ case is visible from the entry and exterior of the home. (see pics)

Thom began the evening by talking about selecting the Wahl firm to build the instrument and the process to design, construct and install the organ. He expressed his gratitude to the Wahls for their attention to detail and fine craftsmanship. Guests were then encouraged to play the instrument. To demonstrate the versatility of this home organ, Thom concluded the evening by playing the Scherzo (mov't 3) of *Symphonie 2* by Louis Vierne. We thank Thom and Judy for their cordial hospitality and the opportunity to see and play this fine, new instrument.



### Wahl 2025 Organ Specification (9 stops/3 couplers)

#### Manual I

8 Fugara  
8 Rohrflute  
4 Prestant  
2 Flautino  
II-I Manual Coupler

#### Manual II

8 Gedact  
4 Lieblich Flute  
3 Treble Nasat  
(from middle C)

#### Pedal

16 Subbass  
8 Bass Flute  
I-P Pedal Coupler  
II-P Pedal Coupler

#### Notes:

58-note manual compass  
30-note pedal compass  
Flat and parallel pedalboard  
Lights for music rack and pedalboard  
Adjustable bench

## Upcoming GRAGO Events

**Sunday, March 1, 2026, 4:00 p.m.**

**First Presbyterian Church  
508 Franklin Street  
Grand Haven, MI 49417**

### Young Artist Recital: Chanmi Kim

Chanmi Kim, originally from South Korea, studied piano, psychology, and child development during her undergraduate years. She was first introduced to the pipe organ in college and was deeply captivated by its wide range of tone, colors and expressive potential. This led her to begin private lessons and later pursue formal studies in the United States.

She recently completed her Master of Music in Church Music with an organ concentration at Baylor University, studying under Dr. Jens Korndörfer. During her time at Baylor, she served as organist at both St. Peter's Catholic Student Center and Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, Texas. In 2024, she won the Semper Pro Musica Organ Competition at Baylor and had the honor of performing at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

Chanmi is pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Sacred Music at the University of Michigan and is serving as Organ Scholar at St. John's Episcopal Church in Detroit.



**Monday, May 4, 2026, 7:30 p.m.**

**Calvin University Chapel  
Calvin University Chapel  
1835 Knollcrest Circle, SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546**

### Organ Recital: André Knevel

Organist André Knevel, of Ontario, Canada will present a recital based on the Psalms with sponsorship from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in conjunction with the university's 150th anniversary.





**Lenten Meditation Series at Klise Chapel  
East Congregational Church  
1005 Giddings Ave. SE**

**6:30-7:45 Wednesdays in March**



**March 4**

**Folias Duo: Andrew Bergeron & Carmen Maret, Guitar & Flute**



Folias Duo is a composer-performer ensemble for flute and guitar known for blending classical music with jazz, world music, and improvisation into a singular artistic voice. The duo has cultivated over two decades of collaboration, performance, and original composition.

**March 11**

**Duo Taresque: Howell Petty & Luce Burrell, Lute and Soprano**



Petty and Luce Burrell, who perform works ranging from troubadour songs and 14th-century Trecento music to the spiritual compositions of Hildegard of Bingen.

**March 18**

**Martha Waldvogel-Warren, Harp**



Martha Waldvogel is an accomplished harpist and certified therapeutic music practitioner whose work unites musical artistry with evidence-informed approaches to healing. With performance credits across the United States, Europe, and Asia, she is known for her expressive tone, technical mastery, and emotionally resonant playing.

**March 25**

**The Klise Ringers English Handbell Ensemble**



This group has been formed by Jameson Thompson drawing friends from several Handbell Ensembles in the Grand Rapids area to perform bell music for a small bell ensemble which is played in a small environment.

**Klise Chapel**

is a nearly 100 year building designed by the famous Ralph Adams Cram who designed buildings such as St. John the Divine and St. Thomas Church in New York and Princeton University Chapel as well as many others. He always referred to Klise Chapel at East Church as his "crown Jewel" and exemplifies his talent for creating buildings which follow the Gothic traditions of design.

[For more information on performers, click here.](#)



# CHRIST LAID ASIDE HIS CROWN

**LaGrave Avenue Christian  
Reformed Church**  
12:00 pm

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**February 25**

Liturgist - Rev. Kristy Manion  
Organist - Dr. Larry Visser

**March 4**

Liturgist - Chad Boorsma  
Organist - Dr. Julia Brown

**March 11**

Liturgist - Rev. Peter Jonker  
Organist - Noah Smith

**March 18**

Liturgist - Rev. Stan Kruis  
Organist - Dr. Rob Hobgood

**March 25**

Liturgist - Rachel Thorne  
Organist - Dr. Darlene Kuperus



## **Music at Midday**

**First (Park) Congregational Church  
10 East Park Place NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503**

### **A FREE CONCERT SERIES IN THE CITY**

Park Church offers Music at Midday: a free community concert series on Tuesdays in downtown Grand Rapids. Our concerts begin at 12:15 and last for 30-40 minutes.

