



DRAFT

CHURCH MUSIC INSTITUTE WINTER RETREAT

January 8-11, 2026

A time of reflection, learning, exploration of new ideas, and inspiration for church musicians to begin the new year. Come plan for Spring and Summer 2026! Especially designed for musicians at the beginning of their careers and for mature musicians looking for new ideas and time with colleagues.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

5923 Royal Lane, Dallas, Texas

Presenters

Dr. David Cherwien – Hal Hopson Lecturer

Rev. Amanda Highben, Chaplain

Dr. Zebulon Highben – Dr. Paul Lindsley Thomas Lecturer

Ms. Rebecca Sawyer – Children's Music

Dr. Lynn Trapp, Resident in the Michael Joncas Library at CMI

CMI Staff

Thursday, January 8, 2026

9:00 – 12:00 CMI libraries will be open for exploration of music and liturgical resources, browsing, planning, initial work on projects. Coffee will be waiting for you! Bring laptops or iPads. Internet will be available. Staff are available for informal consultation:

Dr. Cherwien – organ, choral, improvisation/composition

Dr. Highben – choral, vocal pedagogy, service planning, composition

Rev. Amanda Highben – clergy/musician planning, spiritual development

Dr. Tim Shewmaker – liaison for PLT Society members

Mr. Lee Corbin, CMI Staff – organ music library

Dr. Robert Mann, CMI Staff – choral music library

Dr. Charlotte Kroeker, CMI Staff – piano repertoire

Ms. Becca Sawyer – administrative resource for church musicians

Dr. Lynn Trapp, Michael Joncas Library Resident Scholar

Noon – Welcome and Lunch (provided) in CMI office complex

1:00 “Beyond the Notes: Pastoral Music Ministry for Choirs and Congregations” Dr. Cherwien, Rev. Highben, Dr. Highben – Vestry Room or Chapel

Church choirs have an important role in leading music for congregations. How does one think of music as ministry to lay musicians, paid staff, and congregations? What are important lay musician perspectives to consider? What specific ways can musicians create community and build faith? Are different approaches needed for categories of those who make music?

2:00 Panel: Using Masterworks Liturgically – Faculty - Vestry Room or Chapel

The long history of sacred choral repertoire and non-tune based organ literature are vitally linked to the church. How can resources not familiar to current congregations be used in liturgical ways to enrich today’s worship? How might major masterworks be programmed outside worship to enrich spiritual development of the congregation?

3:00 Break

3:30 Choral Practicum* Chapel or Sanctuary – Drs. Cherwien & Highben

5:00 Dinner in the CMI Complex (Provided)

6:00 “Sing Many Names: Scriptural Imagery for God in Hymnody” – Dr. Highben

Scripture is full of evocative imagery for God. Hymnwriters and poets throughout history have employed these images and metaphors, though the average worshiper is often unaware of their Biblical roots, or conscious of the ways in which such images are artfully woven into the songs we sing in worship. Through an exploration of hymns both beloved and new, this session will consider the use of imagery in hymnody, and how it can deepen both our imagination for God and our scriptural literacy.

7:00 “Let the Children Come to Me: Children’s Choirs and Children in Adult Choirs” – Dr. Kroeker - Chapel

Many churches and musicians struggle with engaging young families with children. Since the end of the pandemic, some churches with formerly active children’s music programs have scaled

down or even abandoned their programs. This session will demonstrate why involving children in music is critical to their development, to that of their families, and how important they are to the church faith community.

8:00 Compline – Sanctuary – Rev. Highben

Friday, January 9, 2026

8:30 Morning Prayer – Sanctuary – Rev. Highben

9:00 Reading Session for Small Choirs for Lent, Easter, Pentecost – Dr. Zebulon Highben and Dr. Robert Mann (CMI staff) Chapel

With choirs often smaller there is no reason to use less than the best music. Dr. Highben and Robert Mann will provide a sampling of composers and titles that are accessible but also demonstrate high standards for text and music. Both new repertoire and stalwarts will be explored, including ways to adapt existing music to smaller choirs.

