

# PODIUM

Fall 2009

Volume 36, No. 1

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ReTreat 2009 descended upon the campus of Illinois State University in early July – and was a tremendous success. Our 140 participants were enlightened by the numerous and varied contributions of our three talented headliners: Rick Bjella, Patrick Liebergen, and Eugene Rogers.

Rick was masterful in his leadership with our Director's Chorus. He is a wonderful conductor, with tremendous insights into both repertoire and rehearsal technique. His energy is seemingly endless as is his enthusiasm for his craft. ReTreat 2009 marks Rick's second time serving as a Headliner. Best wishes to Rick in his new position at Texas Tech.

Patrick Liebergen brought forth a wealth of music from his vast musical catalog. His sessions were filled with lots of singing, background information relative to each selection, as well as suggestions for ideas to be implemented in rehearsal. Patrick was a bundle of energy – and we enjoyed having him as our guest.

We welcomed back Eugene Rogers to our ReTreat experience. Eugene presented four quite diverse sessions, each providing insights into not only the rehearsal experience, but also ideas concerning conducting techniques and repertoire from emerging composers. We look forward to future visits from Eugene.

Aside from our experiences with the Headliners, ReTreat 2009 had a great energy and spirit about it. Your IL-ACDA Executive Board hopes to capture that energy and build upon it for this and future years. Many thanks to our board for their efforts with ReTreat 2009.

Special thanks must be given

to our friends at Illinois State University. Tim Fredstrom, Karyl Carlson and Sarah Graham were incredibly helpful and supportive in putting ReTreat 2009 together. We also are grateful for the support provided by Steve Parsons, ISU Director of the School of Music, as well as the Dean of College of Fine Arts, Jim Major.

Lastly, I would also like to thank our Past President, John Jost, for his superb leadership during his time at the helm of IL-ACDA.

RBG

IL-ACDA President

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## Repertoire and Standards Chairs

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TBA

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### Male Choirs

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Millikin University

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### Two Year Colleges

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Wheaton-Warrenville South HS

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## *Hit the Ground Running*

*Mary Lynn Doherty, Ph.D.*

Northern Illinois University

Youth and Student Activities Chair, IL-ACDA Board

[mdoherty@niu.edu](mailto:mdoherty@niu.edu)*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”*

Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu

New students, new schedules, new music: oh my! The start of a new school year is both exciting and stressful for all teachers, experienced and new. As we begin the new school year, there are several things we can do to start off on the right foot and hit the ground running! Organizational and time management skills are so important to maximize productivity during the critical first few days of school. The following suggestions are offered as a way to center your thinking and encourage a positive attitude; it is my hope they will help combat the inevitable stresses that come with this time of year:

First, now that you have survived the first few days of school, be sure to plan short term and long term goals. Balancing the big picture with the day to day details that need to be addressed can be difficult, but it is so important for the growth of programs of all shapes and sizes. Take time to write these goals down, and brainstorm steps to achieving them. This type of reflection, whether it be about aspects of your curriculum, interactions with parents, or skill deficiencies you would like to work on, will help you to establish points of focus on the micro and macro levels of choral music education. In turn, you will be more organized and centered in your approach to the year.

Second, think about pieces that will or should become “standards” for each of your choirs or the program as a whole. These will become anchors for your teaching and the student experience you can provide. All of us have pieces in our own choral history that left a lasting and meaningful impression; every student, from beginners to your most advanced, deserves to sing great music. Lucky for us, there is no shortage of beautiful music in virtually every genre and style! Taking the time to find those anchors will help you to provide a comprehensive and meaningful musical experience to all of the students in your program.

Third, surround yourself with positive mentors and colleagues who can relate to the unique demands and rewards of being a choral music educator. Connect with others in the profession for support, guidance, and friendship. Besides friends in your building who know your teaching context, I suggest having one of your university professors, another experienced choral director, and a colleague who shares your level of experience as a “dream team” of people you can go to for answers to questions, to bounce ideas off of, share resources, or even just to have a chance to vent frustrations.

Finally, plan advocacy measures that will support your program and the place of music education in the school curriculum. It is increasingly important that we take the time necessary to communicate the benefits of a music education with our school community. That includes administrators, school board members, non-music faculty/staff, parents, and students. Our program, unfortunately, will not always speak for itself! The professionalism with which you support your colleagues will help you establish respect for music; we should not attempt to elevate the value of music at the expense of another subject area. Rather, we should tout the comprehensive nature of music and the artistic, social and academic benefits of strong participation that go beyond the music classroom. Work to make your program appeal to many different groups of students; the more exposure you have, the more wide-spread support from all areas of the school community. Reflect on the opportunities we have as music educators to show people that our music programs provide a lot more than sources for entertainment and thus, serve a vital role in the lives of students.

