

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Like An Orchestra



## LIFELINES

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With the beginning of school and the church's program year upon us, I thought of the orchestra as a good picture of what we need to be and do to have a successful year.

In conjunction with the Council of Presidents' Grace Place retreat at the end of June, we had the privilege of attending a concert of the Aspen Music School Orchestra. Listening to and watching these fine musicians perform was awe-inspiring and suggested a powerful image for what can help us practice being the church in the year ahead.

As you know, an orchestra is composed of a wide variety of instruments—violins, violas, cellos, and bass; flutes, piccolos, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; horns, trumpets, trombones, tubas; timpani and percussion—and each of these instruments has a unique sound to contribute to make the group sound like an orchestra.

For the orchestra to sound good, however, each instrument's notes must be played at the right time and right pitch. In other words, good music does not just happen. It takes instrumentalists who are willing to work, to learn the music, to follow the lead of the director, and to play in sync with the rest of the members of the orchestra! If every instrument played its own tune at its own tempo, can you

imagine what earaches the audience would have? Rather than being a symphony, it would be a cacophony!

The diversity of instruments in the orchestra is suggestive of the variety of gifts God has given to his people. Paul enumerates a sampling of those gifts in Romans 12: prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, showing compassion. If these different gifts are going to make melody to the Lord and bring joy to the hearts of those who hear, the individual members of the church will need to use their various talents in harmony with one another. Having each one singing his own tune in his own way will not result in pleasant sounds that inspire and edify.

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A key question, it seems to me, as we face a new program year in our churches is how can we facilitate such harmonious cooperation, with each part doing its part? The orchestra may provide some suggestions.

As I understand it, members of the orchestra are expected to practice their individual parts. Additionally the instrumentalists at Aspen were studying under the tutelage of experienced, accomplished mentors. Through their coaching, they were helped to play the notes not only accurately but with expression, that they might genuinely come to life.

In addition to the individual instrumentalists each doing her or his private practicing, the whole orchestra came together under the direction of the conductor, that the individual parts might become a unified whole, so playing that great music might be heard.

It seems to me in the church's life, if we would imitate the orchestra, we would highlight the importance of each individual knowing her or his part, make arrangements for them to be assisted in learning to do their roles well, and then be helped to see how their roles fit into the overall scheme of things.

Let's give a couple of examples of how the church might act like an orchestra. This time of year suggests the revitalization of the Sunday School, particularly if it has been in recess over the summer. Each teacher needs to understand the critical role he or she has for teaching the students. There's need to prepare, to study the lessons ahead of time, so that the instructor knows the Biblical story personally. But this is not simply an individual matter. Teachers' meetings can help teachers dig into the story to deepen their understanding of it. Veteran teachers can share ideas for conveying those Biblical truths effectively that the students may experience them personally. Joint

our discussions there will help us see how the two are called to interface with each other.

By clarifying the roles of each, pastors can be helped to carry out their distinctive roles, and the laity can be strengthened for theirs in the home, workplace, community, and congregation. By following God's score, beautiful music can sound forth from his people. Instead of discord, there will be harmony!

Here in the Florida-Georgia District, a special committee is hard at work to help us work like members of the Lord's orchestra in our congregations, circuits, and the District. Sitting on the Committee are the six of us who will be attending the Theological Convocation: Lynn Andersen, Dennis Glick, Joyce Heffernan, Greg Walton, Jim Webb, and the undersigned, and members who have been active and instrumental in developing the Great Commission Convocations our District has sponsored in the past. The theme of these Outreach Summits is "Ablaze: Partnering in Christ."

Three regional convocations are planned: February 2-4, at St. John Lutheran Church and School in Ocala, FL; February 9-11, at St. Paul Lutheran Church and School in Boca Raton, FL; and February 23-25, at Faith Lutheran Church and School in Marietta, GA. Dr. Charlie Mueller will be our key-note, I will do the Bible studies on our theme, local pastors and musicians will lead us in worship, and more than 30 workshops will be offered at each location to provide practical assistance

planning can help all the classes work together, that there may be a cumulative effect through the teamwork.

Another illustration I lift up of how the church can function like an orchestra is found in our worship life. Our services are probably our most public demonstration of what it means to be a church. Many different people are called on to help us make "music unto the Lord." If lectors do not prepare their readings ahead of time, how able will they be to edify their hearers? If ushers do not know their responsibilities and carry them out with grace, how

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warm a welcome will we extend to guest and member alike? If our musicians are not ready to lead the rest of us in our response, how well will we sing to the Lord? If our approach to the sermon is, "Preacher, entertain me! You've got to keep my attention," how helpful will we be in encouraging our proclaimers to do their very best? Worship is not a passive, spectator activity; rather it is the people of God listening and responding to the grace of God in Jesus Christ!

Observing the musicians at Aspen, I saw them totally involved in what they were doing: their bodies, their minds, and their emotions were engaged, focused, and intense. What an example for us in the church to function like God's orchestra. Wouldn't following that example help us carry out God's mission more effectively?

### Special Events to Help us Function as God's Orchestra

The importance of the church acting like an orchestra has been recognized by the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations. The Theological Convocation planned for August 23-25 has as its central topic the relationship between the pastoral office and the priesthood of all believers. The hope underlying the conference is that

for strengthening our partnerships for stronger and more effective outreach.

Our desire is to have every pastor attend together with at least three or four lay people from our smaller congregations and 15-20 or more from our larger congregations. These Outreach Summits will be one more way to have our own Symphony planning and practice time to help our congregations become more effective in singing the Lord's song in our District.

The Psalter closes with a great and powerful call to praise the Lord—both in the sanctuary and in the firmament. He is to be praised for his mighty deeds, according to his surpassing greatness. The praise is to resound with the trumpet, lute, and harp, tambourines and dance, with strings and pipe, clanging cymbals and loud clashing cymbals. Everything that has breath is to praise the Lord!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, our privilege as church is to be the orchestra that so lives and works together that we call the whole creation to acknowledge and trust the One who is its Lord. May God help each of us take his or her part in the church seriously and so work together that the whole world knows what a joy it is to live under and serve the Lord of all!

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