

## PODIUM

**Podium Editor**

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## President's Message

**Paul Laprade**

IL-ACDA President  
*VanderCook College of Music  
Oak Park Concert Chorale  
Tutti Voce Collective  
New England Congregational Church*

**Final Thoughts – A Celebration of Collaboration**

It is a true honor to write my final Podium submission as President of IL-ACDA, especially during this milestone year—our 50th Anniversary. As we look to the future, I'm filled with joy and confidence knowing that a strong and passionate team will guide us into the start of our next 50 years: Amy Branahl as President, Ben Luginbuhl as President-Elect, Paul Nielsen continuing in his invaluable role as Treasurer, Puja Ramaswamy our Secretary, and yours truly as Past-President, stepping into the role so ably filled by Laura Coster. Even more exciting is the energy and dedication of one of the most active boards in recent IL-ACDA memory. I expect great things ahead.

In this brief article, I want to reflect on the collaborative developments that give me hope we are truly moving beyond the lingering impacts of COVID and other recent challenges—into a vibrant new chapter for IL-ACDA.

**Celebrating Through Collaboration**

Our tradition of honoring excellence in choral leadership continues through the annual Harold Decker Award, and in recent years, we've expanded that celebration with the Young Directors' Award. Under Laura Coster's outstanding leadership, the committees overseeing these awards received the highest number of submissions in our history. Laura also spearheaded the creation of a new Partnership Award to recognize individuals and organizations that have consistently supported IL-ACDA through service, generosity, and advocacy. This year, for the first time, three of these awards will be presented at our Summer ReTreat. Additionally, as detailed in Chris Windle's article, our Composition Contest has been revitalized—now stronger and more active than it has been in a decade, thanks to collaborative efforts that have inspired unprecedented engagement.

These successes underscore the power of collaboration. As I transition into the role of Past-President, I'm hopeful that this spirit of teamwork continues to spark innovation and excellence throughout IL-ACDA.

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**Two-Year College Choirs  
Chair**

OPEN

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**Leading Through Collaboration**

"When governance is unclear, we cannot achieve our artistic goals with effectiveness and efficiency." These words, shared with the board in 2023, shaped my first major initiative as President: a comprehensive review and rewrite of our byLaws. These guiding documents are essential tools that prevent us from reinventing the wheel and provide a clear framework for progress and accountability.

With over 89% approval from our membership, the new ByLaws allow us to form committees with well-defined objectives and transparent processes. This clarity has helped reduce confusion and conflict, enabling the board to work more cohesively and efficiently. These changes were made possible only through thoughtful, collaborative work—a hallmark of the strong leadership our board continues to exhibit.

Moving forward, I hope we strike a balance: maintaining attention to governance without losing focus on our art, and ensuring that equity and clarity guide every endeavor.

**Reaching Out Through Collaboration**

ACDA's great strength—and challenge—is its commitment to representing the full breadth of the choral world. Inevitably, some voices or needs go unrecognized—not by intent, but often due to gaps in leadership or perspective. That's why I'm especially proud of the new BIPOC Mentorship Program, highlighted in Nythia Martinez's article. This initiative, born from the collaborative work of our Diversity Initiatives Committee, represents a vital step forward in inclusivity and leadership development. Similarly, thanks to Keith Hampton and Sean Newman, we are once again addressing the needs of the Music in Worship community—another group that had gone underserved in recent years. As I complete my term, my hope is that we remain committed to creating new initiatives while also looking inward—continually asking ourselves who we serve, and how we can better support every voice within our community. The more we collaborate across lines of familiarity and comfort, the stronger our organization becomes.

In service to you,  
Paul Laprade



# illinois *acda* SUMMER RE-TREAT

*Rekindling the  
Choral Spirit:  
Connecting  
Through Song*



June 25-26, 2025



Bloomington-  
Normal, IL



Dr. Brandon Williams



Elaine Hagenberg

**Register Now!**

Please go to [www.il-acda.org/summer-retreat](http://www.il-acda.org/summer-retreat) for more details.  
Use the QR below to link directly to the registration form:



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## Note From the Editor

### Sean J. M. Newman

Podium Editor  
Faith Lutheran Church, Lake Forest

### Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Year of the Podium!

Greetings! I hope you will find this year of *Podium* invigorating. The *Podium* has been diligently communicating with the choral directors of Illinois for 50 years! We're excited to begin celebrating this historic milestone, and you will see that throughout this year.