For brand new teachers, the following ideas are offered as helpful reminders of things you probably discussed in your methods classes and now can be put to the test:

Communication should be professional, concise and timely. Use, verbal, written and

*Hit the Ground Running (continued)*

electronic to cover all bases: do not assume all of your students/families prefer or have regular access to internet. If brand new to a position, get going right away on that letter of introduction to students and other music teachers you may be working with. Have several people proofread anything that will be sent out/put up on the internet. It is unacceptable to have typos or grammatical errors in professional communication.

Classrooms should be inviting, organized and creative. Limit visual distractions such as clutter and plan traffic flow and student use to maximize time and creative potential. Your classroom should support high levels of learning and participation first and foremost; making it look nice is an important but secondary issue.

Curriculum should be challenging, relevant, and musically sound. Choose the best musical examples you can find and focus preparation on the big picture ideas of each piece/unit. Your "curriculum" includes your content/materials and your teaching strategies; at the heart of each are your students. When choosing repertoire for the beginning of the year, try to envision a grouping of pieces that will educate and entertain. Think of concerts as informances rather than just performances...concerts are a chance to educate your audience on what students learn in your classroom (a great advocacy measure!).

Every new school year offers us the opportunity to reinvent our programs, inspire new students, and make a lasting contribution to the school community. Much like a marathon, a great school year requires preparation, focus and drive. You have trained well; now go for it! There are lots of us on the sidelines cheering you on.

## Saint Mary's College Hosts 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary High School Women's Choir Festival

Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN, will host the **25<sup>th</sup> annual High School Women's Choir Festival** on Thursday, **November 19** and Friday, **November 20, 2009**.

This is a unique opportunity to provide your treble choir with exposure to other choirs of its kind, and to give the members a special event to look forward to that is geared especially toward them.

Each participating choir will be asked to perform three or four pieces. Please understand that this is not a show choir event, but a concert choir festival. There will be no competition as such, but each choir will receive written evaluations from two commentators and a third commentator will work with each choir for 15-20 minutes following their performance. This year's commentators are all well known composers as well as conductors: **Eleanor Daley** from Toronto, and **Paul Carey** and **Lee Kesselman** from Chicago. Participating choirs are encouraged to consider performing one of the many treble voice pieces these composers have written. Choirs will perform for each other during the morning and afternoon sessions. The Saint Mary's College Department of Music will provide lunch for all performers. Each choir should plan to attend the entire day's events which will include a tour of the campus and a performance by the Saint Mary's College Women's Choir.

This year, in celebration of the festival's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary we have commissioned a new work for women's voices by composer Eleanor Daley. Each participating will be asked to purchase copies of this new piece and prepare the work in advance. We will combine to form a mass choir and we'll work with Ms. Daley on this new piece.

For more information, please contact Dr. Nancy Menk at [nmenk@saintmarys.edu](mailto:nmenk@saintmarys.edu).

### Repertoire and Standards Chairs *continued*

#### College /University

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Knox College

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Paul Laprade

Rock Valley College

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#### Children's Choir

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Quest Academy

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#### Community

Pete Martinez

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## History of the Illinois Chapter, ACDA

As the newly appointed Historian for the Illinois Chapter of ACDA, there are a number of projects I would like to tackle with your help. When I retired from Lyons Township High School, I had little storage space at home for past programs, magazines, and the like. As a result, I tossed a lot of those materials. Now (of course) I find I could use those past issues and programs to assist in compiling our state history.

For a start, it would be great to have a compilation of the following:

- Past Presidents (and their pictures)
- Decker Award Winners (and their pictures)
- Past Convention/ReTreat headliners
- Past Convention/ReTreat presenters
- Past performing groups

I've started a listing of Chestnut choral repertoire that you will find on the website, but I know I don't have all years listed. I'd like to expand that listing of recommended choral repertoire, particularly as it reflects some gems of literature we are not hearing because we don't know it!

There is also a listing posted of repertoire from reading sessions from conventions and ReTreats in the past five years, but I wonder if we can go back even further. We can never know enough repertoire, can we?