- 3/10 Dr. Larry Visser, organ**
- 3/17 Grand Rapids Christian High School**
- 3/24 Karen Albert, mezzo-soprano, and Robert Byrens, piano**
- 3/31 Easter Break**
- 4/7 Caleb Wenzel and Friends**
- 4/14 Perugino String Quartet**
- 4/21 Outside Pocket with Greg Scheer**
- 4/28 Eric Strand, organ**
- 5/5 Bruce Robey and Friends**

While the concerts are free, there is an optional lunch available for \$7.00 payable at the door (cash is preferred). Lunch is served both before and after the concerts in our fellowship hall.

The items are boxed or individually wrapped, and the menu varies by the week.

A COLLABORATIVE CONCERT



KARA STEVENS  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



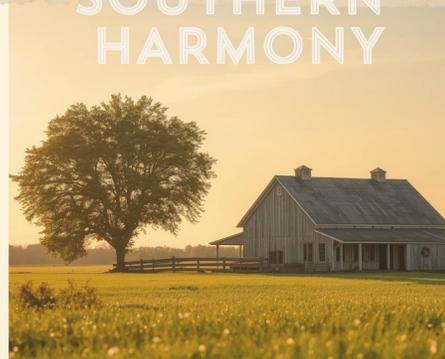
FIRST UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH OF GRAND RAPIDS

MARCH 10, 2026 | 7:30 PM

SOUTHERN  
HARMONY



DR. CHRISTOPHER MASON  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



*Southern Harmony:* Journey to the south with Vox GR in March in collaboration with the Chamber Choir of Grand Rapids.

This program will celebrate music from South America and the Southern United States. The combined choirs will sing together Z. Randall Stroope's work for double chorus "We Beheld Once Again the Stars" and Shawn Kirchner's "Sweet Rivers."

This event is ticketed.

[TICKETS](#)



## Robert S. Ragoonanan Organ Recitals

March 11, 1pm  
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Grand Rapids, MI

March 26, 12pm  
First United Methodist Church, Kalamazoo, MI

**Christopher Churcher (b. 2004)**  
This Shining Night

**Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (1676-1749)**  
Suite du premier ton

**Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979)**  
*Petit canon from Trois Improvisations*

**César Franck (1822-90)**  
3 Pièces pour grand orgue

[robertsragoananan.com](http://robertsragoananan.com)

Robert Ragoonanan, Minister of Music at Westminster Presbyterian in Grand Rapids is set to give two 45-minute lunchtime programs in March. Swing by for a great afternoon of French music (and a little bit of music from Britain).

Wednesday, March 11, 1:00 p.m.  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
47 Jefferson Ave. SE  
Grand Rapids

Thursday, March 26, 12:00 p.m.  
First United Methodist Church  
212 S. Park Street  
Kalamazoo

# The Bach Chorale of Grand Rapids

presents

## “CONCERTATO MICHIGAN”

Sunday, March 15th, 2026, 4:00pm

Fountain Street Church

24 Fountain Street NE, Grand Rapids

## J. S. Bach & Francis Poulenc

J. S. Bach: Fantasia in G minor, BWV 542

Cantata BWV 29, “Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir”

F. Poulenc: Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani

“Domine Deus, Agnus Dei” from “Gloria”

Caroline Robinson, organ

Martin Werner, Music Director

General admission: \$20.00 — <https://bachchoralegrandrapids.org>

## Spring Concert

March 15th, 2026

We are thrilled to announce our 2026 spring concert which will take place on Sunday, March 15th, at 4:00 pm, at Fountain Street Church, 24 Fountain Street NE, Grand Rapids, 49503. Doors will open at 3:15 pm.

The motto for this event is “J. S. Bach and Francis Poulenc.”

We have created a program of masterworks by these illustrious composers, in which there are some fascinating cross relationships between the individual elements.

Did you know that Bach’s famous “Fantasia and Fugue in G minor” became the inspiration for Poulenc’s “Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani”? We are going to perform both pieces right next to each other, and we are most fortunate to have the internationally acclaimed virtuoso organist, Caroline Robinson, as our guest soloist.

Also on the program will be the “Domine Deus, Agnus Dei” from Poulenc’s “Gloria”, and one of Bach’s most festive cantatas, “Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir”, BWV 29.

Tickets will be \$20 for general admission.