### The Beginnings

On September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1974, a letter was sent to IL-ACDA members pitching the idea of a state ACDA newsletter for Illinois' chapter. The letter was written by Dr. Robert E. Snyder, then-President of IL-ACDA (1974-1976), Director of Choral Activities at Eastern Illinois University (1969-1995), and 1994 Harold Decker Award Winner. He wrote the following:

Up to this time, we have not had a state ACDA newsletter. Several states including Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin and California have these, and they have been received well by the members. I have contacted one of our district chairmen about assuming the responsibilities of being editor. I would appreciate some response from our Illinois members about how you feel about such a project. If you have ideas of what format this should take and what should be included, please write me your suggestions. I'm always interested in learning what others are doing. This seems one way in which we can help each other.

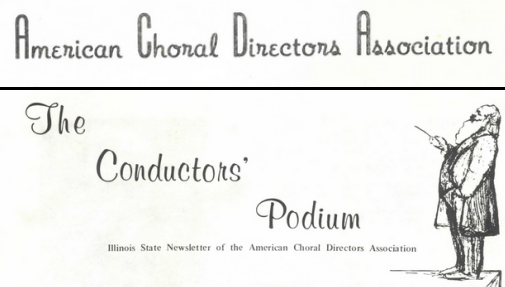
The first issue of what was first called *The Conductors' Podium* was published on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1974. Here is how Dr. Snyder introduced that very first issue:

### A MESSAGE FROM THE STATE PRESIDENT

Dr. Robert E. Snyder

This is the first Illinois ACDA Newsletter, appropriately named *The Conductor's Podium*. Dennis Sparger, who is Director of Choral Activities at Belleville Area College, has agreed to serve as editor. Not only is Dennis working on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Illinois, but he is also serving as ACDA District 6 Chairman. Our thanks to you, Dennis, for undertaking a sizeable task in addition to your many other obligations. This type of spirit is what will make ACDA an even better organization.

I hope that you will consider this vehicle YOUR paper. If there are items that you would like to include about anything unique or special in your program, wherever you are teaching and directing, I hope that you will send it to Mr. Sparger at Belleville Area College. It is our hope to issue at least three newsletters this first year. Ohio, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Iowa have similar publications already, so we are catching up a bit.





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Please reach out to Paul Laprade if  
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positions at  
paullapradeacda@gmail.com


If you have any questions or  
comments, please reach out at  
www.il-acda.org/contact-2

## Note From the Editor continued

Many of the first issues of the *Podium* included "favorite choral works." Here is the list of "favorite choral works" from the very first issue:

FAVORITE CHORAL WORKS	
<p>The two immediate Illinois past-presidents have submitted a few of their many favorites.</p> <p>John Davis, Director of Choral Activities Bradley University President 1972-74</p> <p><i>Musicians Wrestle Everywhere</i>, Elliot Carter (Mercury). <i>To Be Sung On The Water</i>, Samuel Barber (G. Schirmer). <i>A Jubilant Song</i>, Norman Dello Joio (G. Schirmer). <i>Sing Unto God</i>, G. F. Handel (Carl Fischer). <i>Matra Pictures</i>, (IV, Summer Time; V, Stealing Chickens) Zoltan Kodaly (Universal). <i>Six Folk Songs</i>, Brahms (Marks). Selections from <i>Porgy and Bess</i>, arr. Warnick (Chappell).</p> <p>Dr. Leonard Van Camp, Director of Choral Activities Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville President 1970-72</p> <p>"Brief Works with a Few Instruments"</p> <p><i>Cantata 118</i>, "Oh Jesus, Lord, My Light and Life", J. S. Bach (Marks 12576-8). SATB, can be performed with piano or organ or with wind ensemble.</p>	<p><i>Rejoice, Earth and Heaven</i>, Dietrich Buxtehude (C. F. Peters 6633). satb/SATB, Vol. I &amp; II, 2 tpt., timp., continuo.</p> <p><i>Lo, I Bring Tidings</i>, (Christmas Concerto), Johann Vierdank (J. Fischer 9156). 2 equal voices, can be performed with 2 vl., fl. or recorders, and cont.</p> <p><i>O Beloved Shepherds</i>, Andreas Hammerschmidt (Concordia 97-6332). SATB with 2 treble instr. and cont.</p> <p><i>O Praise the Lord, All Ye Nations</i>, Georg Phillippe Telemann (Concordia 97-4838). SATB, vl. and cont.</p> <p><i>Missa Brevis in F Major</i>, W. A. Mozart (G. Schirmer 2183). satb/SATB, 2 vl. and cont.</p> <p><i>Christmas Cantata</i>, Daniel Pinkham (Robt. King 602). Chorus and Double brass chorus; or Chorus, brass quartet and organ.</p> <p><i>Laud to the Nativity</i>, Ottorino Respighi (Franco Colombo). smt/SATB, 2 fl., ob., Eng. hn., 2 bsn., triangle.</p> <p><i>O Clap Your Hands</i>, Ralph Vaughan Williams (Galaxy 2222). SATB, 3 tpt., 3 tbn., tb., timp., tym., and organ.</p> <p><i>Psalmkonzert</i>, Heinz Werner Zimmerman (Concordia 97-4854). 5-part mixed choir, unison children's voices (or unison women), bar. solo. 3 tpt., vibraphone, and string bass.</p>