Jeff Wilson of Greenville College has already been a great help in supplying copies of the PODIUM he had collected. If anyone has copies of the PODIUM prior to 2002, that would be a great help. Ari Mosiades sent me a listing of some treasurer reports that had names of headliners. Connie Lyda had some copies of National Convention programs back in the 80's. It will take a lot of piecing information together, but I think it will be valuable for our organization and our membership to collect the information as a resource for the future.

IL ACDA Convention programs anyone? If you have copies of any of them I would appreciate collecting information found therein.

If you find you have any IL ACDA information, please contact me so I can arrange with you how to proceed.

Looking forward to this new chapter with the Illinois ACDA with your help.

Bob Boyd  
IL ACDA Historian  
r-boyd@northwestern.edu

## Student Perspectives



John C. Hughes is a full-time graduate student at Northern Illinois University, where he studies Choral

### Deciding to Go to Graduate School Full-Time

John C. Hughes  
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The in-depth and highly individualized instruction allowed during full-time graduate study strongly appeals to many people. However, the process of selecting appropriate programs, successfully applying to them, and finding ways to make full-time study possible can be quite overwhelming. This decision-making process can be made significantly easier by determining both long and short-term goals. The long-term goals should serve as a destination, while the short-term goals are mile markers along the way. Once these goals are in place, it becomes much easier to find a path that will help you achieve them; however, without goals, the plethora of opportunities for graduate study can be overwhelming.

I recently made the decision to leave my teaching position to pursue a Master's degree full-time. The decision-making process was very daunting. In this article, I hope to share with you some things I considered when making my decision and provide a starting point if you are considering this option.

#### Setting Goals

It is easy to become consumed by the constant cycle of school years. Rigorous schedules and constant deadlines make the years fly by. Long-term goals comprised of attainable benchmarks are crucial in fostering an intrinsic desire for self-improvement. Think of someone who has your "dream job." Most likely, his/her position did not start out looking like this at all. Through long-term planning and perseverance, that person has in fact created his/her own dream job. Intentionality is the key to creating meaningful long-term goals. Purposeful reflection upon the following questions may help you form and articulate your desires.

- What are your long-term goals? Where do you want to be and how will you get there? Will a graduate degree get you closer?
- Where do you want to be in 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?
- What type of degree is needed for your goal?
- If you were to look at a job posting for your "dream job", what does it require from a successful candidate?

Discuss your goals and plans with colleagues. Ask mentors, professors, and current graduate students to discuss the path they took. Most people would be happy to discuss these topics with you. However, the responsibility is yours; no one will make you plan your future. Force yourself to live in the decision-making process. On the other hand, it is also imperative to make a conscious effort to maintain a certain amount of pliability when making career and life decisions. There is nothing wrong with changing your plans as your life and career progress; furthermore, maintaining this flexibility does not necessarily contradict objective or pragmatic thinking.

#### Evaluating Programs

Begin considering and researching degree programs years before you intend on applying. By investigating what schools' application processes and requirements are, you can tailor your credentials to match the qualities of an ideal applicant. The questions below are a good place to start when evaluating graduate programs.

- At what institutions did leaders in the field earn their degrees?
- When looking at specific programs, consider asking these questions:
  - Are assistantships offered?
  - How long does it usually take to earn the degree?
  - Are teaching/conducting opportunities available?
  - What is the focus of the program? Research? Performance? Does it align with your goals and interests?
  - Does the school have funding for research projects?
  - What job placements have recent graduates received?
  - How many applicants do they admit each year?
- The application process:
  - When are the application deadlines?
  - What is the application fee?
  - What supplemental materials do programs request?

Writing samples  
 DVD of your teaching/conducting  
 List of works performed/conducted  
 Analysis of a piece from repertory  
 Statement of teaching philosophy  
 Statement of goals

- Is an on-campus audition required? Travel to these is usually at your own expense.
- When are you informed of the status of your application?

While it is not necessary, researching possible graduate programs years in advance can provide many advantages. One, you can get a firm grasp on where the best programs are, what they focus on, and what the application process is like. Two, you can start gathering and preparing supplemental application materials so that you are not scrambling to complete them right before the application deadline (see "Laying the Groundwork" below). Three, you can gain the experiences necessary to stand out as an applicant and eventually succeed in the program. The process of evaluating graduate programs requires a firm understanding of your long and short-term goals. If possible, create a spot in your planning timeline to do thorough research on potential graduate programs. As with anything, the earlier you start the process, the more informed and comfortable you will be throughout it.