10:00 Reading Session for Organ Repertoire – Dr. David Cherwien and Lee Corbin (CMI staff)

New settings of tune-based repertoire for the upcoming seasons will be explored, including concertatos for congregational singing. Sanctuary

11:00 “Vocal Technique for Church Musicians” – Dr. Highben - Chapel

Church choir singers can sing productively for decades with good vocal technique. Dr. Highben will help leaders understand the voice, its capabilities, the importance of warmups, and how to teach singing to encourage the best from lay singers.

12:00 Lunch – CMI Office Complex

1:30 Panel Discussion – Building on Denominational Strengths: What are special musical contributions from various denominational sources? Retreat Faculty

Most musicians will serve multiple faith traditions over their lifetimes and can encounter clergy not familiar with liturgical resources. How can these resources cross and enrich other denominations? Explore ideas from Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian and other denominations that will fill your bookshelf and electronic files with resources to use again and again. Chapel

2:30 Time to Work on Projects, Plan Upcoming Services, Speak with Presenters and Use the CMI Libraries.

4:00 Choral Practicum* - Chapel or Sanctuary – Drs. Cherwien & Highben

5:30 Leave for the home of Barbara Bradfield for 6:00 dinner & program TBD. Mrs. Bradfield has a lovely Sipe tracker organ that we are invited to play. Address is 3535 W. Lawther, Dallas 75214.

8:30 Vespers – Rev. Highben

Saturday, January 10, 2026

8:30 Morning Prayer – Rev. Highben - Sanctuary

9:00 “Encouraging Assembly’s Singing” – Dr. Cherwien.

Few things can warm a room up, bringing people to a common place more effectively than singing. Yet our times do not encourage it. How does that inform those of us who invite our assemblies to sing? In what ways can we help it be more inviting, and less discouraging? The accompanying instruments (organ, piano, drums, etc) and choir can be a huge boost (or detriment!) to this effort, and help it be, well...interesting! How?

10:00 “A Children’s Music Program Can Happen and Here’s How!” Ms. Sawyer – Chapel

Rebecca Sawyer, children’s music specialist, presents basics for establishing and growing a children’s music program that works.

11:00 “Venturing off the Page for Organists” - Dr. Cherwien – Sanctuary

Everyone is capable of some level of improvisation – immediate ideas as well as longer-term plans for growing the improvisational tools will be presented – all to the end of helping the congregational song come to life in clarity, imagery, and invitation. These tools are applied to create introductions, harmonization, to full sized hymn based “voluntaries”.

12:00 Lunch (provided) – CMI Office Complex

1:00 “Page to Pattern: How the Printed Score Shapes Conducting and Rehearsal Planning” – Dr. Highben

A choral score poses a wealth of questions for a conductor: What technical challenges does this piece present? Does the tempo affect perception of difficulty? What pattern should I use? How do I “make it work” with my singers? This session will use specific anthems to demonstrate how careful score study can suggest teaching techniques, simplify rehearsal planning, and determine conducting gestures that will prepare both the conductor and the choir for a successful and musical learning experience

2:00 “Spiritual Development for Clergy and Church Musicians” (who are in charge of the development of spirituality of their flock) – Rev. Highben

3:00 Break and time for work on projects.

4:00 Choral Practicum* - Sanctuary

5:15 Choral Evensong – Rev. Highben - Sanctuary

6:00 Dinner (provided) – CMI office complex

7:30 Church Music Bloopers – Sharing of stories of weddings, choir experiences, bulletin misprints and anything else you want to share. Start your “fun” folder of cartoons and stories of church music levity! (Retreat faculty will bring us a good start on that folder!)

Sunday, January 11, 2026 featuring a HYMN FESTIVAL with local choirs and retreat participants. 5:00 Sanctuary, St. Luke's Episcopal. Open to the public.

Morning: Worship at church of one's choice

Lunch on your own

1:00 Participant Reports on Projects – Chapel (Screen & Projector for Powerpoint available)

2:30 Rehearsal for Hymn Festival led by Drs. David Cherwien and Zebulon Highben - Sanctuary

4:30 Break and Snacks – Brides Room in rear of church

5:00 Hymn Festival - Sanctuary

6:00 Depart, Equipped to Serve in the Companionship of Colleagues and with God's Blessing

*Choral Practicum will focus on the practical application of topics in sessions in the process of preparing/rehearsing for worship during the retreat.