On January 30th, 1980, the *Podium* (vol. 6, issue no. 2) featured what became the Harold A. Decker Award:



**Illinois ACDA Recognizes Distinguished Conductor**

At the Illinois Convention luncheon, held October 13, 1979 at Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, the members of Illinois ACDA paid tribute to Harold A. Decker for his immense contributions to ACDA and the choral art. The presentation of the award by Illinois President A. Dennis Sparger was greeted by enthusiastic approval and a standing ovation.

Established as a continuing honor, the award which will bear his name, will be bestowed yearly on an Illinois choral conductor who consistently demonstrates the high standards of humanity, musicianship and literature, as exemplified in Harold A. Decker.

Since then, IL-ACDA has established additional awards:

- Outstanding Partnership Award
- Composer Award
- Outstanding Young Choral Director Award

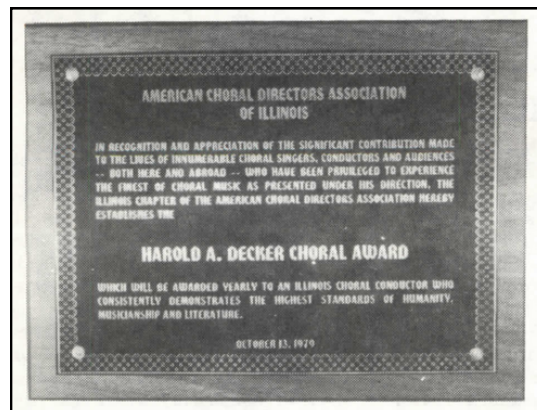
## Podium Archives

You may peruse all of the previous *Podium* issues from the past on our website at:  
[www.il-acda.org/il-acda-podium-archives](http://www.il-acda.org/il-acda-podium-archives)

I want to thank Randy Haldeman, Janet McCumber, and Aaron Mejorada for collaborating to get all of our archives digitized and onto the website!

More to come in our next issue of *Podium* as we celebrate this 50<sup>th</sup> year!

Musically yours,  
Sean J. M. Newman



## Spotlight on Ben Luginbuhl: IL-ACDA President-Designate

### Andrew Bruhn

District 3

*Illinois State University*

As the District 3 Representative, I always enjoy the opportunity to highlight the exceptional work happening in our region. This issue, I'm especially pleased to feature one of our own—Ben Luginbuhl—who currently serves as IL-ACDA's President-Designate.

Ben Luginbuhl is currently in his 27th year of teaching vocal music at Normal Community High School (NCHS). During his tenure, he has also taught general music and chorus at every grade level (K-8) at two middle schools and elementary schools within the McLean County Unit 5 school district in Normal, Illinois. At NCHS, Ben is the music department chair and directs five curricular and two extracurricular choirs, including the NCHS Madrigal Singers, Court Singers, and Voice Male a cappella ensemble. He is also vocal director and pit conductor for NCHS musical productions and has also taught AP Music Theory and American Popular Music. He received his Bachelor of Music Education degree, with highest honors, from the University of Illinois, and has received master's degrees in both educational administration and music education from Illinois State University. In 2010, Ben became a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), renewing in 2021. In the 2018-2019 school year, Ben was humbled and honored to be named a Top Ten Finalist in the Illinois Teacher of the Year program.

Ben has served as President and Senior Chorus Chair for the Illinois Music Education Association (ILMEA) District 3. He also is active in the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), having served as Illinois District 3 Representative, High School Repertoire & Resource Chair, and is currently serving as state President-Designate. He has been the guest conductor of the ILMEA Districts 2, 5, and 8 All-District Junior Choruses, as well as several public school and church choir festivals throughout the Midwest.

He enjoys adjudicating choir festivals, and has spent over 20 years as a section leader and conductor at Illinois Summer Youth Music (ISYM) Choir Camps at the University of Illinois. Ben, his wife Kristy, and children Cade, Cole, and Charis reside in Bloomington.

I first met Ben in the summer of 2018 while I was teaching middle and high school choir in Rockford. I was attending the Illinois Choral Conducting Symposium with Andrew Megill and Joseph Flummerfelt, which coincided with the ISYM high school camp, where Ben was serving as a section leader. I spent several hours observing Dr. Megill work with the choir. In his signature warm and welcoming way, Ben introduced himself. That sparked a friendship that continues to this day—and it's an added bonus that we now live and work in the same community.

### Q&A with Ben Luginbuhl

Congratulations on being named IL-ACDA President-Designate! As you look ahead, what are some of your hopes or priorities for the organization?

