

both sides now

What Do Church Musicians Treasure in a Pastor?

by Nancy Raabe

Both Sides Now is a resource for both clergy and cantors. The column explores the working relationship between the pastor and the musician in a Lutheran congregation. It offers suggestions, advice, and encouragement for all parties who are committed to the sacred vocation of leading worship in today's world.

One of the marks of true prophets is that their words ring true across time regardless of location or circumstance. Carl Flentge Schalk (September 26, 1929–January 24, 2021) was one such prophetic voice. Those who knew him well or followed his work closely might quip, “He just said the same thing over and over again.” Ah, yes, perhaps—but his proclamation was always fresh, and the truth of his words never failed to resonate.

As editor of the journal *Church Music*, Schalk more than 40 years ago published an article titled “The Pastor and the Church Musician: Thoughts on Aspects of a Common Ministry” (vol. 80, 1980). It was released four years later by Concordia Publishing House in the Church Music Pamphlet series, and reprinted in 2015 by Lutheran University Press (now part of Fortress Press) in Schalk's collection *Singing the Church's Song: Essays and Occasional Writings on Church Music* (89–98). As congregations are returning to in-person worship or making plans for that,

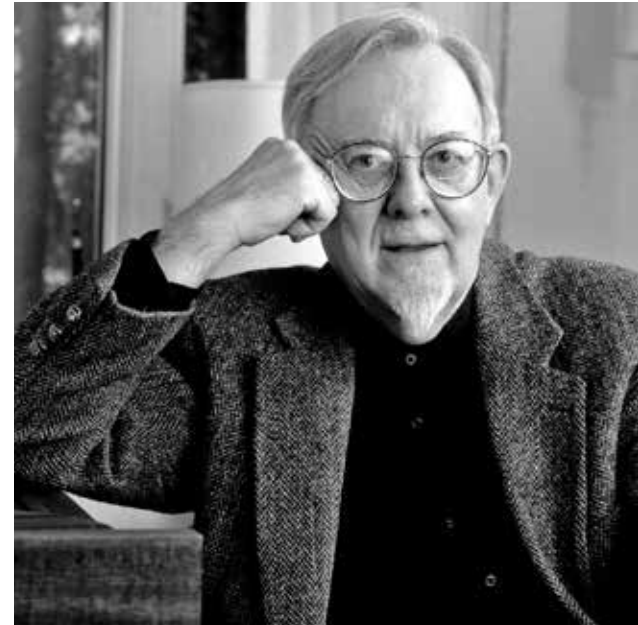
let us revisit Schalk's thoughts on the relationship between pastors and musicians as a “fair and glorious gift” in which we may meet the risen Jesus again, as if for the first time.

What do church musicians treasure in a pastor?

“They treasure a pastor who understands that the Church—before it is anything else—is a worshipping community” (90).

In worship, the community of believers gathers regularly to praise and thank God for all that God has done. Worship is the outpouring of our grateful response to God's grace. Yet, is this how most congregations are known in their communities? Schalk writes, “In many parishes the worship life of the gathered community is often a peripheral concern, the priorities of time, energy and resources being expended elsewhere. Yet the corporate worship of the congregation is for many people their one regular contact with the church. To understand the church as first of all a worshipping community gathered around Word and Sacrament [results] in a realignment of priorities in congregational life” (91).

What does this mean? That the pastor must resist the contemporary inclination to allow a congregation to be defined by its actions in the world in place of its



Carl Schalk's (1929-2021) thoughts on the pastor/musician relationship—shared in this article—is a “fair and glorious gift.”

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worship life. The primary focus of the pastor and the congregation must be on worship, not on programs. This requires the pastor and musician to be in constant collaboration to craft a weekly worship experience centered in the lectionary that is vibrant, engaging, and brimming with invitations to new life.

Faith without works is dead, but works run the risk of being misguided that do not flow from the wellspring of faith nurtured in the regular encounter with



Carl Schalk (1929-2021) continued to write music for the church well into his 91st year.

the Christ of the gospels. Also, a prime way to burn out your corps of volunteers is to overextend them in service projects without the regular refueling of the spirit that great worship provides.

