

THE COUPLER

THE DEAN'S MESSAGE



Going where the Spirit leads

As I listen to a certain collection of music, I imagine a group of 20-year-olds on a beach in California in the 1970s--hip, hippy-ish, fun-loving kids who love to sing about Jesus. This is an album from my childhood, *Lost & Found*, with music by Otis Skillings, performed and produced by musicians from the colleges and universities from around the United States in the Church of the Nazarene. This is Jesus music.

For most of my career, I had no interest in using this music for liturgy. Well, I shouldn't say *no* interest, perhaps very little interest. I would someday love to lead a production of *Godspell* during Holy Week, or have my choir do *Seasons of Love* from the musical *Rent* for some event, perhaps in the parish hall. But I love Palestrina and Howells and Anglican chant psalmody too much to cheapen our liturgy with Jesus music. (Huh. Really? Did I just say that?)

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MARCH 2021

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Chapter treasurer Rob Church shares what it's like to be an organist with an apt surname.

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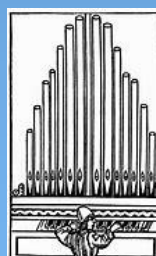
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The Franciscan Monastery, National City Christian Church, St. Matthew's Cathedral and Church of the Epiphany plan recitals.

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Mark Your Calendar!

Our March 22 chapter meeting will feature a webinar led by Ronald Stolk on improvisation based on Lenten hymn tunes.

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CHAPTER NEWS

March program on improvisation

Our next chapter program, Monday, March 22 at 7:30 pm., will feature a Zoom webinar led by Ronald Stolk on improvisation based on Lenten hymn tunes. The Zoom link will be emailed to members and anyone else interested by March 21.



RONALD STOLK

Ronald is music director at St. Patrick Catholic Church and teaches organ at the Catholic University of America, both in DC. He graduated from the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, Netherlands. He studied with Jean Langlais and Gaston Litaize, and at the International Summer Academy for Organists in Haarlem.

Ronald won the J.S. Bach Prize of the City of Wiesbaden (Germany), First Prize in the AGO National Competition in Organ Improvisation, First Prize in the San Anselmo Competition, and was a finalist in competitions in Haarlem, Strasbourg and St. Albans (UK), where he received a Tournemire Medal.

He is a recitalist and teacher, and has contributed to collections of hymn preludes and settings in the Netherlands.

He was dean of the DC chapter of the AGO and coordinator for the 2010 AGO National Convention in DC.

In 2008, Ronald was the organist for the Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI in Nationals Park.

Elections for the DC AGO Board

Our chapter will elect 2021-22 officers in May.

A nominating committee made up of Eileen Guenther, Clarice Snyder, Michael Clarke and Rebecca Yoder is assembling a slate of candidates for positions including dean, subdean (program coordinator), membership liaison, treasurer, secretary, and Coupler editor/website administrator.

Watch your email and future Couplers for brief bios of the candidates and voting instructions.

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The Coupler

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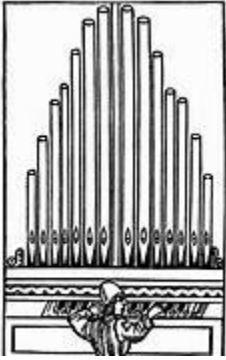
Pat Henry,
Editor

To contact the DC AGO
or for newsletter
submissions:
dcagochapter@gmail.com

MORE CHAPTER NEWS

Service Playing Competition rescheduled

Our chapter's National Competition in Service Playing, already delayed once because of the coronavirus pandemic, has been again rescheduled – now for Jan. 6-8, 2022.



Co-sponsors are Schoenstein and Co. Organ Builders and St. Paul's K Street. The \$5,000 1st Prize and \$2,500 2nd Prize will be provided by Schoenstein.

The competition is open to organists under age 30 at the time of application. Submission deadline for the preliminary round is Nov. 15. The four finalists will be announced Dec. 1.

The final live competition will be at St. Paul's K Street in January 2022. Judges will be professor Thomas Murray, Dr. John Walker and National Cathedral Canon Michael McCarthy.

For repertoire lists and more information, go to the Calendar tab at dcago.org.



Consider earning your AGO certification

A couple of our colleagues are planning to take one of the [five comprehensive exams](#) the AGO offers.

The levels are:

[Service Playing Certification](#) (SPC)

[Colleague Certification](#) (CAGO)

[Choir Master Certification](#) (ChM)

[Associateship Certification](#) (AAGO)

[Fellowship Certification](#) (FAGO)

The deadline for applying for the spring Service Playing Certificate passed Feb. 1, but tests will be offered by our local chapter and others again in the fall.