*I am really excited to serve as President-Elect Designate and have really enjoyed learning about the organization and how it all works. I have loved working with Paul Laprade and Amy Branahl—they have done SO much to define roles, streamline the organization, and set a strong path moving forward after the difficult years of COVID (shoutout to Laura Coster for navigating those difficult years as President!).*

*My biggest hope for the time being is getting more of our membership to attend the Summer ReTreat. Amy and I are really excited to welcome Brandon Williams and Elaine Hagenberg, and we're also putting a priority on networking and having time to just "talk shop" with our colleagues, as well as offer some great interest and reading sessions! Hosting it at my school will also be a special treat.*

*As I transition into the President-Elect role this summer, I am hoping to increase our downstate membership by helping them understand the value of being a member of ACDA. I also will continue the work that has already been so ably started by Paul and Amy and the rest of the board. I hope to look into providing opportunities for our members that will meet their needs to help them be the best choral directors they can be.*

*You've had remarkable longevity at your school and in the profession—what has sustained you and kept your passion alive through the years?*

*I tell my students that I'm a "unicorn" when it comes to career planning...I knew I wanted to be a choir director when I was a freshman in high school! I knew then that it was my calling, and I've never doubted it since. I am super thankful that I have taught in the Normal School District for my entire career. I grew up in a very small town, and when I got hired, I thought I would give the "city" school system a try—my current choir program alone is bigger than my entire high school was! I fully expected that it would not be for me. After a couple weeks, I knew I had found my forever home!*

*I am blessed with some pretty great students. The opportunity to work with and help them develop into independent musicians is what brings me back every year. I love the students, and I love finding new and unique choral compositions to teach them, especially those that are outside of our Central Illinois corn-and-bean field background.*

*Of course, it is also the relationships that I have been blessed to form with my involvement in ACDA and related organizations that have also continued to foster my passion for the choral art. I'm just really thankful that I have been able to do what I love for my living!*

*District 3 is fortunate to have Ben as a vital part of our ILMEA community and now as a leader within IL-ACDA. Congratulations, Ben—we look forward to what's ahead!*

**Nythia Martinez**

District 1 & Diversity Initiatives Committee Chair  
Payton College Prep

The IL-ACDA Diversity Initiatives Committee is excited to share the details of a new **BIPOC mentorship program** that aims to connect experienced teachers of all identities to pre-service and early career teachers who identify as BIPOC and seek a community of support as they begin their careers.

**Prospective Mentors:** If you are already connected to a collegiate teaching candidate or teacher in their first professional years who you believe would benefit from this plan, please send the information their way!

**Prospective Mentees:** Secure this unique opportunity to build long-lasting professional and friendly relationships with passionate educators who will soon become your colleagues!

While we advertised a priority deadline of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 for matches in the 2024-2025 school year, interest submissions are ROLLING! Fill out the Google Form linked in the flyer to participate!

see flyer on page 8



# Illinois ACDA BIPOC Mentorship Program

Developed by the ACDA Diversity Initiatives Committee

## Purpose

- Our mentorship program bridges the gap between aspiring BIPOC-identifying and experienced choral directors, fostering a community of support, growth, and creativity. Together, we cultivate a new generation of choral leaders who inspire, innovate, and uplift diverse voices in choral music.

## Qualifications

- Mentors: Experienced or veteran choral directors/music educators of all identities who want to give back to the field through mentorship
- Mentees: Pre-service choral directors and early career professionals who identify as BIPOC
- All participants must be active members of Illinois ACDA.

## How Will It Work?

- Mentors and Mentees will use the form below to register (ROLLING DEADLINE)
- Mentors and Mentees will be paired up by the IL-ACDA Diversity Initiatives Committee. Pairings will be communicated via email.
- Mentors will reach out to Mentees to schedule in-person or virtual meet-ups.
- We will send a toolkit with a recommended timeline and ideas of how to connect, but the relationship will be largely self-directed and flexible to meet the needs of each pair.



Please use [this form](#)  
to register!  
**ROLLING APPLICATION!!**



## Past Events!

- Friday, January 31, 2025, 9 pm: Networking Opportunity at IMEC ACDA Reception
- Sunday, February 2, 2025, 11:59 pm: Mentorship Program Suggested Registration Deadline

## Upcoming Event!

- June 25-26, 2025: Connecting and Networking Opportunity at IL-ACDA Summer ReTreat

## Questions? Please contact:

- Nythia Martinez, DIC Chair, at [nmriviera@cps.edu](mailto:nmriviera@cps.edu)
- Kate Lee, Past DIC Chair, at [klee@maine207.org](mailto:klee@maine207.org)



### Brian Birch

Tenor/Bass Choirs

*Marmion Academy*

Every concert cycle, I try to choose selections that can be used to develop comradery amongst the singers. The young men love to be able to express a message of unity, of fraternal love, or a common mission. It is important for each individual and the group to connect with the text and in some cases, even interact with the text. When the singers can embody the text, and truly feel its power, they are compelled to connect with one another. Adding movement or allowing singers to engage each other, they freely experience the message of the text more profoundly. If I get creative enough, I can approach any piece in a manner that creates a spiritual or interpersonal bond or connection between singers.

