

Lessons from Bayreuth

Every year, 58,000 people make the journey to the Bayreuth Festival. For 150 years, 1,925 uncomfortable seats are occupied by devotees for each performance of Richard Wagner's operas. As the lights go down, complete darkness and absolute quiet ensue (the Bayreuth hush) in expectation of the first chords of the orchestral prelude. The unremarkable exterior of the building houses amphitheater seating which ensures everyone has a superb view of the unfolding drama. The orchestra is completely hidden, with sound coming unexpectedly from unknown places. Electronic and amplified sounds are absent. The superbly designed acoustics mean even the quietest sound can be heard everywhere. Down the hill from the performance venue, the residents of the small town of Bayreuth provide food and lodging support to the pilgrims to each year's festival. Attendees wear formal attire, despite the heat and lack of air conditioning, given the significance of the occasion.¹

What if worshipping Christians considered going to church as seriously as Bayreuth attendees coming to the Wagner Festival? What if silence greeted the first chords of the prelude? What if every word spoken and sung were so carefully planned, rehearsed, and so gloriously compelling that the hearers knew to listen carefully so as not to miss the transcendence? What if churches were designed so everyone could see and hear without amplification? What if leaders of worship were so inconspicuous that the drama of the liturgy unfolded with no distractions? What if worshippers considered worship such a special occasion that wearing their best was the only option? What if the surrounding community noticed the importance the congregation placed on their worship?

Annie Dillard, well known American writer, penned these words decades ago: "Why do people in church seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? ... Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return."²



David and Goliath - John August Swanson³

If you have read this far, you likely understand something of the ministry of Church Music Institute. What could happen if all of us put the lessons of Bayreuth and Annie Dillard's advice into action? How would our worship and music change? How would we be changed? How could the world around us change? - Dr. Charlotte Kroeker

Thoughts? We'd love to hear from you. ckroeker@churchmusicinstitute.org

¹ Barone, Joshua. "Nothing Deters Wagner's Opera Fans." The New York Times, July 26, 2026.

² Dillard, Annie. Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters. New York: Harper & Row, 1982, pp. 40-41.

³Swanson, John August. David and Goliath, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt University Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

<https://act.library.vanderbilt.edu/artworks/56540> [retrieved September 4, 2026]. Original source: Estate of John August Swanson, <https://www.johnaugustswanson.com/>.

Music in Christian Worship Course

Ten class members including clergy, musicians, and seminarians from many different areas of the U.S. attended the Music in Christian Worship Course June 22 - July 3. Faculty members Drs. Gail Ramshaw, Zebulon Highben, Don Horisberger, Robert Mann, Charlotte Kroeker, Christopher Anderson, Peter Marty, David Cherwien, and Wilma Ann Bailey taught in their specialized areas of expertise. The course attendees and faculty participated in daily prayer services which incorporated music and liturgy from the content of the day's instruction and learned how those elements developed over time and across denominations. Congratulations to all who attended!



Summer Workshop



Dr. Yoonmi Lim



Dr. Greg Hobbs



Lunch with Chris Brunt and Yoonmi Lim



Caitlin Molechat

Attendees of the Summer Workshop August 7-8 gathered to learn from church music leaders on the beautiful campus of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Dallas. Dr. Greg Hobbs unpacked pedagogy on Handel's Messiah, recommended choral anthems, and facilitated a discussion on planning liturgical music. Ms. Caitlin Molechat shared her expertise on how to establish a thriving music program for children and youth, covering practical and logistical matters in addition to music. Dr. Yoonmi Lim and Mr. Chris Brunt played organ for prayer services and accompanied sessions. Dr. Lim recommended new organ publications along with some of her personal favorites.

Books of Note

Highben, Zebulon M. - *Sing Many Names: Scriptural Images for God in Hymnody*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2026. 127 pp. This book, prepared by an astute "user" of hymnody in his work at Duke Chapel, identifies six images for God with eighteen sub-headings to link scripture (NRSVUE) to hymns. Intended primarily for ELCA Lutherans using *All Creation Sings*, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the potential use goes far beyond these hymnals, as the hymnody cited is shared across denominations. This book will be helpful for anyone studying hymn texts as well as for worship planners.

McDaniel, Stanley R. - *Servanthood of Song: Music Ministry, and the Church in the United States*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024. 815 pp. An extensive survey of the American church music landscape with emergent trends that inform church music in the 21st century, along with questions and issues to help the reader develop a theology of music in practice. While the book length may seem overwhelming, it is well organized, inviting the reader to those portions of most interest.

Fancourt, Daisy - *Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Save Lives*. New York: Celadon Books, 2026. 309 pp. The writer is a professor of psychobiology and epidemiology at University College London where she heads a research group and directs the World Health Organization's Collaborating Centre for Arts and Health. The book cites research demonstrating the positive effects of the arts on health and healing, and their necessity for living well. Her points require only a short step to understand these concepts for music in worship and to embrace the power of music to develop a deep spirituality.

Giving Day is September 17, 2026!

