Dear Colleagues,

The December issue of *Antiphon* arrives in the midst of one of the busiest times of the year for the church musician. During this season, the exalting of “tradition” is often paramount among congregation members, and among townspeople who may only pass through a narthex once or twice a year. While much of the music of the church may be unknown to the general population, there are a handful of Christmas carols that are now well known throughout this country. Traditional observances of the season continue to include Christmas Eve services, and within those services, the congregational hymnody will be largely comprised of the familiar carols that, from October onward, have been increasingly ubiquitous, embedded in department store soundtracks, elevator MUZAK, and in radio and television broadcasts. While the overuse (and, at times, abuse) of these tunes may callous some to their employment in worship, even among least-musically-literate congregations, the percentage of those that participate in the congregational song increases. For many congregations, the most vibrant singing will occur during those Christmas Eve services. Some individuals, for whatever reason disillusioned by organized religion, will still come to such a service just to sing the familiar carols.

While the familiarity of tradition may “make” Christmas for some service attendees, it does sometimes seem to shackle those of us in the church music business. Many of us have a wider exposure to “traditions”, and recognize that some are national, some regional, and some are local.

In the church I attended as a child, it was a tradition that Mrs. Irene Beard would, during the Christmas season observances, read the nativity story from Luke. It was inconceivable (and considered downright rude) that anyone else be asked to read THAT lesson.
When I was in graduate school, it was a tradition, at the Kirkpatrick Chapel of Rutgers University, that “Christmas in Carol and Song” close with the Reverend Brad Abernathy reading Fra Giovanni’s “Letter to a Friend”, followed by the choir singing “The Death of David” from Honegger’s King David. The rest of the music and the lessons might vary, but those were fixed.

In Germany, “Vom Himmel hoch” is among the best known carols. In France, noels (such as set by D’Aquin, Dupré, Lebegue, and countless others) are the core of the “traditional” music of the season. In Philadelphia, one congregation had a tradition of including David Hurd’s setting of “A Stable Lamp is Lighted” in its annual Christmas Carol service.

Many of us recognize that traditions evolve. Mrs. Beard and Reverend Abernathy have both passed away, but not before illness and infirmity prevented them from fulfilling their “traditional” roles. New community members and leaders will bring memories of traditions elsewhere, and cultural cross-pollination will at least be attempted. Some congregations are fertile ground for such new growth and evolution. In others the adherence to tradition may be reminiscent of the 1989 film, “Weekend at Bernie’s”, with some traditional elements present and “propped up” although they lack any life. Regardless of the degree of adherence, each church musician, especially in this Christmas season, must observe some elements of tradition.

Just as traditions of the Christmas season constrain the church musician, so do traditions of Thanksgiving dinner constrain the home cook.

In my family, until COVID interrupted, Thanksgiving was observed by a gathering of my maternal relatives. The attendance has evolved with birth, death, marriage, and engagement, but the basic pattern remains the same.

Over the last two decades, I’ve managed to secure additional days of work leave to assist my mother with the preparations. The menu has always been an area of delicate balance and careful thought. There must be turkey, with plain bread stuffing (as my maternal grandmother made it), mashed potatoes, and gravy. Sweet potatoes, in some form, are essential, although most of my cousins and their families won’t touch them. Cranberry sauce of two varieties must be present: homemade from whole cranberries, as well as the jelled, canned type (that MUST show evidence of the rings of the can). The latter is served sliced as uniform disks. We typically try to have some green vegetable, although food preferences severely limit the options. There must be several pumpkin pies, and a single pecan pie. However, for my cousin Janet, who despises pie, there must be a “non-pie” dessert.

As time has passed, my mother has, in some cases allowed, and in other cases endorsed, continuous improvement initiatives in the kitchen preparation. We have incorporated use of farm-fresh, free-range turkey, which we brine the day before, as replacement for the generic supermarket variety. The mashed potatoes are now cooked in their skins, and peeled hot, with careful attention to the manner and order in which butter and cream are added. The pecans are now toasted before introducing them into the pie. The stuffing is now preheated before placing it in the turkey cavity, to avoid health concerns.
Year after year, my mother and I keep careful record of the volume of food prepared, the volume consumed, and the number of people in attendance, as well as an “after action review” of things that worked, and things that did not. This archive is reviewed prior to preparing the next year’s meal.