Male singers are often looking for deeper connections with other men and an environment where more intimate, fraternal, friendly relationships are acceptable. According to Dr. Brendan Kwiatkowski on Episode 141 of Choralosophy, “Education’s Relationship with Masculinity,” young men are seeking more profound relationships with other males. They desire to have strong emotional connections with other male friends, to hug one another, to support one another, and to inspire one another; but struggle to find occasions where these interactions are suitable. They must navigate through the fear of ridicule and take a leap of faith.

How can an environment that supports masculinity, encourages fraternity, and dispels fears and doubts be created? I embrace and help the young vocalists understand this fear. We use it as an obstacle to overcome together as an ensemble. This realization encourages young men to sing with gusto and unites us in our mission.

Text is incredibly important. I believe there is a reason why our students are drawn to sea shanties, pirate songs, and songs with toughness and bravado (just the other day, my students were learning a sea shanty completely on their own, unprompted, from a book they had bought themselves). These songs convey a bond between men that is strengthened through shared experiences and overcoming hardships together. A good text or message can further support a culture of brotherhood and unity.

Through choir performances and the music, we have an opportunity to create a culture and expectations where men connect with other men in profound ways. Here are a few pieces that help to achieve these goals:

- “Pirate Chorus from Pirates of Penzance”: through humor, this piece can be very theatrical in its performance creating exaggerated moments for guys to engage one another.
- “Homeward Bound,” “Carrickfergus,” and “Nine Hundred Miles”: these are very accessible and help singers connect emotionally to search for belonging.
- “If...”: this is a great text by Rudyard Kipling. The composer, Jonathan Reid, encourages the singers to cheer each other on as they “strive for their own personal greatness.”
- “Brothers, Sing On!”
- “Music of Living”: this is a fantastic quest of music yearning to feel truly alive.
- “In Flanders Fields”: this was written after World War I to remember the fallen brothers.
- Sea shanties and work songs – “Haul Away Joe”; “Drill Ye Tarriers, Drill”; “Rainbow Round my Shoulder”
- “Sixteen Tons”
- “Stouthearted Men”: this is from an old movie, but powerfully expresses acting on dreams and calls for unity.

Through our understanding and performances of the texts, we create a place to be together, celebrate, express ourselves, and make physical and emotional connections. Once this environment exists, it gets harder to manage because the fellowship in the group is strong, but it is also a culture that is willing to take risks, a foundation that is more receptive to greater themes, and a community that is powerfully connected through shared musical and life experiences. Each rehearsal is a joy, and we continue to grow together as musicians and humans.

### **Jennifer Whiting**

Community Choirs

*Glen Ellyn-Wheaton Chorale*

Paul Laprade and his young boys were invited to “Grandma Carol’s” house for dinner one evening. When they walked in, little Jonathan noticed the table gleaming with crystal and glowing candles, and the enticing aromas coming from her kitchen. His eyes beamed and he said, “something wonderful is about to happen!”

This sweet scene often reminds me of the impact of gracious hospitality, and I think it teaches me something about preparing every aspect of a concert with our patrons in mind.

The Japanese custom known as *omotenashi* means to take care of one’s guests wholeheartedly and with genuine warmth. This philosophy emphasizes three essential principles: anticipating the needs of others, thoughtful attention to detail, and surpassing expectations to ensure a memorable experience.

When planning a musical event, we might view our audience’s experience through the lens of *omotenashi*, from the moment they receive the first email blast to their final applause. I’ve gathered a few simple and low-cost ways to elevate hospitality, and I bet you’re already doing many of them.

- Consider posting program notes online ahead of the concert. Reading about the music builds anticipation for the event.
- In addition to background on composers and songs, program notes can tell why the pieces were chosen, what the music means to the singers, or how a theme ties the program together. This helps audiences feel connected to the musical journey.
- Provide clear directions to the venue and options for parking. For a recent event, we also needed to explain how to get from the parking garage into the building.
- Let people know about ramps, elevators, and wheelchair seating so everyone feels welcomed and included. Prepare ushers to give assistance when needed.
- Post clear signs outdoors and indoors for concert parking, the entrance to the building, ticket tables, and restrooms.
- Have friendly greeters at several points: at the parking lot, at the outer doors, at the auditorium doors, and inside the auditorium to help people find seats and to assist those with special needs. They will not forget this personal touch.
- Name tags, lanyards, or “ask me” tags help identify volunteers to your guests.
- Ask for audience feedback and invite them to your next concert. Feedback forms can be inserted into the printed programs, or a QR code can link to an online form.
- After the concert, encourage musicians to greet audience members in the lobby. Thanking people for coming and asking what they thought about the program lets your patrons know they are valued. Besides, they feel special meeting the stars of the show!