### Laying the Groundwork

Applications for graduate programs involve many components and supplemental materials. There is no rule that mandates that you must create all these materials in the months immediately prior to the application deadline. If you start creating and constantly updating materials in advance, they will be more thorough and polished by the time you need them. The process will also be much less stressful. Once you have found out what programs are looking for in applicants, make your experience and materials what they want. Some things to consider:

#### Experience:

What type of literature are you programming? Does it demonstrate your taste and versatility? Would graduate schools be impressed?  
 Have you presented or performed at a convention?  
 Do you participate in an ensemble that you do not conduct?  
 What recognition has your teaching or ensemble earned?  
 Can you address some weaknesses you have? For example, if you are not comfortable with asymmetrical meters, perhaps you could challenge yourself to do a few of these pieces with your ensemble.

#### Materials:

Do you frequently update your curriculum vitae/resume with your accomplishments?  
 Do you have a running list of pieces you have conducted or performed?  
 Could you provide a polished philosophy of education?  
 What video and audio recordings of teaching and concerts do you have?  
 Do you have artifacts from your classroom?  
 What could you offer as a writing sample to potential graduate schools?

#### Other considerations:

Can you start saving money for application expenses?  
 Can you put yourself in a solid financial situation for full-time study, when you will most likely not be making an income?

There are a lot of applicants to every graduate program. It is therefore necessary to distinguish yourself. Gaining experience and addressing weaknesses will not only improve your professional abilities, but will also make you stand out to both graduate programs and, eventually, potential employers. By starting early, you can gain experience and lay groundwork for completing graduate school and achieving your long-term goals.

### Weighing the Cost

Without a doubt, deciding to attend graduate school full-time bears significant weight. It is wise to determine what the desired outcome of graduate school would be and decide if these goals are worth the cost of full-time graduate work. Be frank with yourself and those who will be affected by your decision. Here are some things to think about:

Besides yourself, who else will be affected? Consider, for example, marriage, relationships, and family.

Can you manage your financial obligations (bills, mortgage, car payments, student loans, etc) if you forfeit an income?

Is now the best time in your personal and professional life to go back to school? Would it be advantageous to wait a year or two?

What will you do immediately after this degree program? Will you continue on for more graduate school? Will you look for a job?

What things can you achieve in a graduate program to prepare yourself up for this next step? Your next step need not be attaining your long-term goal.

How would an advanced degree further you towards the long-term goal(s) identified above?

When considering going to school full-time, many people mistakenly use the term *realistic* to mean *pessimistic*. For example, some might say, "I'd love to go to school, but realistically, the financial burdens are too much." Certainly, determining the implications of such a major life change is very important; however, the possibility of full-time graduate study should not be ruled out while it is only a hypothetical situation. Perhaps it might not be a possibility now, but what about in a few years? Consider what the great conductor and teacher Howard Swan terms as an *optimistic realist*, meaning someone who objectively evaluates his/her weaknesses but does not allow him/herself to be limited by them.

The decision to attend graduate school full-time is a leap, but it need not be a risk. While it may not be possible next year, you may find that through disciplined planning, you would be able to go a few years down the road. Even if your plans change (as they most likely will to some degree), long-term goals provide the impetus for purposeful living, both professionally and personally. Being deliberate and remaining flexible are not mutually exclusive. Though sometimes difficult, the delicate balance of an *optimistic realist* can be struck.

## Harold A. Decker Award

*presented by the*

**Illinois Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association**

*In recognition and appreciation of the significant contribution made to the lives of innumerable choral singers, conductors, and audiences who have been privileged to experience the finest of choral music as presented under his/ her direction.*

*The Illinois Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association hereby presents the Harold A. Decker Award to:*