The Colleague Examination may be administered by any chapter on May 7 or Nov. 12 of this year. The other exams will take place in June. In our Mid-Atlantic Region, they are being coordinated by Michael Britt of the Baltimore chapter at Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1316 Park Ave., Baltimore (410-523-1542, ext. 16 or michael@browndowntown.org).

To schedule a Service Playing or Colleague certification exam with our local chapter, send an email to dcagochapter@gmail.com. For information on the other exams, consult the agohq.org/certification website.

The Dean's Message continued from Page 1

Growing up, we listened to all kinds of music in my household except for true country music. We had eight-track cassettes and LPs of Tchaikovsky, Olivia Newton John, The Carpenters, The Speer Family, maybe something of Beethoven, and my brother developed a collection of hard rock with his Columbia House subscription service. And then there was this music by Otis Skillings with really good vocals, synthesizer and a Rhodes electric piano, guitar and light percussion. I recently found the album on YouTube and listened all the way through, mesmerized by how well I remember it, but surprised at how well I had forgotten that it existed.

This album does not fit my memory of my parents. They loved this album, but they had almost no sense of syncopation or modern rhythm, or at least not that I can remember. And yet this album *does* fit my parents completely, because even in a church atmosphere that was filled with judgment and rules and altar-calls, my parents chose to focus more on love, peace and joy. This album is full of love, peace and joy. Of course – it's Jesus music from the 1970s.

This idea of what kind of music I associate with my parents makes me wonder, how will my congregation remember me in 30 years? Will I be remembered as the organist who loved to lead "I bind unto myself this day" (*St. Patrick's Breastplate*) as a dirge? As the organist who ran into the ground all eight verses of *Sine Nomine* ("For all the saints") as the procession winding through the church got slower and slower until the choir fell to their knees in pain?

Or will my congregation remember me as the parish musician who enlivened liturgy with inspired settings of *Hyfrydol* ("Love divine, all loves excelling") or juxtaposed within the service *Ein feste burg* ("A Mighty Fortress") with "Lead Me, Guide Me," both rhythmically driven and led with confidence from organ or piano? Or as the musician who taught the congregation Taizé chant, sung with parishioner-musicians accompanying and improvising?

Will I be the organist bound by my own rules and regulations (and limitations) or be the musician willing to move with the spirit of creativity within fluid boundaries of best practice and local tradition? Can I make Bach relevant to my congregation's current dilemmas? Am I willing to make traditional hymns Jesus music for current times?

Please excuse me for using Jesus' name so much in this essay, and I do not assume that all of you reading this are followers of Christ. There are times that I consider myself more of a follower or admirer of Jesus rather than a Christian. And yet most of us, as employees of churches, are called to make music that supports and invigorates ministry, leading parishioners into a closer walk with Jesus.

And so I invite you, during these days of disrupted work habits and disjointed rehearsal schedules, to use this time to re-evaluate your relationship to standard hymns and go-to anthems. Re-imagine your standard hymn introductions and registrations. Learn how to solo out the melody of "O Sacred Head" on the Cornet. Practice a moving jazz bass line in the pedals for "Every time I feel the Spirit." (You have 12 weeks to Pentecost...) And above all, practice and play for the love of making beautiful music: This is where the Divine (and Jesus) may be found.

--David Houston

LET ME TELL YOU...

By Chapter Treasurer Rob Church

I have heard so many interesting comments because of my last name, Church. The most common is, "Oh how fitting, you're an organist and your last name is Church."

On more than one occasion, someone simply has not believed my last name.

One telephone call that sticks in my mind was for a wedding program and it was straight out of a "Who's on First" parody. The person kept saying, "And what is the organist's last name" and I would say, "Church," and they would say, "No no, I know we are doing this service at a church, I get it, but I need the organist's name!!" And I said, "Church" again, and the person said, "Yes, we know it's in a church, but what is his name?"



ROB CHURCH AT WORK

The Church last name has also caused some fun for others in my day job. When I'm not playing at church, I'm working on a trading desk and many colleagues over the years have used my name "Rob Church" as ... "Robbing a church." So I frequently hear, "How can we trust a guy with money when his name is Rob church" "This guy Robs a church, and we're going to trust him with money!!"

Now these stories are funny, but the time I hated my last name most of all was when I worked in an office with the name "CHURCH" printed on the toilet seats. You can imagine how I was teased for that. I was a 21-year-old, fresh out of college, working at a frat-house-culture brokerage firm with my last name emblazoned on the toilet seats.