Anticipating needs, thoughtful attention to details, and surpassing expectations—I’d love to hear your additional ideas to enhance hospitality and promote sincere connections with our audiences. When they take their seats, what makes them say, “something wonderful is about to happen”?



### **Roland Hatcher**

Senior High School Choirs

*Adlai E. Stevenson High School*

Being a choral musician has taught me some of the most invaluable life skills I have ever learned. The skills that come to mind first include, but are not limited to: humanity, discipline, time management, communication, and problem solving. Even so, the skill that I would contend to be most valuable to my life and teaching would be **collaboration**. The ability to work and engage with others is both a disposition and a learned skill; and it is paramount to our art form as choristers. As conductors, we have the unique opportunity to teach collectivism; to bridge gaps between generations of singers, to meld connections between different walks of life that may not ever connect otherwise.

This all may seem obvious, but at least in my school, we have noticed a significant change in our students' dispositions, post-COVID. We have clocked that our society (as a whole) has only become more and more increasingly individualistic; and our students and stakeholders, in turn, reflect that. As the world has become more and more self-reliant, less interdependent, and less inclined to engage outside of our immediate comfort zones, it has become essential to curate experiences within and outside of our programs for our singers to interact with their peers, and with choral music in as many ways as possible. To me, it gets to the heart of what we do; we all initially fell in love with choral music because there is a unique, breathtaking joy and sensation that comes with being in an ensemble where every member is contributing to the betterment of the collective; the joy only amplifies when we are intentional about finding more opportunities to share music.

### **Sharing With Ourselves**

I've been talking extensively with my students about what can make their choir experience better as we approach the next school year. The first part strikes me as a "no duh, Sherlock" moment, but I have to hope I'm not the only person who sometimes "can't see the forest for the trees" here. We have three choirs with about 135 students total. The overwhelming majority of kids' #1 suggestion to improve their experience is that they want more time to interact with each other, sing for each other, and share music with each other. It's an incredible and extremely thoughtful answer! Who among us doesn't want this for our programs? But I fully confess that I need to continually do a better and more consistent job of making that happen for my students.

Inevitably, there are always obstacles – time and space immediately come to mind, but like anything else we do, a little advanced planning and communication seems to do the trick most of the time. Having prioritized collaborative events over my last two years at Stevenson, I've never once left an event thinking, "man, I wish I didn't take the time to plan and host this." We have an extremely thoughtful student leadership team who have planned everything from shifted rehearsal dates for our *a cappella* groups so they can sing for each other, to game and movie nights, to cabarets and benefit concerts, to service events within our local communities. Whether the event is curricular or cocurricular, musical or nonmusical, the following things always hold true:

We know that younger students love the opportunity to look up at their more-experienced counterparts and see the endless future potential of their own choir experience. Similarly, older students benefit from mentorship opportunities, giving back to younger peers and opportunities to reflect on their musical growth and journey; but even more important are the small, joy-filled victories that massively improve the overall culture of a program—kids smiling and having fun, kids more intentionally learning each other's names across both their own ensemble, and the other ensembles at our schools, and kids making social connections that they otherwise would not have made.

Intentionally building toward a culture of trust and interdependence both socially and musically creates strong collaborative habits that strongly benefit the kids, their future transferable future life skills (bonus points for something your admin will love!), and the overall “vibe” (as the kids would say) of our ensembles day in and day out. Even if you only have one choir, giving kids the opportunity to share with the band, other fine arts classes, and other communities will always reap rewards.

### Sharing With Others – Part 1

Confession #2 (I feel a little bit like Usher writing this article...): something I really value is being considered “excellent”, “highly intelligent,” or “great” at what I do as a choir teacher. I think that is (another) something that we all might want, to varying degrees—a combination of validation in the time, money, and effort we have spent harnessing our craft, and validation in the high quality of the experiences we create for students. I think it is more than fair that we are all prideful of the work we do. But in my experience, it can become isolating and extremely challenging to live within our very insulated bubbles at our schools, while applying that level of pressure to ourselves, our students and the work that we do.

