



The pulpit in St. Jacobi Lutheran Church, Einbeck, Niedersachsen, Germany

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*both sides now*

# The Integrity of the Church's Song

by Nancy Raabe

I have had many responses to my most recent column here, “Pastors and Musicians: Co-Conspirators for Christ” (*In Tempo*, 2022, no. 1:24–25). Some readers included details of trials they have faced. We’ve heard similar stories in our Fourth Friday Happy Hour. This confirms what we already know: the marginalization of music ministry in the life of the church is more widespread than one would like to think.

Those who attended the recent ALCM conference at Valparaiso University had the chance to ponder this predicament in the clergy-track session “Supporting Our Musicians.” John Morris, senior pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Dublin, OH, emphasized that developing good inter-staff relationships falls to the clergy. “We are the ones who are set apart by the church, ordained,” Morris said. “We have a responsibility. One of the things we need to be doing is asking [our musician]: ‘What do you need? How can I support you?’”

It’s important, Morris added, that roles be clearly defined. For musicians, make sure that the expectations outlined in your job description are reasonable. Ask that the document be reviewed each year by the council or by the mutual ministry committee. Make a note, especially as you move into the fall season, of how much time you spend each week. If your job description says 20 hours, are

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you really putting in 30, or even 40? (Practicing and preparation count.) Perhaps you could even keep a log one month to bring in for reference.

Salary is also a perennial issue. Here the church at large needs help—our help. How can we do a better job of making the case that proper compensation is as important for musicians as it is for clergy? Would one ever come across a pastor’s job description that covers every conceivable area for a work time of ten to 15 hours per week? (Of course, synod requirements and oversight keep this from happening.) Yet for music ministry this seems to be the norm. The first job I called up just now under [alcm.org](http://alcm.org)’s “Jobs and Employment” area includes, among other sections, the expectation that the candidate will plan and coordinate the entire music ministry; direct four ensembles as well as small groups; and recruit, educate, and train all participating musicians. The hours per week expectation? Fifteen. (It appears that this position does not include keyboard duties; it can be argued that the trend toward dividing music ministry into separate components has the effect of fragmenting resources and

thereby drawing less-qualified candidates for each position.)

And even if there are instances of 20- or even 30-hour-per-week positions, do they include benefits? Likely not, if that is discretionary. Full-time positions probably do, but I can count those I am aware of on the fingers of one hand, if that. Churches all seem to want full-time pastors. Why not full-time musicians, given that music is the heart of worship in the Lutheran church?

For inspiration I always turn to Carl Schalk, whose words continue to ring in our ears:

Wherever Christians have gathered to worship and praise God, they have sung songs—songs of faith and confidence, songs of contrition and confession, songs of exile and rebirth, songs of sin and salvation. Through 20 centuries of Christian history, words and music joined together have been a vehicle for singing the old song in an ever-new land.<sup>1</sup>

As we stumble through the shifting sands under our feet in this post-pandemic era, we are discovering anew that the song of the church is the firm earth that connects our past with our present and our future. Especially as we affirm that “Congregational song is the pre-eminent music of the Church” (section 3.a in ALCM’s 2003 [Statement on Worship and Music](#)), wouldn’t all congregations want their song to be as highly skilled, well informed, and faithfully and creatively practiced as possible? Isn’t the church at large therefore willing to work toward

greater respect for its musicians? And what can we do individually and together to help that along?

I truly believe this is mainly a matter of awareness. If church finance teams or even pastors don’t know any better than to pay their musician for ten hours a week, it is our job to broaden their horizons. I call on each of you to help us at ALCM develop ideas for how we can make a better case to the church at large for the cantor’s “high and holy calling.” Bring ideas to our Happy Hour, share them with each other, share them with me, or hang on to them for the biennial conference in Philadelphia next summer. Together, we truly *can* make a difference.



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Previously she served as music director at congregations in Wisconsin and Ohio and has written a three-volume set of *One-Minute Devotions for the Church Musician* based on readings for all three lectionary cycles. She may be contacted at [pastorgracehatfield@gmail.com](mailto:pastorgracehatfield@gmail.com)

### Note

1. Carl F. Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988), 31.

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The pipe organ pipes in St. Martin Church, Naucelle, Aveyron, France