# Pipes for a Purpose

*featuring*

**STEPHEN RUMLER-McCLUSKY**

**Organ**



Sunday, March 22, 2026 at 3:00pm

Saint John's Episcopal Church

524 Washington Ave. Grand Haven, Michigan

## A Brief History of the Grand Rapids Chapter of The American Guild of Organists

Prepared by Janet Van Dyke  
for the 50th Anniversary in 1987

The Western Michigan Chapter of the American Guild of Organists was organized on November 17, 1937, at a luncheon meeting in the Pantlind Hotel. On November 29, the National Council of the American Guild of Organists granted formation of the Chapter and on January 7, 1938, the first Guild meeting was held at Grace Episcopal Church, Grand Rapids. Thirty-six persons attended the dinner prior to an organ recital given by Walter Blodgett. Monthly meetings that first year included concerts by the English Choir Boys and John Challis, a Guild Lenten Service, and a Guild picnic. Thus began a tradition of social and professional association that was to continue for fifty years.



Harold Tower was the first Dean of the new twenty member chapter. All new members were required to pay an initiation fee of \$2.00, and annual dues of \$3.00. Prices of Guild dinners ranged from \$0.45 to \$0.60!

The new chapter launched an ambitious program of organ concerts, vesper services, lectures, choir concerts and festivals, and social events. By 1944, an Artist Concert Series was well established for the purpose of bringing nationally and internationally known organ recitalists to the area. Numerous musicians performed; some returning for several performances. A news article in 1950 reported that 1400 people attended Alexander Schreiner's fifth Grand Rapids concert, held at Fountain Street Church.

By the late 1940's the Chapter had become very active in establishing and promoting community involvement in church music. Junior and Senior Choir Festivals were begun in 1949 and continued for more than a decade with wide support. In 1950, Guild-sponsored student organ recitals and student organ scholarship competitions were established for the benefit of area students. Beginning in 1959, annual church music conferences were held under the joint sponsorship of the Grand Rapids-Kent Council of Churches and the Chapter.

The 25th Anniversary Year (1962-1963) was highlighted on December 3, 1962, with a banquet and organ recital played by Charles Peaker at Fountain Street Church. A special concert honoring the Chapter was given by the Grand Rapids Symphony on Feb-

ruary 8, 1963, with Virgil Fox as the guest artist. Other events followed and in June, 1963, the Chapter concluded the Anniversary Year by hosting the Regional Convention.

In the 1970's the Chapter division of the National Organ Playing Competition was begun, numerous workshops covering a wide range of topics led by Chapter members and guest clinicians were introduced, and several noted organ recitalists appeared in concert. In 1978, the Chapter organized a placement service to better serve are churches and musicians.

The Chapter was again host for the Regional Convention in June 1985. *Extravagrandza '85* offered a wide variety of concerts, workshops, and social events and was an artistic and financial success.

The name was eventually changed from the Western Michigan Chapter to the Grand Rapids Chapter to more clearly identify the geographic location of the membership.

Over the years, the Guild has continued the tradition of offering outstanding musical events and educational opportunities to both its members and the community. Our 50th Anniversary Year brings a sense of great accomplishment and pride in our Chapter. In a letter written in 1967 to the Chapter, the first Dean, Harold Tower, wrote the following, "The first years were a struggle and I am so glad the Guild has developed so well." We are indebted to him and the countless others who have contributed so much over the past fifty years.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

## A CELEBRATION OF THE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE GRAND RAPIDS CHAPTER OF THE AGO

Presented by Howard Slenk on November 19, 2012

The year is 1937. How many of you were already living at that time? Someone once told me long ago that in a house owned by a woman organist on the corner of Morris and Logan, a group of organists occasionally met for fellowship and to hear each other play. I have actually been in this room where they supposedly met. The organ had been dismantled, and the pipes were lying in cardboard boxes on the floor. Some of the women who might have been in that group are: Anne van der Heide, Alyce Lantinga, Mrs. Kerstetter, and Mrs. Muller. I know these names because these fine ladies belonged to the same denomination that I did, and were very interested in improving the state of organ playing and the level of appreciation for organ music. They were also very sociable and gracious persons, who encouraged a youngster like myself.



The organization of the Western Michigan chapter was taking place at this time. There was an organizational meeting on November 17, 1937 at a luncheon in the Pantlind Hotel. This meeting would have been spearheaded by the following persons. Paul Calloway was Director of Music at St. Mark's Church; Harold Einicke was at Park Church; Harold Tower was at Trinity Community Church, having left St. Mark's after a clash with the new Dean, Carl Sennema was at First Methodist, and Vern Stillwell was at Grace Episcopal. These were big names on the local scene, and I can remember hearing about them when I began taking organ lessons in Holland in 1945, even though some of them had left the Grand Rapids area by that time.