Part one of sharing with others, to me, is bringing people in to interact with our programs. We have it as good as anyone in Illinois, a state chock full of brilliant choral educators, in every corner of the state. Whether we like to admit it or not, we all have specific strengths and deficiencies as teachers and conductors. My favorite school days are ones where I bring in someone who is lightyears smarter than I am—more experienced, has a specialty that is not my own, someone I deeply admire as a person and teacher, and where I get to learn alongside my kids. It keeps our cup full as educators. We have the opportunity to decenter ourselves to learn and engage through a different lens, add new tools to our toolkit, new repertoire to our libraries, and build human connections. That rocks. My second favorite school days are the ones where I get to go and interact with students who aren’t my own and share my own unique perspectives and experiences. Clinics teach malleability within the skill of collaboration. How often do we as teachers (or just adults in general) need to be able to flex and bend ourselves and our plans to adapt to new perspectives?

The best part? It doesn’t have to be a big, fancy, expensive clinician experience. We can learn from other music teachers in our buildings and communities. We can learn from stakeholders, such as family members or students with specific musical backgrounds; to have successful choral ensembles, engaging with those experiences adds to the collectivism that we so badly need.

### Sharing With Others – Part 2

The best advice I have ever gotten is that “nobody wins at choir.” I was initially supposed to be a band director (thank goodness I saw the light!). Before that, I played a few sports. I love competing, and I think competition can be good for young people. I’ll let someone else write an article on that another time. Some of that might be who I am as a millennial—some of that might be attributed to my brief stint in the competitive show choir world, but I sure did spend *way* too much time earlier in my career trying to “win choir!”...and for what?? No idea. I was a crazy person and my priorities were WACK.

The thought of sharing a concert with another choir used to make me an anxious wreck. I worried about how my group would sound compared to other groups, about how my colleagues would perceive me, about a million other things. It took a great deal of coercing and reassuring from many mentors whom I value beyond measure, to remind me to get over myself and just **share**. So I’m here to remind you to breathe, take the leap, and **collaborate**. When the disposition is to share, find joy, and enjoy music, as opposed to compare (which I’ve realized nobody has time to do anyway), this can be the most rewarding experience possible for our students.



I had the distinct pleasure of planning a collaborative concert in early April. I was inspired, called my dear friends at Lake Zurich, Niles North and Glenbrook South, said we should rent a concert hall and sing with each other. And it very well may be one of the most memorable concerts, if not the most memorable concert I have ever conducted. Every choir was excellent. The ensembles reflected the quirks and personalities of their directors, and the kids **celebrated each other** more than I ever could have imagined. Everyone sang repertoire they had worked on at other points in the year. Doors were opened to sounds and genres that students from each school had never experienced before. Everyone sang a combined closer (Justice Choir Songbook, easy to teach, for anyone thinking, “where did you get the time?!”), and the kids, 3 weeks later, are still beaming and asking to do this again next year. We were fortunate to have the resources to rent a space. There are also countless places of worship and academic institutions that you can collaborate with that may not charge to rent—or better yet, invite people to join you at your own school! I cannot speak highly enough of this model of sharing music with your friends and colleagues whenever possible. I’d be happy to share schedules and ideas with anyone and everyone—and better yet, I’d be happy to share concerts too; come hang out and let’s all sing together.

Sharing is caring, and caring is collaborative. It develops empathy and compassion, deepens the collective experience of what we do as choral musicians, and makes a difference in the lives of our students.

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## IL-ACDA Composition Contest

### **Christopher Windle, DMA**

Composition Contest Chair

*William Ferris Chorale*

*Chicago Chamber Choir*

*Church of the Atonement*

*DePaul University*

The Composition Contest of Illinois ACDA has a long and distinguished history. Going back to 1984, our state chapter has awarded a prize to more than 25 composers. In 2023, following the COVID-19 pandemic and years of waning applications, I began discussions with Donald Frasier, the then-Composition Contest Chair, and Paul Laprade, IL-ACDA President, to reimagine this award. From these fruitful and collaborative conversations, a new opportunity for composers emerged; one that is an exciting celebration of new music in Illinois.

The reimaged award launched in 2024, and was renamed the Composer Award.

In relaunching the award, we had several goals we wished to achieve:

1. Increase the number of applicants
2. Remove barriers to entry for composers of all backgrounds
3. Provide the winner with an excellent recording of their piece and a high-profile premiere
4. Provide the winner with an opportunity to have their work published

We adjusted the application process and resulting premiere to achieve these goals.

The first thing we changed was the nature of the winning work. In past years, composers submitted a composition that had been previously written, but not premiered to be chosen as the winning piece.

In the reimaged contest, composers submit a portfolio of their past work. Then, the winning composer is commissioned to write something entirely new. With this change, we intended to open the contest to all composers, including those who might not have an un-premiered work available for submission.

Second, we opened the award to applicants across the Midwestern Region of ACDA. In the past, applicants had been limited to those individuals living in Illinois.

