



ALCM 2014 Survey Results

Thomas Schmidt, ALCM board member at large

The purposes of the ALCM 2014 Survey were threefold: 1) to take a snapshot of ourselves to see what we look like in clearer focus, 2) to give us data about what we actually do in our work as church musicians today, and 3) to evaluate the present services that ALCM offers to its members. The past three decades have seen many new trends and developments in all Christian churches in the U.S. and throughout the world, and the board agreed that it would be helpful to see if and how those trends might be affecting ALCM members.

We are first of all people who respond to surveys! Over 42% of our 1200+ members responded, an excellent response rate. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that they are retired, which required them to respond as they saw fit. As a result the total percentages for some questions hover around 80% rather than 100%, so the actual percentages of active members may be slightly different.

MEMBERSHIP

We are evenly divided between male and female members 51/49%. 28% of us are employed full-time in our church positions; 16% are employed half-time and 36% are employed less than 20 hours per week. This means that **over 50% of us do not work full time in their church work.** Perhaps not surprisingly **only 24% of us receive full health and retirement benefits,** a fact which lines up with those 28% of us are in full-time positions. Most of us are employed in Lutheran churches, but 5% of us work in non-Lutheran churches. 9% of us are not Lutheran, but working in a Lutheran church. That means that **one in ten of our members has not grown up in the Lutheran music tradition.**

84% of us are over the age of 45 and 37% of us are 65 or older. Only 3% of us are 30 or younger and 13% of us are in the 31-45 age group. **We have many young, energetic and creative leaders in our ranks, but statistically they are a smaller portion of our membership than we might expect.** Recruiting younger members of our profession and inviting them to become involved in ALCM needs to be one of our goals.

The churches that employ us are divided equally in size: 1/3 have one service per week; 1/3 have two services; and 1/3 have three services or more. **By an overwhelming margin we feel that our work is appreciated by both our congregations and by our pastors.** Only 2% of us experience a lack of support.

WHAT WE DO

Almost all of us direct adult choirs (80%), but 42% of us also direct children's choirs and 21% direct youth choirs. Over half of us have at least one handbell choir in our churches, although only 30% of us direct an adult handbell choir and only 6% of us direct a children's or youth handbell choir. It seems that we often use others to lead those groups. **Most of us serve as organist or pianist.** 30% of us also direct instrumental ensembles and 14% of us direct or play in praise bands. **About 2/3 of us are in charge of choosing the music, including hymns and liturgy settings.**

HYMNALS AND SONGS

62% of us use the ELW (ELCA); 19% of us use LSB (LCMS); 26% use LBW (ELCA or some LCMS congregations); 3% of us use Christian Worship (WELS). **These numbers would seem to indicate that approximately 2/3 of us serve at ELCA churches and about a quarter of us serve at LCMS or WELS congregations.** (And, of course, 5% of us are at non-Lutheran churches.)

14% of us use This Far by Faith (African-American); 2% of us use Libro de Liturgia y Cantico (Spanish); and 46% of us sing additional contemporary songs not found in hymnals. Almost all of us sing traditional hymns (86%), and that includes 70% of us who sing traditional Lutheran chorales. The majority of us also sing African-American hymns, world culture hymns, gospel hymns, Taizé chants, and praise songs. 40% of us use cantor/refrain-style songs. **As a group it is clear that we have led our congregations in using many new kinds of hymns and songs of praise.**

PRAISE BANDS

About 25% of us are in churches with a weekly service led by a praise band; 40% of us are in churches that use a praise band at least occasionally. This is a substantial part of the musical experience of our churches, but it is also an area that we have had difficulty dealing with as an organization. **Most of the praise bands in our parishes are led by non-ALCM members. However, 14% of us are actively involved in leading or playing in them, a substantial percentage of us.** Several individual comments cheered at the possibility of ALCM recognizing this style of music and applauded any attempts that we might consider to deal with it programmatically. So the question confronts us: do we consider praise band music to be part of the mission of the ALCM in that it is used in so many Lutheran churches? Or, stated another way, **do we need to recognize that Lutheran church music today also includes praise music and that we need to serve its leaders, or is this best served by other organizations?**

ALCM SERVICE TO MEMBERS

Over 70% of our members consider our national and regional conferences to be important or somewhat important. Only 10-15% consider them unimportant. The same is true of the importance of fellowship with fellow musicians with almost 80% valuing it.