“They treasure a pastor who understands that the Church of the Augsburg Confession is consciously a part of the Western Catholic tradition” (91).

Sixteenth-century Lutherans did not reject their liturgical heritage, Schalk points out. In fact, “for Luther and those who followed him it was the retention of that heritage which was at the heart and center of their liturgical reform” (91). The reforms affirmed tradition and rejected only that which was contrary to a clear understanding of Scripture.

What does this mean? That pastors and musicians must work together to mine the practices

Discover new ways to breathe life into these forms, so that worshippers may embrace the marriage of music and text as central to their discipleship.

of the historic church across the ages for new expressions and encounters with the triune God who makes all things new.

“They treasure a pastor who understands and respects the integrity of the worship forms with which the Church offers its sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving” (91).

We gratefully receive the structures of worship that come down to us from the historical church. Schalk writes, “Church musicians treasure a pastor who realizes that it is the regular and recurring use of such forms—with all their attendant richness and variety—which gives continuity and stability to Christian worship” (92).

What does this mean? That, with the pastor’s encouragement, the musician can discover new ways to breathe life into these forms, so that worshippers may embrace the marriage of music and text as central to their discipleship.

“They treasure a pastor who not only preaches the Gospel clearly and forthrightly, but who expects the music of worship to do no less” (92).

Just as all music in worship must proclaim the Gospel in some way, so the word proclaimed from the pulpit must be clear and unambiguous. As “the choir loft ... is no place for poor theology,” Schalk stresses, so the pastor must

understand that sentimentality is no substitute for “the nourishing word which builds and sustains the faith” (92).

What does this mean? That pastors and musician must work together in their worship planning with a clear understanding of the message that is being proclaimed in a given week. Clear-minded collaboration is the key to engaging worship.

“They treasure pastors who understand the Reformation insight that music is a gift of God, the ‘living voice of the Gospel’—to be used in his praise and in the proclamation of his Word” (93).

Luther had a rare understanding of the gift of music in nurturing faith. Musicians treasure pastors who understand the way “in which words and music join together to move the heart and mind” (93) in a way that words alone cannot.

What does this mean? That music in worship is celebrated and lifted up to the same degree as is the proclaimed word. This understanding “stands at the heart and center” (93) of the Lutheran worshipping community. It means that, in the life of the congregation, the musician is to be accorded the same respect and value that the pastor typically enjoys.

The musician is to be accorded the same respect and value that the pastor typically enjoys.

“They treasure pastors who plan for worship, who plan adequately and sufficiently ahead of time, and who plan for worship as part of a team” (94).

The message is clear: planning, planning, planning!

Thanks be to God.

In Part II we will explore Schalk's views on “What do Lutheran pastors treasure in a church musician?” (94).



Nancy M. Raabe is the pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshall, WI. Previously Raabe

served as music director at congregations in Wisconsin and Ohio, and she has written a three-volume set of *One-Minute Devotions for the Church Musician* (St. Louis: Morning-Star, 2010-11) based on readings for all three lectionary cycles.

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Quiz

Name That Tune

Can you name the hymn tune from the clues given?

- Martin Luther wrote both melody and lyrics, based on Psalm 46.
- The first word of this two-word hymn tune is pronounced as it is spelled in Welsh (all three consonants of it!), and it means “valley.” The second word is the name of that valley. The hymn itself calls on the “Bread of Heaven” and “Strong Deliverer.”
- Lois Martin mentions this beloved hymn in her article elsewhere in this issue. The text by Isaac Watts conveys a “sureness, certainty, a love and power bigger” than transitory trials. The lyrics are usually wedded to this melody by William Croft, organist at the church in Soho, London, after which the tune is titled.
- Perhaps Carl Schalk’s most famous hymn tune, with lyrics by Jaroslav Vajda. The lyrics invert the usual Trinitarian order: the Spirit’s visitation, the Son’s epiphany, then the Father’s blessing. And the melody ends on the dominant, not the tonic. Mentioned in Grace Hennig’s article.
- African American spiritual rooted in the history of American slavery.

Answers on page 31.