The most noticeable result of this approach is that the quality of the meal, despite constraints on the items of the menu, is outstanding. The continuous refinement and improvement has both heightened the enjoyment for those around the table, as well as easing the preparation tasks for my mother and me. Yes, tradition may still force the passing of that jelled cranberry sauce, but, by golly, those are the best mashed potatoes!

So what does this have to do with church music? Even within the shackles of tradition, the constraints on repertoire, with requests for MÚZAK favorite carols, it is possible to implement continuous improvement. You can find recipes (be it arrangements or improvisation patterns) for preparing the carols that can make those the BEST for your situation. That search for continuous improvement is key to the mission of the American Guild of Organists. May we never grow complacent! Even if Bernie is still propped up in a front pew, even if tradition forces the passing of the jelled cranberry sauce, even if Silent Night by candlelight must close every Christmas Eve service, you still have opportunity to make some aspect the very BEST! You and those you serve will be able to revel in the knowing that this year’s “Joy to the World!” was the best, and you can quietly know that next year’s will be even better! (And while serving up the BEST traditional elements, you may be able to sneak in a Brussels sprout or bit of sweetbreads for the true connoisseurs!)

Bon appétit, and Merry Christmas!

David

**FUTURE CHAPTER EVENTS**

Saturday January 7, 9:30 - 12:00: Broadening the Repertoire: A Sampler of Organ Works from Lesser-Known Composers A-Z, presented by David Beatty. Severna Park United Methodist Church, Severna Park. (Please note snowdate of Jan. 21 is planned). We will enjoy refreshments during a break; please contact Betsy Lord if you would like to bring something. Free for Annapolis and Southern Maryland AGO members; $20 registration fee for others. $10 for students with ID.

Saturday, February 25, 10:00 - noon: Resources and Strategies for Children’s Music, St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church, Annapolis. Clinicians Michael Smith and Jim Douglas. The workshop will cover resources (and how to adapt them for local circumstances), practical tips on starting and maintaining a children's choir; and a discussion of ways to reach singers of all ages and keep them motivated and growing. Free for Annapolis and Southern AGO members; $20 registration fee for others. $10 for students with ID.

Monday, April 24, 6:30 - 8:30 PM: Annapolis AGO Member Night at the United States Naval Academy. Organist and Director of Chapel Music Monte Maxwell will talk about the organ, and members will be able to play a favorite piece while Monte pulls the stops. Members of the Annapolis and Southern Maryland Chapters are invited to bring music and shoes and have fun playing and/or listening.
PROGRAM NOTES FROM YOUR SUB-DEAN

Ten chapter members and four friends enjoyed a tour of the Lewis and Hitchcock Organbuilders’ workshop on November 19. A highlight is shown in this picture. It was fascinating to see the inner workings of pipe organs. The shop combines old tools and equipment, along with modern technology. Following the tour twelve of us enjoyed lunch together.

We have exciting events planned for 2023. The first three are described on the previous page. Try to join us on January 7 and find a few gems to add to your repertoire. It’s refreshing to learn new music, even if it requires several weeks of practicing! The workshop will include music available for free through imslp.org.

Does your church have a children's choir ministry? The session at St. Margaret’s will give you the tools you need to start a new children's choir or give your current group a boost. The parent who volunteers to lead VBS music in the summer? Invite them. The future of church choirs depends on the success of children's choir programs. Don’t we all know someone who sang in children's choirs and has always been a dedicated choir member? I do; I am married to him!

On another note, I have two copies of the book published by the AGO in 2020: EMPLOYING MUSICIANS IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS. I picked them up for free at the Seattle convention, and would be very happy to pass them along. The book explains very clearly why church musicians need high salaries by listing all of the different aspects of the job. If your church is discussing whether to upgrade your salary, or is looking to hire someone in the near future, this is an excellent resource.

UPCOMING CONCERTS AND EVENTS

December 2 - 11: Meredith Wilson’s MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET, THE MUSICAL, presented by St. Matthew’s Musical Theatre Troupe. December 2, 3 and 9 at 7:30 PM; December 4 and 11 at 3:00 PM. St. Matthew’s United Methodist Church, 14900 Annapolis Rd., Bowie. Tickets $10 for Adults; $8 for children 12 and under. Tickets may be purchased in advance at https://34thstreet.bpt.me.


