

The Little Things

It's the little things.

The life of a church musician can seem very ordinary to both the musician and congregation. It includes choosing music, practicing, and directing rehearsals. But musicians (and congregations) dream about what the music can be. We want the best.* And then,

The lead tenor has laryngitis. The weather changed and reeds are out of tune. Re-arrange the anthem quickly! Re-register the organ music! Alas! And then,

A parishioner says, "Thank you for the music. I was able to worship deeply and felt a strong connection to God today." Really? Even when it seemed ordinary to the musicians? Stuart Baskin says the ordinary equates to discipleship.* As Paul Westermeyer reminds us, we are not called to be successful but faithful. *Tending to the little things.*

In *The Afternoon of Christianity: The Courage to Change*, Tomas Halik, a Czech sociologist, priest, philosopher and admirer of Pope Francis, says, "A person's life speaks more about their faith than what they think or say about God." Journalist David Brooks says he has learned in his adult life that "the passions of the heart precede and are greater than the machinery of reason."** Churches have done "heart work" for centuries, in singing eternal truths, often rooted in scripture, the texts set to beautiful music of gifted composers. As Dr. Robert Mann says in choosing music for worship, "Good music gives a text transcendence, beyond what the text itself expresses." *Tending to daily decisions with integrity.*

J.S. Bach scholar Dr. Christopher Anderson recently fielded a question about how Bach's study and notations in the Calov Bible affected his theology and view of his vocation. Bach was convinced by scripture that music was necessary for God to be experienced in worship. Music made possible the connection between God and worshippers. Thus, Bach saw his role as musician as vital to worship. He attended to the "little things" so worshippers could experience God, no matter if some thought his work "ordinary."

As we near the end of 2025, we can take care of the little things, like tuning the organ, encouraging the singers in the congregation to "Make a joyful noise" even if they do not read music, proofing the bulletin for mistakes, choosing the best music to express a theological idea, working with a young person to offer their gifts of music, using song to celebrate the moments of the life of a congregation. 2 Peter 1:5-11 reminds us to confirm our call and election: "...you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love." *Daily little decisions.*

Singing encourages people of faith to remember scripture and spiritual truth. Fulfilling the Psalmists' admonition to "Sing to the Lord" places us in a long tradition of shaping our character and relationship to God to become whom God means us to be. *Not so little after all.*

*Like James Thurber's character Walter Mitty who daydreams about his important role in the world, as reported in Rev. Dr. Stuart Baskin, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Tyler, TX. Daily devotional for November 13, 2025.

** David Brooks. "How to Replace Christian Nationalism." Op-ed for November 13, 2025, in the New York Times.

*** Dr. Christopher Anderson. "Johann Sebastian Bach Reads the Bible: Insights from the Calov Bible." Lecture for the Luther Center of North Texas, October 30, 2025.



DR. PAUL LINDSLEY THOMAS SOCIETY 2025-2026 Members

The Paul Lindsley Thomas Society benefits trained musicians who want to further their understanding of church music. Accepted applicants enjoy monthly online meetings with other early career church musicians to share and learn about church music, admission to online and in-person CMI events, and complimentary CMI membership to access the 60,000 title choral and organ libraries.



Valentina Qishan Huang was recently awarded first prizes at the Poister Organ Competition and the Fort Wayne National Organ Playing Competition. Valentina holds degrees from Wesleyan College, Peabody Institute of Music, and Jacobs School of Music. Currently she is a doctoral student under the tutelage of Prof. Ken Cowan at the Shepherd School of Music and is the Cathedral Organist at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston.

Grace Jackson is a doctoral candidate in organ and sacred music at the University of Michigan, and serves as the 2025-26 Gerre Hancock Intern with the Association of Anglican Musicians at The Church of St. John the Divine in Houston. Grace has a M.S.M. from the University of Notre Dame and a B.M. from Oklahoma City University. She held graduate assistantships at Notre Dame and the University of Michigan, and other positions as a scholar, organist, and director of music.



Keri Kelly is a senior music performance major at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, where she studies the pipe organ, modern and baroque violin, and viola da gamba. She plays organ for area churches, and is sought after as a collaborative pianist, and as a chamber musician for both violin and piano. Her studies include historical performance practice and Library Sciences.

Spencer Koger serves as Organist and Choir Accompanist at Cave Spring United Methodist Church in Roanoke, Virginia, and as Executive Director of Uptown Partnership, a nonprofit organization focused on community revitalization. He is a member of the American Guild of Organists, and holds the Service Playing Certificate (SPC). He is a graduate of Christopher Newport University with degrees in Communication Studies and Leadership Studies.



Jody Lee is the music director at first Presbyterian Church of Monterey, California, and assistant director of Voices of Silicon Valley. She sings with Carmel Bach Festival, Choral Artists of Carmel, Madregalia, and Voices of Silicon Valley. She holds a Bachelor of Music from Brock University (Canada) and was active as a soloist, adjudicator, vocal coach and chorister throughout Southern Ontario, Canada through 2011.

Elsa Catherine Salo is the Director of the Music Ministry at St. Albert the Great Catholic Church, on the campus of Michigan Technological University in Houghton, MI. She is also Church Organist and Choir Director for St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Dollar Bay, MI. While studying forestry, she accompanied church services at St. Albert and began organ lessons. Her first official job as an organist came in 2023 as Director of the Music Ministry at the church that started her on this new path.