**Harold A. Decker**

University of Illinois

**Sten Halvorson**

Aurora High School

**Colleen Kirk**

University of Illinois/Florida State

University

**Walter Rodby**

Joliet / Homewood-Flossmoor High Schools

**Leonard Van Camp**

Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

**John Maharg**

Eastern Illinois University

**John Davis**

Bradley University

**Richard Hoffland**

Millikin University

**Elvis Coble—1988**

Homewood-Flossmoor High School

**Frederick Swanson—1989**

Moline Boys Choir

**William Schnell—1990**

Glenbrook South High School

**Margaret Hillis- -1991**

Chicago Symphony Chorus

**Judy Marderosian—1992**

York High School

**Ronald Benner—1992**

West Chicago High School

**James Wilson—1993**

Greenville College

**Robert Snyder—1994**

Eastern Illinois University

**Elwood Smith—1995**

Northern Illinois University

**William Olson**

University of Illinois

**Mary Selk—1998**

Bloomington High School

**Dennis Sparger—1998**

Belleville Community College

**Bob Hills—1999**

Eastern & Western Illinois Universities

**Richard Griffiths—2000**

Monmouth College

**Diane Hires—2001**

Downers Grove South High School

**Janet Watkins—2002**

Mahomet-Seymour HS

**Chester Alwes—2004**

University of Illinois

**Donald Armstrong—2005**

Illinois State University

**Robert A. Boyd—2006**

Lyons Township High School

**Doreen Rao—2007**

Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus/

Roosevelt University

**John DeGroot—2008**

Waubonsie Valley HS

**Calvin Hedegaard—2009**

Moline High School

**High School Perspectives**

The ACDA Summer Retreat ended a few weeks ago and I am still processing all that I learned. I must confess that at times I feel like a member of the Pygmy tribe walking among the Watusi. There were all these giants among the choral world attending or presenting sessions. If you didn't know who they were, they appeared to be one of us.

Some of the giants...

Rick Bjella's energy level was so infectious. Every rehearsal was an adventure of asking for the same thing in a new way. Diane Marelli did an inspirational job at the piano. Tim Fredstrom was a beacon of happiness. As each glitch was presented to him, he and Karyl Carlson would eliminate the problem in a kind and careful manner. Tim would act as if solving your situation would create his highest contentment. Then Karyl would sit down at the piano and blast the spots right off the page! Our selfless president, Brett Goad sits like a Yoga instructor radiating peace in the eye of a hurricane. He gives away his music, his time, his seat, his thoughts without ever raising his heartbeat. He has his thoughts honed in on seeking strategies to help the district and ACDA achieve their goals. Joy Schertz was making everyone feel welcome with her elegance and grace while helping us to see that our retreat attendees were from everywhere. Eugene Rogers was amazing. He must be a genius. I know that there is no way he is 16 years old - why does he look so young?! Patrick Liebergen had an endless supply of his arrangements. How does he find the time to be so prolific? What an inspiration to anyone who has those skills and teaches full time. Brad Holmes led us through the All State Music with his unique and exquisite style. Millikin is so blessed to have him. Our question and Answer session with our composition winner was so fascinating! I

know that we will all be watching for her future choral works.

Now that the retreat is finished, it is time to get back to work. Here are a list of ten ways to tell that school is resuming:

- The days are getting shorter.
- Janet McCumber has achieved almost 100% participation of the student population of the Villa Grove High School choral program.
- The Unit 5 School District (Normal Community) has once again drawn up redistricting boundaries.
- Leslie Manfredo has chosen her Christmas 2010 Madrigal Repertoire (no, I don't mean 2009)
- Dennis Morrissey has cleaned out, pared down, and pruned his Bloomington HS Choral Library, again.
- The corn is almost 7 feet high around here.
- Sandy Erickson of Pontiac saw her son safely return from active duty in the middle east!
- The Redneck Olympics are finished.
- Beth Best, of Naperville, (and president elect) announced that she will be performing Verdi's Requiem with her 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus.
- I have cleaned and resealed the grout on my kitchen floor.

Have a great year!  
Debbie Aurelius-Muir, District III, Representative

**SAVE THE DATE!**



SUMMER RETREAT 2010  
JULY 7, 8, 9  
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY



**FEATURING:**

CHARLES BRUFFY, PHOENIX & KANSAS CITY CHORALES  
STEPHEN HATFIELD, COMPOSER & LECTURER  
PEARL SHANGKUAN, CALVIN COLLEGE



GO TO [www.il-acda.org](http://www.il-acda.org) TO REGISTER OR FOR MORE INFORMATION



Special thanks to the following vendors for their participation in Summer ReTreat 2009.

**Shattering Music**  
[www.shatteringmusic.com](http://www.shatteringmusic.com)

**Musical Resources**  
[www.musical-resources.com](http://www.musical-resources.com)

**Patti DeWitt, Inc.**  
[www.pattidewitt.com](http://www.pattidewitt.com)



# ACDA Central Division News

## Conference Committee

Dear Central Division ACDA Members,

We are anticipating one of the best division conventions this coming February in the wonderful town of Cincinnati. This message is to encourage you to consider sending singers for one of the Honor Choirs we will be holding. Don't let your singers miss out on this great opportunity.

If you would like to nominate someone for the Stegman award, the application can be found at [Stegman Award](#).

