

President's Report

to the Membership of the North American Academy of Liturgy

Glenn CJ Byer, President

In the beginning, fifty years ago in Scottsdale, December of 1973, there was a meeting. I was not present, but I began my career in Church music three years later, in 1976, the year of the first official meeting of the Academy. I leave that as a note to the Vice President we elect today, who will preside over that Jubilee. Since then the Academy has had successes that none present in Scottsdale could imagine, and trials that have tested our resolve.

Today I believe we stand as an organization with a lot of hope. I, at least, am hopeful for many reasons:

1. We have met here in Seattle, and met well. Our numbers are strong and the discussions stronger. Tonight's Berakah address will complete a trifecta of brilliant presentations. I wish I could take credit for the fact that our Keynote addresses this year are all by women. This, too, is a sign of the health of our Academy.
2. Visitors and New Members. We have just admitted a wonderful cohort of new members to our association, and have what I think must be one of the largest groups of visitors in living memory.
3. At the end of this meeting, I am happy to say we will discuss a proposal that would allow us to meet in person in 2025.
4. Our efforts at fundraising and recruiting exhibitors have been exceptional. Thanks to Michael Prendergast, this has been a good year. May there be many more to come.
5. I have hope because I was surrounded by an Academy Committee of amazing talents. Leading a group of leaders can be challenging, but this group gave me all the help I could ever need to do this task.
6. My last reason for hope is that throughout my year in this post, I have never been turned down by any member when I asked them to do anything—no task was too large or too small.

We do have challenges ahead, and so my hope is tempered by several challenges:

1. We celebrate what seems like a return to normalcy, but our field is not in a growth sector of the academic world, let alone the pastoral one. Many institutions, looking for ways to cut payrolls, feel that credentials in the field of

worship are a luxury they can do without. As an organization we will need to continue to broaden our appeal to practitioners of worship, but at the same time we need to strategize on how we can make institutions aware of the essential place we hold.

2. Even in those places where we still work, the pandemic created a new reality. It means that travel to events such as the Academy is now no longer a given. Yes, we have recovered nicely this year, but it will be more challenging in coming years for our membership to gather; our need for scholarship money will continue to grow.
3. We celebrate the fact that treasurers past and present built up a reserve that saw us through these past years. While we are better equipped now to deal with the next pandemic, we will need to rebuild those reserves.

So faced with hopes and challenges, I will, in a few hours, be happy to turn over the leadership of the Academy to our new President. This seems especially fitting, as I am as of this week starting my preparations for retirement. I could not have asked for a better group of friends and colleagues with whom to have spent my professional career, and I thank you.