When Pat asked me to write something about my name for the Coupler, I thought of this story. I did a quick Google search and in fact my name is still on toilet seats! I guess I should ask for royalties.

In case you are curious, here is a link to [Church Seats](#), a commercial toilet seat manufacturer. Perhaps even you have sat on one!

Now it's your turn...

One benefit of AGO membership that we are missing in the time of coronavirus is in-person fellowship.

Chapter get-togethers provide the chance to swap tales about the quirks of our jobs – and we do have some stories!

So, what is the weirdest...scariest...funniest... thing that has happened to you as an organist? Got a wacky wedding tale? We'd like to share some of your stories in our newsletter. Email them to pathenry33@gmail.com. Include a photo if you'd like.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Pat Henry, Coupler editor and chapter web administrator

Two things got me hooked on the organ--hearing one played weekly at our Lutheran church in Hershey, Pa., and playing a toy instrument I received at age 6.

I pestered my parents for organ lessons and they stalled me until one day at age 11 I came home from school to find a Hammond in the living room. My parents did not know most organists start on the piano.

I began lessons and later transitioned to practicing on the church pipe organ until I went off to the College of William and Mary and University of Exeter in England, where I majored in government. I was going to be a journalist, and I put music aside.



PAT ON A DIVE BOAT IN THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS IN FEBRUARY 2020

But after I became a journalist, I decided to be an organist too and began lessons with Frank Speller at the University of Texas-Austin. Years later I spent a year at Stanford University studying with Kimberly Marshall and then earned a master's degree in music from UT.

I played at mostly Methodist churches in Austin and Houston while working full-time as an editor at newspapers in those cities. When I moved to DC 22 years ago, I signed on at Georgetown Lutheran Church on Wisconsin Avenue, first as organist and then music director/organist. Now that I am retired from journalism (most recently at BNA--now Bloomberg Industry Group -- as editor of a newsletter on international environment issues), I have more time for music.

When I am not on the organ bench, I enjoy playing the Celtic harp, cycling with friends, scuba diving with my husband (mostly in the Caribbean but most recently in the Galapagos Islands), exchanging homes with people all over the world through homeexchange.com, gardening, serving on the board of the Friends of Georgetown Library and exercising my journalistic muscles by editing the Coupler and the chapter's website.

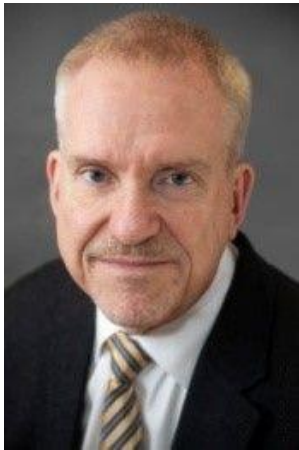
Q&A WITH MICHAEL MCMAHON OF THE HYMN SOCIETY

Editor's note: This [article](#) appeared Jan. 11 on the website of Baptist News Global. It is reprinted here with permission. Mike is a member of our DC AGO chapter. He has served as executive director of The Hymn Society since September 2018.

By Jeff Brumley of Baptist News Global

The Hymn Society has had its work cut out for it in the COVID-19 pandemic, trying to help music ministers, choirs, composers and others adjust to virtual worship.

But 2021 is likely to be challenging too, said J. Michael McMahon, executive director of the international society committed to supporting congregational song as integral to worship.



MIKE MCMAHON

In his January message to members of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, McMahon predicted “2021 will also bring new opportunities for churches and other worshipping communities as we gradually resume in-person gatherings. What will be the ‘new song’ and what fresh approaches will renew our singing? How will our communities sing differently as we come together once again to offer praise and prayer, to hear and respond to God’s word, to celebrate God’s presence, and to embrace God’s ways in the world?”

McMahon spoke with Baptist News Global about the ways congregational song may be experienced in the coming year and how musicians, singers and composers got through 2020.

Does the society focus on one particular genre of music?

Stylistically, it runs the gamut from organ and choir to band-led, and it is also ethnically, culturally and racially diverse. There is a lot of inclusion of global song, as well. Wherever congregations are singing, we want to be there with them. We want to know about them. We want to include them, and we want them to be part of the conversation about how music is part of worship.

Would you say those involved in music ministry were among the most impacted by the closing of in-person worship during the pandemic?

Totally. I spent many years as a choir director, and you get into that routine. You are constantly preparing, gathering and leading. Singing is part of the rhythm of your life. Not only that but singing connects people, and when that’s gone from your life, that leaves a big hole. It’s especially the case for people who do this at a more intensive level.