There was only one AGO chapter in Michigan prior to 1937, based in Detroit. It was called the Michigan Chapter. Many of the chapters at that time were the only ones in their state. There were regular reports of their activities in *The Diapason*. In the November issue of 1937 The Michigan Chapter reported this news: "After some preliminary discussion, Benjamin Laughton submitted the motion that Dean Halvorsen confer with the Chicago organists relative to the proposed regional convention, and inviting them here." At the next meeting, "Mr. Laughton suggested that the Northern and Central Ohio Chapters and the Canadian organists cooperate with us in planning a regional convention." As far as I could tell, the regional convention was held in Ohio, sponsored by the two Ohio chapters.

At the national level the big news was that Bernard R. Laberge was announcing a record-breaking tour by Marcel Dupre. His daughter Marguerite, a pianist, would join him in about three-fourths of his concerts in American cities from September 29 to December 3. He gave forty-seven concerts in two months and five days. Another big name that toured that year was Fernando Germani, but he was sponsored by the Hammond Organ Company, and played exclusively on that instrument – five times with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy.

The news of the birth of the Western Michigan Chapter of the AGO appeared in the February 1938 issue of *The Diapason*. It occurred on January 7 of that year. The article is reproduced in your handout. Notice that it took place not in someone's home, but in the parish house of Grace Episcopal Church. Some of you will remember that dark building on the northeast corner of Cherry and Lafayette. Did any of you ever play that organ? What kind was it? Was it moved to the new church? At the meeting, Harold Tower took over as Dean, and Paul Callaway reported. There was a dinner and an announcement of future programs. After that the group moved into the church for a lengthy organ recital by Walter Blodgett from Cleveland.

In February a boy choir from England sang for the group at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, followed by an Evensong sung by the men and boy choir of St. Mark's. In April there was a harpsichord recital by the builder John Challis. This was given in Trinity Hall, which I assume was the parish house of Trinity Methodist Church. That seems to have been the extent of the program for the first season of our chapter's existence as far as *The Diapason* was concerned. Several of the large downtown church choirs were involved in big choral festivals in May, which might explain why guild members decided not to have any more meetings that spring.

All this entire year Detroit kept calling itself "The Michigan Chapter." But of course, Detroit and Ann Arbor have always harbored a false sense of superiority.

The first meeting of the new season was on October 11, 1938 at Kalamazoo College. Dinner and a business meeting preceded an organ recital in Stetson chapel by Frieda Op't Holt, a former student of Henry Overley from Kalamazoo College, and of Palmer Christian at the University of Michigan. There are no more reports of our chapter in that year. And I did not look farther to see how long Detroit kept calling itself "The Michigan Chapter."

Now I'd like to jump to ten years later, the year I first joined the guild as a student member. I lived in Holland, and hitchhiked into Grand Rapids for the meetings, and then hitch-hiked back home afterwards. All of the big names that were around in

1938 had left Grand Rapids for other jobs. Paul Calloway left St. Mark's for the National Cathedral. Harold Tower, who was Paul Calloway's predecessor at St. Mark's, had moved to take a job in another city. I remember meeting him in 1950, but I do not remember where he was living and working.

This is what I remember from the six years that I was a student member of our chapter, from 1947 to 1953. I remember the kindness and support of the four ladies that I mentioned a few moments ago. I remember a Mr. Magin who took Harold Einicke's place at Park Church, and that he was almost blind. Carl Sennema was at First Methodist and accompanied the Schubert Club, whose yearly concerts filled the Welsh Auditorium, under the baton of Frank Goodwin. I remember that John Lewis was organist at Fountain Street Church, and I think Robert Noehren was one of his predecessors there. The following persons were welcomed into our chapter during this period: Bev Howerton at Fountain Street Church, John Davis at Park Church, Kenneth Jewell at Westminster Presbyterian, Donald Pempin at St. Mark's, Joe Sullivan at St. Andrew's, Will Bartholomew at East Congregational. I remember each of these men very vividly. This must have been because they talked with me and seemed interested in what I was doing. This encouraged me to continue attending the meetings.

Our chapter at that time sponsored three big-name organ recitals each season. I heard the following people play recitals during that period, several of them more than once: Virgil Fox, E. Power Biggs, Flor Peeters, Arthur Poister, Alexander Schreiner, Fernando Germani, Marilyn Mason, Claire Coci. and Jeanette Demessieux. I remember what churches they played in, and even some of the numbers in their programs: I almost swooned when I heard Virgil Fox play "Come Sweet Death" at Fountain Street. Jeanne Demessieux played several pedal pieces at Park, probably in high heels. Germani played music by Bossi at Westminster Presbyterian, a composer I had never heard of. I remember Claire Coci, dressed in white tulle, throwing off one of her shoes in the middle of a Bach fugue at Park Church. At a reception for E. Power Biggs at East Congregational Church, someone said: "Pierre Cochereau states that he plays the greatest organ in the world in the greatest church in the world." Biggs looked at the group and said: "One hates to say no, doesn't one?"