Join us to complete the Annual Fund, and secure the future of CMI's most important resource:
the online Choral and Organ Libraries

Help CMI maintain operations for the next year and hire a new professional librarian!

When you give, you:

- **Impact congregations** in 45 U.S. States and 17 foreign countries
- **Support the 2,146 registrants and congregations in the last five years**
 - **Join 10,000** who love and support church music

Give on or before September 17 to **double your gift!**

Giving options at churchmusicinstitute.org/giving-day-2026

Calendar of Events

Join us this fall!

See complete listing and registration information at churchmusicinstitute.org/events

August 22 – New and New-to-You Choral Music for the Upcoming Seasons. Drs. Don Horisberger and Robert Mann return for this popular, twice-yearly review of music. Let them do your work for you!

August 29 – Navigating Church Music Employment. Dr. Lenora McCroskey, emeritus professor of organ and harpsichord, University of North Texas, shares insights from her years as a church musician and mentoring students in church music to find and keep satisfying and fruitful employment in church music.

September 12 – A Psalm Service for Advent/Christmas based on the O Antiphons. Dr. Lynn Trapp returns with more gleanings from his Joncas Library Residency to spur ideas for Advent and Christmas programming.

September 26 – Mastering Congregational Song: Getting In and Out of the Way for Inspirational Singing. Dr. Michael Burkhardt explores the complexities of supporting and leading effective congregational song – and sometimes just getting out of the way!

September 27 – CMI joins the Wichita, Kansas AGO for their chapter kickoff.

October 3 – More than Moving Our Lips: Singing with Confidence and Helping Others to do the Same. Singing is a part of nearly all faith traditions and Christianity is no exception. Dr. Geoffrey Williams will address clergy and church musicians who would like to sing better and those who want to help potential singers discover their voices.

October 7 – Inaugural meeting of the Paul Lindsley Thomas Society for 2026-27.

October 18 – “The Church Sings Its Faith” project features “A Festival of American Hymns” with Dr. Michael Burkhardt. 4:00 p.m., First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Carlisle, PA. To sing in the choir: Dr. Stanley Wicks, musician@firstlutherancarlisle.org.

November 7 – Our Present and Future: Singing with Children. Dr. Michael Burkhardt, a masterful, thoughtful leader of children's music explores tried and true techniques, and introduces his latest publications for children.

November 14 – Spirituals: The Why, When, and How to Use Black Sacred Music in Worship. Dr. Jeffrey Murdock, Yale University. Dr. Murdock, a choral conductor and specialist in Black sacred music unpacks performance practice for using spirituals authentically in worship.

Where are they now?

The Paul Lindsley Thomas Society is comprised of trained musicians who want to further their understanding of church music. Dr. Thomas was a deeply committed church musician, composer, and organist/choir director who served St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church in Dallas, TX for decades. Members of the society participate in a year-long study of church music as a vocation and receive free CMI membership and access to all events.

2024-25 Cohort

Alex Green continues his position as Music Director at Christ Church Congregational in Brockton, MA, directs a choral group at Brighton Senior Living, and sings professionally with the Copley Singers.

Christopher Lo is Music Director, playing the organ and directing the choir at St. George's Anglican Church in Malvern, Victoria, Australia.

Felicity Mazur-Park completed her DMA at Texas Christian University and is now Music Minister and Organist at the Episcopal Church of the Annunciation in Lewisville, TX.

Geoffrey Liu recently completed AAGO certification and gave his first solo organ recital this summer. He continues as organist at Kent United Methodist in Kent, WA, and enters his 7th year teaching at Key To Change Studio in Renton, WA.

John Landis is Director of Music at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Landisville, PA where he conducts the choir and plays the organ. John is also a laboratory scientist in Harrisburg.

Zach Bowyer recently completed a term as Dean of the Charlotte, NC AGO and continues as Director of Music and Organist at South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC.

2025-26 Cohort

Valentina Huang was a finalist in the NYACOP competition this summer in St. Louis and is finishing a DMA in Organ Performance at Rice University with Ken Cowan. She currently serves as Associate Organist at Palmer Episcopal Church in Houston.

Grace Jackson just completed a year as the AAM Scholar at St. John's Episcopal in Houston, and begins a professorship at Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania this fall.

Keri Kelly finished her undergraduate degree in the UW system and is beginning a master of music in organ performance and pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma, studying with Damin Spritzer.

Spencer Koger continues his position as Organist and Music Associate at Cave Springs UMC in Roanoke, VA, and a career as a non-profit executive.

Jody Lee directs the chancel and handbell choirs at First Presbyterian Church of Monterey, CA and is beginning a master of music in choral conducting degree at San Jose State University.

Elsa Catherine Salo is Director of Music Ministry at St. Albert the Great Catholic Church on the campus of Michigan Technological University in Houghton, MI. She completed the CMI Music in Christian Worship graduate course in June, 2026.

Mykah Snyder is Director of Music at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Delafield, WI, and continues as a professional librarian in Madison, WI.

Watch for the announcement of the 2026-27 members!

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musicians, and congregants.*