Mykah Snyder is a longtime church music volunteer who finds herself at the beginning of a career in church music serving as Director of Music at her local church. While pursuing her bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance at Southern Nazarene University, Mykah enjoyed her experiences in chorale and concert choir, often singing sacred music. She has experience in both musical theatre and opera, and splits her time working as a church musician and as a research librarian at a local university.

CMI: A Look Back at 2025

*In 2025 CMI held 16 events with 453 total registrants.
This total included 152 people who had not previously attended a CMI event.*

Sat, Nov 08, 2025: New Organ Music from OUP Composer, editor and organist Rebecca te Velde explored new Oxford University Press organ collections with music for every season.

Sat, Oct 04, 2025: Sacred Choral Music of Hal Hopson Dr. Robert Mann, Senior Resource Librarian, explored highlights of the prolific output of Hal Hopson (1933-2025).

Mon, Sep 22, 2025 - Sat, Oct 18, 2025: The Church Sings Its Faith - Hymn Study & Festival The choirs and congregations of seven Connecticut churches participated in a hymn study culminating in a festival on October 18, 2025, in a celebration of hymnody.

Sat, Sep 13, 2025: "In the Beginning Was the Word: Text and Word Stress in Compelling Performance" Robert Simpson, respected choral conductor and church musician, shared his wisdom for making texts come alive.

Sat, Aug 30, 2025: New and New-to-You Choral Repertoire for Upcoming Season Drs. Don Horisberger and Robert Mann offered their choices for church choral pieces for Fall, Advent, and Christmas seasons.

Tue, Aug 19, 2025: Dr. Kroeker fielded requests for finding choral and organ music in the CMI libraries.

Thu, Jul 31, 2025: Church Music Practice: Resources and Techniques for Excellent Music-Making/NPM Presentations CMI and gifted presenters offered a one day event of practical resources and tips for utilizing church members in transcendent, engaged worship/liturgy in Portland, OR. On August 1 Dr. Kroeker presented two sessions on children's music at the regional NPM-on-the-Road conference.

Mon, Jun 30 - Thu, Jul 03, 2025: CMI at the American Guild of Organists Regional Convention, Fort Worth, TX

Mon, Jun 09, 2025 - Fri, Jun 20, 2025: Congregational Song: A Graduate Course with Brite Divinity School accessed experts from across the U.S. to work with 12 seminary students and musicians. A historical survey of the church's hymnody and underpinning of psalmody earned three hours graduate credit through Brite Divinity School and documented non-credit/audit participation through CMI.

April 2025: Invitation to the Dr. Paul Lindsley Thomas Society The Paul Lindsley Thomas Society benefits trained musicians who want to further their understanding of church music. Membership is by application asking respondents to react to the document "Aspiring to the Ideals of Paul Lindsley Thomas" as they view their own calling as church musicians.

Mon, Mar 17, 2025: Come and Sing with Bob Chilcott, an event for choir singers at Highland Park United Methodist Church, Dallas.

Monday-Friday, March 18-22, 2025: CMI Exhibit at the ACDA national convention in Dallas; Dr. Kroeker presented a session on Thursday, March 21.

Sat, Mar 15, 2025: Using the Piano in Worship Dr. Charlotte Kroeker, building on her academic career as professor and performing pianist, shared how the piano can be used effectively in worship.

Sat, Mar 01, 2025: Joyful Intergenerational Music Ministry: Priorities and Possibilities. Will Breytspraak, Director of Music at St. Peter's Parish in the Kansas City area gave ideas for how all ages can participate in musical offerings.

Sat, Feb 08, 2025: Organ Improvisation Using Bach's Orgelbüchlein as a Model Award-winning improviser Ethan Haman demonstrated practical ways organists can enhance music for worship using time-tested principles, including those of J.S. Bach.

Sat, Feb 01, 2025: New and New-to-You Choral Repertoire for Lent, Easter, and Pentecost Drs. Don Horisberger and Robert Mann returned for their always-popular choices for upcoming seasons.

Thu, Jan 02, 2025 - Sun, Jan 05, 2025 Winter Retreat Musicians and leaders gathered for new ideas and resources, relaxation, and inspiration to begin 2025. The retreat ended with a Hymn Festival with 50 choir members.

Thanks to our donors who make this possible!

CMI 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

<https://www.churchmusicinstitute.org/events/winter-retreat-2026>

PLANNING YEAR-END GIVING?

CMI has received a generous gift to match donations made prior to 12/31/25.

Check out ways to give: [churchmusicinstitute.org/donate](https://www.churchmusicinstitute.org/donate)

Thank you for keeping church music strong!



Church Sings Its Faith Project

The Church Sings Its Faith Project continued in Connecticut with seven congregations, choirs, and music directors leading a four week study of hymnody and culminating in a Hymn Festival on October 18, 2025, at St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church in Norwalk, CT. Eighty-five choir singers and ~150 congregants made joyful and beautiful music in praise to God. Participants were from Trinity on the Green, New Haven; St. Paul's Episcopal, Fairfield; First Presbyterian, Stamford; First Congregational, Darien; St. John's Lutheran, Stamford; Stratford United Methodist, Stratford. Contact CMI if you are interested in the project for your area!



Did you know?

A CMI membership gives you access to our extensive, carefully curated repertoire searchable by scripture, hymn tune, composer, and more! To become a member, sign up at www.churchmusicinstitute.org/membership/

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CMI is a proud partner of the American Choral Directors Association, the American Guild of Organists, the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, and the American Federation Pueri Cantores.



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