Do you want to connect with other choral conductors in our Division? We have a Facebook page! Check it out.

If you would like further ACDA Central Division messages to be sent to a different email address please let me know.

Mary Hopper  
Central Division President

- [Mary Hopper](#)  
President
- [Scott Dorsey](#)  
Program Chair
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- [Wendy Treacher](#)  
HS Honor Choir
- [Julie Clemens](#)  
MS Girls Honor Choir
- [Linda Busarow](#)  
MS Boys Honor Choir
- [Laura Lane](#)  
Collegiate Repertoire
- [Mary Evers](#)  
Interest Sessions
- [Jennifer Burkemper](#)  
Reading Session
- [Dawn Stone](#)  
Hospitality
- [Bill Niederer](#)  
Program Book
- [Richard Ingram](#)  
[Duane Karna](#)  
Doors and Students
- [Pearl Shangkuan](#)  
Past President
- HEADLINER—CHANTICLEER



### High School Honor Choir - Edith Copley

**Your high school students will have the opportunity to work with one of the most exciting conductors in the United States. Edith Copley, Director of Choral Activities at Northern Arizona University, is known for her creative programming and dynamic rehearsal style.**

**Application deadline is October 10th.**



### Middle School Boys Honor Choir - Randy Swiggum and Margaret Jenks

**Are you looking for a way to encourage your young male singers. Send them to Cincinnati in February to sing with 70 other Middle School Boys! This is an opportunity you shouldn't miss.**

**Application deadline is October 10th.**



### Middle School Girls Honor Choir Lynne Gackle

**Give your middle school girls the opportunity to work with one of the country's leading conductors. Lynne Gackle, newly appointed to the faculty at Baylor, will bring enthusiasm and beauty to the girls in this choir.**

**Application deadline is October 10.**



## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

**JOB TITLE:** Executive Director—Illinois Music Educators Association

**TYPE:** Part Time / hours as necessary to fulfill responsibilities.

**SALARY RANGE:** \$35,000+ commensurate with professional arts management experience.

**STARTING DATE:** No later than July 1, 2010.

**DEADLINE:** Application screening begins December 15, 2009.

**PRIMARY DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** A detailed position description and candidate profile are available at: [www.ilmea.org/director-search/profile.pdf](http://www.ilmea.org/director-search/profile.pdf)

**EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:** The ideal candidate will merge a passion for arts advocacy with the managerial skills necessary to lead an active and prominent association of educators. Experience in arts management and/or experience in the field of music education (direct or indirect) is preferred, but not required.

**INQUIRIES:** The search committee asks that all inquiries be directed to the following email address: [ilmea.search@gmail.com](mailto:ilmea.search@gmail.com).

**HOW TO APPLY:** Send cover letter, professional resume, and professional references to: [ilmea.search@gmail.com](mailto:ilmea.search@gmail.com)

Additionally, please mail hard-copies of same to:



Illinois Music Educators Association  
18700 Wolf Road, Suite 208  
Mokena, IL 60448-8603  
Attn: Executive Director Search Committee

### *Church Perspectives*

## Choral Ministry Health Assessment

Shots make me queasy, hospitals make me downright ill, and I can just imagine how anymore references to Health Care might make a lot of us feel! So at the risk of some sort of outbreak, I've put together a few thoughts that challenge me to assess the "health" of my own choral music ministry at my church. I hope that readers of all faiths and religious traditions will find that these principles are applicable to you. After a couple of drafts attempting to use "one-size-fits-all" language, I chose to go for clarity. But as I write, please know that I have all of you in mind who serve various faiths through music.

These are points that I've developed and presented over the years, and I can say with certainty two things: One, I think they've held up pretty well and still apply. And two, I am just a little uncomfortable as I see that in my current ministry position I still have some building to do. So please consider this "Choral Ministry Health Assessment" as it is intended... from one who has some growing yet to do.

### **Hallmarks of Church Choir Health**

#### **Care for intricate details with freedom of extravagant spontaneity ...**

Have I planned carefully and paced well, considering the time constraints and abilities of my groups – making sure to stretch them a bit? At the same time, am I willing to let go of these plans when a greater purpose calls? Perhaps it is a musical or expressive breakthrough that needs to be enjoyed longer. Perhaps it is a pastoral care concern. Or perhaps there is a sense of being so moved by a piece that we need to quietly reflect or pray, even as the clock ticks? To bring this value into the worship service requires some wisdom, maturity and sense of decorum for your tradition. Nonetheless, am I willing and able to be in the moment with a brief and thoughtful comment, a willingness to change plans occasionally, or the humility to acknowledge an error and respond by starting over?