In the same way CrossAccent and online newsletters are valued as important by over 80% of our members. Our members most valued articles on worship and music/musicians (80%); articles on theology and music reviews were considered important, although less so; employment listings were valued by over 60% of our members.

Our members had many specific ideas about additional services that they would like ALCM to provide.

Among their ideas were the following:

- 1 Resources for very small choirs, 6-10 singers, sometimes 1 or 2 men, most do not read music.
- 2 Enlarged forum for sharing settings/compositions/arrangements for small congregations.
- 3 Help in making transitions from traditional to contemporary worship.
- 4 Quality resources for congregational singing in new idioms.
- 5 More downloadable music.
- 6 Local area meetings and more local connectivity.
- 7 Online workshops.
- 8 Advocacy with denominational leaders for improved pay and working conditions for part-time professional church musicians
- 9 Improved formation for seminarians in music and worship.
- 10 Receiving publications more in advance of the season that they cover.
- 11 More involvement from clergy.
- 12 And—always the perennial request—a lot more practical materials.

13 One writer had a slightly different take on member services:

The term "association" implies that we are the one who provide services to/with/for each other, and to/with/for the church. I do not expect ALCM to be a provider of services for our work, but more "coordinator," or "igniter of new initiatives" which we then carry out. Networking is the main thing.

SOCIAL NETWORKING/OTHER PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

58% of us use Facebook, and 25% use LinkedIn. Only 9% of us Twitter and 24% of us use no social networking sites. 56% of us are member of the AGO, 21% belong to the Choristers Guild, 16% belong to the Handbell Musicians of America, 16% belong to ACDA and 12% are members of the Hymn Society.

We are active in our fields in other ways than just the ALCM. 7% of us are also active in other denominational organizations.

PERSONAL COMMENTS

Finally, here are representative **general comments that were written as part of the survey that put a human face to this survey.**

Although I'm not currently employed, I've given you information about the church my husband and I attend, in hopes that it will be helpful to you.

I marked myself "not currently employed" because you did not provide a place for me to tell you all my work is volunteer ... as is the case with the other musicians in our congregation.

There are times when I feel that the articles I read or what I hear in workshops and other professional gatherings have little relationship to my work in the "trenches."

I lead one adult choral choir, two children's choral choirs, a children's chime choir, a pre-school choir with melody bells, and play the organ at one Sunday service. (A Praise Band, responsible directly to the pastors, plays at the other two Sunday services.) I also oversee a volunteer who leads the Youth "Band" and the volunteer who conducts the adult handbell choir.

I'm really, really retired.

At our church we have 2 services every week. Most are "traditional" worship with organ accompaniment. The later service on the second and last Sunday of each month is a "contemporary" or "alternate liturgy" service with piano accompaniment (and sometimes drums and a guitar). I do not have to play for those 2 services. I am responsible for all other services.

I considered myself a parish musician in my former congregation, adding instrumental descants, preludes, and instrumental parts to choral pieces, as well as playing with the handbell choir and serving on the worship committee. I am new to my current community. My small, rural congregation cannot pay compensation, so I am a volunteer. Currently I offer instrumental music for preludes and hymn descants in addition to directing the adult choir. I also "conduct from the music stand" when I am playing an instrumental part on a choral piece.

I am 83 years with vision problems. I read Cross Accent with a magnifier but am unable to read from the computer screen other than headlines... I believe ALCM is a tremendously important organization. I am thankful that I could be a part of it for those years and I wish you all the very best success with future ventures. May God continue to bless.