For months they have had to step up with some creative solutions. Yesterday on Zoom I heard
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someone share that when all this started, they were determined they were not going to create a virtual choir. But over the months their position softened because their people needed music. We have all come up with creative ways to sing together the best way we can until we get back in person.

How did the society respond to the pandemic?

One of the things we did almost immediately was decide to go all digital in our annual conference in the summertime. A more immediate action was to start having weekly Zoom gatherings that anyone could attend. These were to support one another and to share ideas of how to respond and how to keep ourselves supported to do the work for our congregations. It was very successful. We are fewer than 1,000 individual members, but we had more than 100 people on each Zoom gathering.



And then we did host a fully digital conference in July that actually helped us reach even further than if we had been together in person. The digital platform gave us the opportunity to include people who couldn't travel to be with us. We were able to include people from 15 countries on six continents. So it certainly broadened the scope of the gathering and created a way to support each other on a deeper level.

It taught us we can still do that for one another if we can't be together. We couldn't sing together the same as before, but we found creative ways to get around that. One of the highlights of the gathering was the sharing of congregational music of different genres. We had organ one evening and African-American singing on another evening and so on. We even had Asian-Pacific. We were able to create mostly prerecorded events that included singing that exposed people to different styles and different contexts and different cultural settings.

Do you see those virtual offerings continuing after the resumption of in-person worship?

Yes. Our board is committed to doing hybrid events going forward so that we can include many more people, and I think churches are having the same experiences. Churches are seeing lots and lots of participants from all over the place who are attracted to their online worship. They are realizing that when they go back to in-person worship, they need to keep connecting with people who can't be there in person.

You mentioned music ministers being creative during the pandemic. What are some of the more notable innovations you saw in 2020?

Just in terms of singing, that people have learned to use Zoom and YouTube and other platforms to create singing experiences that allow people to connect to a larger worship experience from their homes. Some of the virtual choirs I have seen have been absolutely astounding. They have found ways to provide experiences virtually that are spiritually enriching.

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What challenges do you see for music in the eventual return to in-person worship?

I think it may be a painful transition for some. It may be awkward and difficult at first. But I think people will be really, really glad to get the process going. An integral part of worship is presence.

For musicians, I think the first step will be to ask if it's safe for us to sing together again. And will we be able to go back to singing together all at once? I don't know the answers to those questions. We have to be nimble. We have to be responsive to the actual situation and part of that is not predetermining what we are going to do.

Part of all of this is learning from the pandemic. We are not just going to go back to business as usual. We are going to be more attuned to what it means to be together in one place. We want to do that with greater deliberation and while also being more inclusive of those who can't be physically present and how we can serve them. When you think about it, we have now all experienced what it is like to be excluded, and that gives a responsibility to those who can't be there.

In what ways might music ministry be different than before the pandemic?

I think we will see a doubling down on our understanding that worship is a corporate act. It's not a spectator sport. And singing is an integral part of that. People will be asked, are you giving your all to this experience? I want to encourage people to take an active role and not just sit back and let someone else do all the singing. Coming together is a privilege, and people will be challenged to take an active part and respond to that privilege, and to participate in song and carry what we sing into our lives.

Mike is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and holds a Master of Divinity degree from the Washington Theological Union, a Master of Arts degree in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from The Catholic University of America.

From 2001 until 2013 Mike served as president and CEO of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM).

For nearly 30 years he worked in full-time church ministry, most recently from 2013 to 2018 as minister of music at National City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Washington, D.C.

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

Members are encouraged to submit recitals and concerts to dcagochapter@gmail.com for public listing on the DC AGO website as well as in the newsletter.

Tuesday, March 2, 12:10 pm: The Church of the Epiphany posts a performance by organist S. Yeri So of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Alexandria on its [Youtube channel](#). So will play the Fantasia and Fugue in g-minor by Bach, 11 chorale preludes by Brahms, the Prelude and Fugue in g-minor by Dupre, and more.

Sunday, March 7, 3:30 pm: Lynn Trapp plays a recital at St. Matthew's Cathedral, 1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW. Masks and social-distancing will be observed. Also to be [live-streamed](#). For more information, visit the Cathedral [website](#). Donations accepted but not required.

Sunday, March 14, 4 pm: Brass of Peace (Sylvia Alimena and Lisa Tyler) plays a livestream recital at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America in Northeast DC. Log onto myfranciscan.org to view.

Tuesday, March 30, 12:10 pm: Church of the Epiphany posts a Holy Week Meditation by organist Dr. Jinsun Cho and Epiphany musicians on its [Youtube channel](#). The program will include Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine: Miserere (Allegri) and Ave Verum Corpus (Mozart) - F. Liszt; Bible Poems - J. Weinberger; and more.