### **Artistry with "Heartisty" ...**

No matter how "low-church" my services might be, are my choirs taught and challenged to love beautiful phrasing, accurate tuning and communicative diction? Regardless of how formal the setting, do I allow my singers to be fully human, feeling and communicating the emotion in the music? I believe there is a double-edged and deadly sword that cuts to the heart of our church choral ministries. On one hand we assume that sincerity is all that matters while denying the complexity of our creation... that skills, training, and dedication to excellence are somehow cut off from our ability to feel and communicate message – it is "just the heart" that matters. On the other hand we hear that by our sophisticated repertoire and our resistance to emotionalism we will somehow be superior to other kinds of expression, leaving our own artistic communication cold and lifeless, and perhaps superficially motivated.

### **Unity balanced with free-flowing individual expression of gifts, talents, and personalities...**

Do our choirs share a unity of purpose and a reasonable oneness of spirit? And yet do they allow for the unique chemistry of the group to form its own life and personality? Am I willing to take those quiet and gentle corrective steps to address behavior that would seriously damage the unity of the group? But am I also careful not to force a unity that is held together tightly with an iron fist?

### **Commitment and accountability that flow from our understanding of the value of what we do, for whom and with whom we do it...**

We are choral musicians. We want our people to be committed because we know the music will never sound good if they're not! But have we taken the time to remind our people of the value of singing the Word on worship? Of speaking to and for the congregation through an anthem? Of supporting the liturgy and the people's song? Of setting a beautiful example of stewardship of time and talent by our presence and leadership? How often have we drawn our singers' attention to the God we serve? Are we acutely aware that God's presence is with us in our ministry? Are we humbling ourselves to allow God's work to be done in God's way? And then, do we live in the reality of an authentic community of faith that is a subset of a larger community of faith? Choristers might love us if we're particularly fortunate, but their commitment and accountability is not to us! It is to God and to the community with whom they have made a covenant to lead in worship. What I do as a chorister .. my rehearsal habits, my punctuality, the joy I bring to the process, the prayerfulness with which I approach it ... all of these things directly affect this covenant community of music ministry.

### **Knowledge that we are ministers who are making a contribution to a lasting spiritual and musical legacy - we are never just volunteers...**

We have a pastoral and spiritual responsibility if we sing in services of worship. We are not volunteers, we are called. I might not always demonstrate that reality but I must be growing toward it in order to be healthy. Yes, we honor the time constraints of our busy singers, and we show loving appreciation for what they give. Some of us are blessed to have musicians in our churches who could easily have paid musical work elsewhere, but freely give their gifts of music to their church. But this service of love and sacrifice of time can be celebrated with a greater depth than to simply accept the label of "volunteer". Music ministry is far too significant, and what it can mean in the lives of our singers is too significant to make it sound like working at the PTA dunk-tank once a year. (Not that there's anything wrong with that!)

### **A desire to live out what we sing about...**

Our expectations and theology are very diverse, but at a minimum, a healthy church choir is made up of people who support its mission and honor the sacred environment. This is far from a tone of permanent somberness. In

**Continued from page 11**

fact if it is genuine it will very often be expressed as an environment of joy and laughter. However it is expressed, I want to encourage my choirs to live and believe the faith.

**An organic connection with the mission of the church ...**

Does my choir see itself exclusively as a community chorus while enjoying the convenience of a regular rehearsal location, perhaps good instruments, perhaps paid leadership, and a free performing hall? That sounds extreme, but it is an attitude that exists, and if we're not careful we can play into it. Do at least *some* of our choir members get involved in the broader life of the church? Do I? Do I encourage discord with the church leadership? Do I try to build my choir by touting our superiority to that "other" service with its "bad" music? It's easy to become anxious and even angry if we disagree with things happening around us in our houses of worship, but if our choirs have been active contributors to the life of the church we will have a much better chance at concerns begin graciously heard and addressed.

**An attitude of recruiting ...**

Does my choir believe in their ministry so much that they enthusiastically welcome new singers? Don't worry, it's fine to add a disclaimer – new members who can *sing!* But we all know that lots of people can sing, and a good lot of them should be in our church choir! Do we share that welcoming spirit? Can we introverts bring ourselves to extend personal invitations and make occasional phone calls?

**Active leadership from within the ministry that is replenished over time with new leadership...**

It might take some time and effort, but a healthy, supportive, working choir leadership team is a gift. Keep working on it!