I am a Lutheran church musician with a Master's Degree in Church Music and 50 years of experience. My church is currently going through an evaluation process by the "Church Doctor" organization, which

seems determined to make our traditional Sunday service into a contemporary one, so that we can attract un-churched members. I could use more advice/resources on how to preserve our Lutheran liturgy/mass and blend it with contemporary ideas and/or music to appeal to younger people.

I had some problems with the survey, being retired, but I thought my opinions based on long service to the church and to ALCM might be of some value. I know that all of the leadership work done by ALCM elected officers is volunteer, but getting opinions and work from others would be of value, e.g., articles or brief essays on limited topics from successful church musicians, theologians. Historians of church music, scholars for CrossAccent or Newsletter could be of great value. Start with an approach such as "What do you think about . . .? And let the subject respond in 200 words or less.

Thanks to the dedicated musicians in ALCM who take on leadership roles and conference planning. ALCM has greatly enhanced my role as a church musician.

Children's music ministry: Since parents will no longer commit to a week-day rehearsal, our talented organist/youth choir director offers seasonal Sunday rehearsals to work with the Sunday School children to participate in worship several times a year.

CrossAccent is the only journal I read cover to cover as soon as I receive it! Thanks for your work!!

ALCM is a wonderful organization and I'm happy to be a part of it!

For number 25 above, I put "not important" because of the theological direction of many articles. As a WELS Pastor and member of our Commission on Worship, ALCM is - sadly - not a dependable source of Lutheran theology. This is regrettable but true. This is one of the reasons, by the way, why there is not a more significant presence of LCMS and WELS at national conferences.

It would be nice to be able to have local chapters of ALCM wherever possible. I think that could be very beneficial; I'm just not sure if a local chapter option would even be feasible or practical.

Although I have been playing the organ for many years at my church, I do not consider myself "a born musician". I work hard to prepare pieces for pre-service music, offertory and postludes and like to have them fit with the season of the church year. I appreciate reviews on new music for organ and organ and various instruments (violin and flute) that can be prepared quickly (1 rehearsal) and that would enhance the service during the offertory or pre-service. I recently subscribed to the ALCM when our congregation was interested in rebuilding our organ (a 1906 Hook and Hastings!) I wanted to read about experiences that other congregations might have had.

First, way to go! The video greetings have been great, and the monthly newsletter is good, if anything, maybe just a bit on the short side. Can we encourage members to submit more news about their activities at all? Another question I've wondered about: how reflective are college/university programs of expectations of practicing musicians? Should we be encouraging sacred music programs to require percussion/guitar techniques, a marketing/fundraising course, etc.? Can we do more to encourage membership of not necessarily "lead" or "staff" musicians, but talented instrumentalists?

The church is changing and I would like the ALCM to recognize that a growing number of Lutheran church musicians are being called to lead music ministries where band-based worship is no longer the alternative service "down the hall" but the new norm. There is much to wrestle with theologically as musicians like myself, trained in a traditional vein, endeavor to remain faithful to Lutheran understanding of worship while recognizing that popular Christian music is transformational to so many of our members. Bottom line: at my church, I am everyone's music director, those who attend

contemporary worship and those who attend traditional worship, and I must be a pastoral musician to all. I long to feel that the totality of my ministry is supported and valued by ALCM.

I found my current position through the ALCM website before I was officially a Lutheran, and now that I am in the call process to become a rostered leader in the ELCA, I hope it will still be there when I am looking for my next position. I found it to be very helpful. Many thanks!

Money is a factor in attending conferences - therefore the regional conference which cut down on travel costs was welcome. Anytime less expensive housing or food could be arranged is most helpful.

The Survey Committee and the ALCM Board of Directors hope that this survey has given all of us a clearer picture of where we're at today and inspire us all to respond creatively to the challenges that we face in the church and in the world today.

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