Third, we partnered with the William Ferris Chorale (WFC), a Chicago-based choral ensemble in its 52nd season, dedicated to the commissioning and performing of new music. In this partnership, WFC agreed to premiere the newly written work on their February Emerging Voices program. The inaugural performance of this partnership saw almost 200 in attendance, and produced a CD-quality, archival recording for the composer's use.

Finally, we partnered with the web-based music publishing company, MusicSpoke. MusicSpoke is now publishing the winning composer's new work in an IL-ACDA Composer Award Series.

In keeping with the legacy of the previous composition contests, we retained several key features.

First, we wanted to make certain of a fair and unbiased selection process. As in past years, the portfolios submitted by composers are judged completely blind by a panel of peers. These adjudicators must agree on the winning composer based on preset criteria.

Second, we retained the \$1,000 cash award that accompanies the prize and premiere. This was especially important, as IL-ACDA is commissioning the winning composer.

Finally, we wanted the whole of our IL-ACDA membership to have the ability to hear the newly commissioned work. In the past, performances have taken place at the Summer ReTreat. In our new partnership with WFC, a conference performance was not possible. However, WFC was able to provide substantially discounted tickets to all IL-ACDA members wishing to attend the premiere performance.

With these changes in place, applicants for the 2024 Composer Award jumped to more than 20 individuals, from zero in the previous year. We hope that this will grow in future years. We were excited to award this prize to Chicago-based composer Ed Frazier Davis in 2024, who wrote *I Will Ride*, now available through MusicSpoke.

We are excited to continue this project and open applications for the 2025 IL-ACDA Composer Award on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

To apply, please submit the following information via Google Form at:

**[tinyurl.com/composeraward25](https://tinyurl.com/composeraward25)**

All applications must include:

- PDF of at least two scores (each as individual documents). At least one must be a composition for voice(s)
- Name or any identifying information should be removed. One's name should appear only on the submission form.
- Any additional documentation (text/translation, etc.) that accompany each score
- (Optional) audio recording of any/all submitted work
- Live, studio, or MIDI are acceptable. If submitting live recordings, make sure to remove any introduction or portion of the performance that may indicate the composer's name.

Applicants must be:

- 18 years of age or older
- A resident of a state within the Midwestern Region of ACDA (including Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin)

The timeline for submissions this year is:

- Submissions open: March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025
- Submissions due: August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025
- Winner announced: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025
- Finished score due: January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026
- Premiere: TBF Winter 2026

I want to thank both Donald Frasier and Paul Laprade for their creativity and collaboration on this project, as well as the entire IL-ACDA Board for their enthusiastic support.

Please pass this along to any and all composers, conductors, voice teachers, and choral faculty who you know. We hope to see many submissions that represent the vast diversity of voices within the Midwest choral community.





## UPCOMING EVENTS

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IL-ACDA leads and sponsors events to support all aspects of the advancement of choral arts in the state of Illinois. Please refer to our website ([www.il-acda.org/events](http://www.il-acda.org/events) and [www.il-acda.org/awards](http://www.il-acda.org/awards)) for more information on the events and award opportunities listed below:

### **Composition Award**

Opened: March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

Materials due: August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

Link: [tinyurl.com/composeraward25](http://tinyurl.com/composeraward25)

Coordinator: Chris Windle, Composition Contest Chair

### **Junior Honors Choral Festival**

September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025

9:00am-3:00pm

Bradley University

Coordinator: Carol Munn, Youth Choirs Coordinator & Middle/Junior High School Choirs Repertoire & Resources Chair

### **All-State Show Choir Festival**

October 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Wheaton-Warrenville South High School

Coordinator: Sean Hoffman, Show Choir Repertoire & Resources Chair

### **IL-ACDA Award Nominations**

Due January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026

Harold Decker and Young Director Award nominations can be sent any time to Paul Laprade at: [paullapradeACDA@gmail.com](mailto:paullapradeACDA@gmail.com)

### **Sing and Share Treble Festival "Central Illinois"**

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Washington High School

Coordinators: Lara Ream with Ben Luginbuhl, President-Designate, IL-ACDA

### **Treble Fest "North"**

Spring 2026

Coordinator: Ali Kordelewski, Treble Choir Repertoire and Repertoires Chair

### **Treble-Bass Voices Fest**

Spring 2026

Coordinator: Brian Birch, Tenor-Bass Choirs Repertoire and Repertoires Chair

### **Children's Choir Festival**

Spring 2026

Coordinator: Marianne Kosaya, Children's Choir Repertoire and Repertoires Chair

### **Vocal Health and Choral Singing for Mature Voices**

Spring 2026

Coordinators: Lori L. Sonnenberg, Vocal Health Specialist and Paul Laprade, Conductor/IL-ACDA President