December 11, 7:00 pm: Advent Lessons and Carols, Christ the King Church, 7438 Baltimore-Annapolis Blvd., Glen Burnie, presented by the Pastorate of Christ the King and St Bernadette’s. Music will be presented by the choirs of both parishes, with a Christmas reception following. Come prepare your heart for the coming of Christ and celebrate his birth through Scripture and music. Geoff Rohrbach and Scott Romanoski, directors.
December 14, 12:00 pm: A Quiet Christmas Service, St. Margaret’s Church, 1601 Pleasant Plains Rd., Annapolis. A quiet and contemplative service for those dealing with pain or loss during the busy holiday season. Afternoon tea will follow. Free-will offering.

December 17, 6:30 pm: Christmas Coffeehouse, St. Margaret’s Church, 1601 Pleasant Plains Rd., Annapolis. Blues, jazz and folk mimics form the Third Sunday Band, including holiday favorites and band originals. Free admission, BYO food/beverage.

December 17, 7:30 pm: The Chesapeake Chorale will present “Lo, How a Rose” at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Crofton, MD 21114. The concert features an array of Christmas and seasonal favorites. Jesse Parker, Artistic Director; Sarah Young, Collaborative Artist; Betsy Lord, assisting at organ and piano. Tickets are $18 (adults), $12 (seniors 60+ and military), $5 (students). Masks are optional, but strongly encouraged. Patrons are invited to bring canned goods for the Crofton Christian Caring Council. More information and advance ticket sales are available at www.chesapeakechorale.org, or call (443) 292-2176.

December 21, 7:00 pm: Winter Solstice Concert with Ensemble Galilei. St. Margaret’s Church, 1601 Pleasant Plains Rd., Annapolis. Tickets required; see https://egmusic.com

**STOPS AND MIXTURES**

This is where we share news of our members. We have one new member, the Rev. Jonathan Moyers. He is an ELCA pastor living in Cordova, MD. We look forward to meeting him soon!

Former Dean Barry Cornwall has sent information on concerts available online, which he enjoys and wants to share with chapter members. The National City Christian Church in Washington has *Music at Midday* (M@M) every Friday from September through May. The majority of the concerts are organ; however, other instruments are featured from time to time. The nice part about M@M is that a recording of the concert is posted shortly after the concert. You can watch at any time. Here’s a link to the M@M web page:

[https://nationalcitycc.org/friday-music-at-mid-day/](https://nationalcitycc.org/friday-music-at-mid-day/) Click on the tab for "Upcoming Concerts." You can send your name and email to address to Michael McMahon to receive notifications of the upcoming concerts: mmcmahon@nationalcitycc.org. You can connect virtually through the Facebook Group *Music at Midday at National City Christian Church*. If you have questions, contact Barry Cornwall at westriverview64@gmail.com.

**DIRECTORY UPDATES**

An updated Membership Directory will be sent to all members in January. If you have had any recent changes in contact information or church employment status, please send the changes to Betsy Lord at betsy.lord@icloud.com. also, remember to update your information with AGO at www.agohq.org.
Resurrection Parish (Ascension & St. George’s) is seeking a Worship Leader / Music Minister who has a passion for leading Christian worship and inspiring communities in song and ministry. Interested candidates, email the Rector. The Worship Leader will have the opportunity to share joyful creativity and grow a new music / worship program, together with strong clergy leadership, dedicated lay leaders and a congregation passionate about growing young. As an Episcopal church, Resurrection Parish (Ascension & St. George’s) is rooted in a particular liturgical tradition, but we’re looking for a joyful, inspiring, and gifted Worship Leader to lead us as we rejuvenate familiar pieces and learn new songs, all a part of our overall commitment to growing ... and growing young. The ideal Worship Leader will lead vocally and instrumentally, have a passion for worship, exercise clear gifts of collaborative servant leadership, bring fresh ideas on worship styles and musical idioms, and be pastorally present to the congregation and wider community. For a complete job description, see: https://stgeorgesvalleylee.org/2022/11/21/now-hiring-musician/ or https://ascensionlexingtonpark.org/now-hiring-music-minister-worship-leader-ascension-st-georges/.

CHAPTER OFFICERS
Co-Deans: David Beatty, Jim Douglas
Sub-Dean: Betsy Lord
Secretary: Cindy Carlton
Treasurer: Scott Romanoski

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE
Class of 2023: Isaac Borocz, Ben Garcia
Class of 2024: HyeSung Hwang, Brendan Walls
Class of 2025: Kathi Hiett, Monte Maxwell

CHAPTER WEBSITE: Annapolisago.org

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