Sunday, April 11, 4 pm: Carolyn Lamb Booth (Montgomery United Methodist Church, Damascus, Md.) plays a livestream recital at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America in Northeast DC. Log onto myfranciscan.org to view.

Sunday, April 18, 3:30 pm: Ronald Stolk plays a recital at St. Matthew's Cathedral, 1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW. Masks and social-distancing will be observed. Also to be [live-streamed](#). For more information, visit the Cathedral [website](#). Donations accepted but not required.

Tuesday, April 27, 12:10 pm: Church of the Epiphany posts a performance by Washington National Cathedral organist George Fergus on its [Youtube channel](#). The program will include Prelude, Fugue and Chaconne - Buxtehude; Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542 - Bach; Hommage à Dietrich Buxtehude (Toccatenfuge) - Petr Eben; and more.

Sunday, May 16, 4 pm: Carl Schwartz (All Hallows Parish, South River, Edgewater, Md.) plays a livestream recital at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America in Northeast DC. Log onto myfranciscan.org to view.

Wednesday, May 26, 12:40 pm: Rebecca Yoder plays a recital at St. Matthew's Cathedral, 1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW. Masks and social-distancing will be observed. Also to be [live-streamed](#). For more information, visit the Cathedral [website](#). Donations accepted but not required.

Music at Midday

Music at Midday concerts from National City Christian Church will resume online beginning Friday, March 5, at 12:15 p.m.

In addition to restrictions on in-person gatherings because of the coronavirus pandemic, the church is replacing its HVAC system. Since there will be no heat in the building for several months, all concerts are being recorded by artists in their home locations through the end of April.

There will be four online concerts during March:

March 5: Samantha Scheff, St. John's Church, Lafayette Square, Washington, DC.

March 12: Sondra Goldsmith Proctor, St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY, in a program of music honoring African-American contributions.

March 19: Colin MacKnight, New York City

March 26: Nicholas Will, Pittsburgh, performing music inspired by his recent year in Italy

Notifications will be posted on the church's website and by email. To add your name to the email list, please send a message to the artistic director, the Rev. Dr. J. Michael McMahon.



Webinar on Musicians and Clergy Working Collaboratively

Monday, March 15 at 4 p.m.

Presented by the national AGO and the Church Music Institute

How has the pandemic changed how clergy and musicians view their vocations to serve their congregation? What models of clergy and musician working relationships have shown strength during this time? Join CMI Director Dr. Charlotte Kroeker and Dr. Eileen Guenther, AGO past president, DC chapter member and author of "Rivals or a Team?", as they address these questions and discuss best practices for successful clergy and musician collaborations. Click [here](#) to register.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Please advise the web administrator at pathenry33@gmail.com if any position has been filled.

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Maryland

Director of Music (organist/pianist/director of church choirs)

Oxon Hill United Methodist Church, 6400 Livingston Road, Oxon Hill

A minimum of a bachelor's degree in music or related training is preferred. Email cover letter and resume to oxonhillumcmd@gmail.com.

Virginia

Full-time minister of music/organist/choir director

Pohick Episcopal Church, 9301 Richmond Hwy., Lorton

Minimum bachelor's degree required; at least 5 years' experience in choral direction and music planning in parish setting preferred. One Sunday service per week with music and may move to two. The music minister directs adult, teen and children's choirs, as well as a bell choir, and oversees a gospel/contemporary worship band. Noack 2-manual, mechanical action 17-rank pipe organ completely rebuilt in 2005 and updated in 2019. Salary begins at \$60,000 plus benefits. For more information, go to <https://jobs.agohq.org>. Mail resume and three references by March 30 to the Rev. Dr. Lynn Ronaldi, rector, and Carolyn Cockroft of the Music Minister Advisory Committee, 9301 Richmond Highway, Lorton, VA 22079. Or email them to info@pohick.org.

Organist/accompanist

First Baptist Church, 2932 King St., Alexandria

12-15 hours per week except during busier seasonal weeks. The church opened a new sanctuary in October that includes a 45-rank Schantz pipe organ. Pay: \$30,000-40,000 annually based on experience. For details, go to <https://jobs.agohq.org>.

Pianist

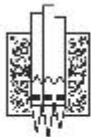
Burke Presbyterian Church, 5690 Oak Leather Drive, Burke

Musician will accompany the Chancel Choir and children's choirs and lead worship service music on a seven-foot Steinway grand piano. Bachelor's degree in piano or organ required. More information available at www.BurkePresChurch.org. Apply at <https://jobs.agohq.org/job/pianist-accompanist-burke-virginia-1489>

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