**Appreciation for others of greater or lesser abilities, and a desire to see them reach their potential...**

One of the great issues that can diminish the health of a choir is how participants of various experience and capability live and work together. The "diva complex" can be extremely harmful, and it can come from your best singers or from those, er, not so good. I personally don't approach soloing democratically, and try to clearly communicate what the criteria are. But it is still easy to step on a land mine in this area. Think through and communicate a gracious philosophy and try to be consistent in order to maintain your group's health. Protect those who desire to sing well and need to grow. Decide what basic skills are required for your group – if any – then be lovingly courageous in moving forward. And if you need to change your mind, communicate well and be humble.

**An ever-growing vision for what can be accomplished, when it is the will of God, through this ministry, always aspiring to greater things...**

Look ahead, and dream. Be hopeful for the future and be healthy and authentic in the present.

Grace and peace,  
Dan Wagner  
Illinois R & S Chair  
Music in Worship

## Nominations for the Illinois-ACDA Harold Decker Award

Harold Decker was the Chair of the Choral Division of the School of Music at the University of Illinois from 1957 to 1981. He was a charter member and past president of ACDA. In 1979, the Illinois Chapter of ACDA chose to institute the Harold Decker Award, with Dr. Decker being the first recipient. The award is given "in recognition of the significant contribution made to the lives of innumerable choral singers, conductors, and audiences who have been privileged to experience the finest in choral music as presented under his or her direction."

### Requirements of the Harold Decker Award

1. Quality leadership and service to the art of choral music.
2. Minimum of 20 years of leadership in choral music.
3. Minimum of 15 years of choral service in Illinois.
4. A record of active service in ACDA.

### Process

Any IL-ACDA member may nominate someone for the Decker Award by submitting, before January 1, a letter of nomination, at least two letters of support, and biographical information or a current resume of the candidate. At the January meeting, the IL-ACDA Board will vote on the recipient of the Decker Award, to be awarded at the summer ReTreat.

Send materials before January 1 to: John Jost, Music Department, Bradley University, Peoria IL 61625. E-mail address: [jrj@bradley.edu](mailto:jrj@bradley.edu)

### From the editor

As the new editor of the *Podium*, I have been given the task of transitioning this publication of the Illinois ACDA from a paper format, to an electronic medium. This transition will help reduce costs and hopefully allow us to publish the newsletter in a timely fashion. As you have come to expect, the *Podium* will continue to publish information about upcoming conferences, reading sessions, as well as relevant articles. It is my vision to continue to provide relevant material as well as provide a forum for helping educators and other music professionals from all areas of the ACDA constituency interact and network together.

I have been an active member of ACDA over the past 10 years, and I have attended national and regional conventions as a member of both the Illinois and California ACDA chapters. In all my teaching experiences from elementary and junior high music, to high school, community, and church music, I have found my greatest professional growth through interaction with the ACDA and its membership. I am grateful to the many wonderful professionals that I have had the pleasure to work with in my different music related roles. Their knowledge of repertoire, rehearsal techniques, words of encouragement and critique, and music sharing experiences have been invaluable to me.

At the start of a new year, it is easy to become insulated and self-absorbed in our work. The pressures of teaching music literacy, programming, concert schedules, and advocacy can be overwhelming. It is at this time of year more than any other that I find myself reaching out to others for ideas and advice on ways to improve my craft. It is my vision that this publication will serve as a resource for connecting people and ideas to further the cause of choral music. I am eager to reach out to new people for contributing articles and ideas for ways in which the *Podium* can serve as a valuable resource to all members. I invite your ideas and comments as to how we can improve.

Beginning with this fall issue, the *Podium* will be e-mailed to members, and available on the website at [www.il-acda.org](http://www.il-acda.org). If you are not connected to the internet and wish to continue to receive this publication, please contact me directly at 630-942-7452 so I can make arrangements for you to receive it.

Best wishes for a wonderful year,  
 Andy Jeffrey  
 Podium Editor  
[andrew\\_jeffrey@glenbard.org](mailto:andrew_jeffrey@glenbard.org)

*The Conductor's Podium* is the official publication of the Illinois chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. It is published three times a year, using the following deadlines.

Fall issue: Copy deadline August 15  
Winter Issue: Copy deadline December 1  
Spring issue: Copy deadline March 1

Send all written materials to Andy Jeffrey at [andrew\\_jeffrey@glenbard.org](mailto:andrew_jeffrey@glenbard.org)

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