



Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 2

Singing the Same Song

The Story of Our Hymnbooks

[Note: This article tells the story of the hymnbooks used in the history of our synod. The names of Andrew and his family are fictitious. Footnotes appear on page 12]

Andrew emigrated from Norway with his parents during the height of the emigration to America in the 1860s. Andrew was fifteen years old when his family packed the possessions into a wooden rosemalled trunk and set sail for America.

*"Into these chests was packed all that was considered good enough to go along. There were a few clothes, perhaps some kind of food that would not spoil, a Bible, and a few trinkets."*¹

In that immigrant trunk along with a Bible was Martin Luther's Catechism, and a hymnbook. The hymnbook was *Guldberg's* hymnbook. It was first published in Norway a century earlier, in 1778. It was then the most popular hymnbook used in Norway. When Andrew's family arrived in the United States, Andrew's father, Elling, used this hymnbook to lead family devotions. When a Norwegian Synod pastor came to conduct services, and when Elling helped organize a congregation, they continued to use the same hymnbook. In fact, their hymnbook was so widely used among the Norwegian immigrants that it had been necessary to reprint this *Psalmebog* in 1854 in the United States.

When Andrew married and established his own home, there was a new hymnbook which sat on the corner cupboard in his house. The Norwegian Synod had published its own hymnbook in 1870. This book was known as the synod's *Salmebog*. It contained 492 hymns along with the complete text of the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for each Sunday. There were morning and evening prayers so that Andrew also could conduct family devotions every day. In European fashion, the words for the hymns were printed without musical notation. Reference was made only to the name of the suggested tune. The synod's *Salmebog* was the first Norwegian hymnbook to be published in this country.

There were some new things in this hymnbook. One of them was a hymn which had been written only three years earlier by the pastor of Washington Prairie Lutheran Church near Decorah, Iowa. Rev. U.V.Koren was intensely interested in church music and became a leader in the work of compiling the new hymnbook. His new hymn began with the words

(continued on page 4)

History Lost

At one a.m. on July 4, 2000, firefighters from Lake Mills, Iowa and three neighboring communities responded to a fire at Somber Lutheran Church, an ELS church located eleven miles west of Northwood in north-central Iowa. By the time firefighters arrived on the scene, the church was completely engulfed in flames and was beyond saving. To date, no cause of the fire has been determined. Coincidentally, the Somber fire was the second area church fire within a few hours. The first was at Pilot Knob Lutheran Church (ELCA), rural Forest City, an electrical fire contained to the church entry. Arson has been ruled out in that case. The fire marshall says there is no connection between the two incidents. The last service in the Somber Church was a funeral, held on Saturday, July 1.

Somber Lutheran Church is part of a five-point parish served by Rev. Alf Merseth since 1966. The other churches in the parish are Lime Creek (Lake Mills), First Shell Rock (Northwood), Immanuel (Riceville), and Lake Mills.

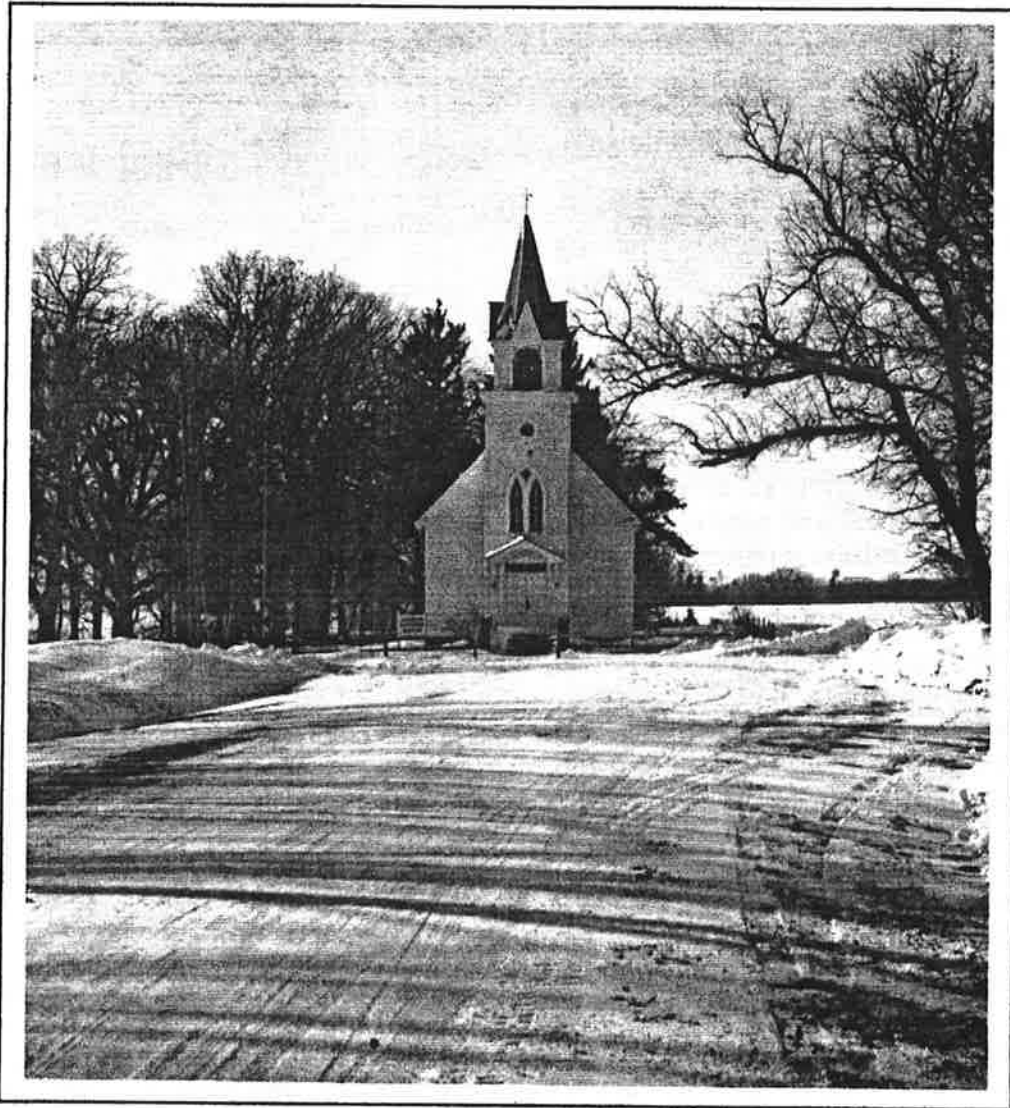
The Somber congregation was first organized in 1859, originally calling itself the *Silver Lake* congregation. Rev. C.L. Clausen served the parish, a member of the Norwegian Synod. Within a year, two other congregations had formed in the area - Shell Rock and Lime Creek. These three made up the parish served by Rev. Clausen.

In 1865, Concordia Seminary Candidate of Theology Torger A. Torgerson became the new pastor. It was during this time that the slavery question was being debated within the Norwegian Synod. In 1869, it caused a split in the congregation and Rev. Torgerson and a minority remained with the Norwegian Synod. It was not until 1873 that a church was built for the small congregation. This house of worship served the congregation until a fire broke out in the furnace room on December 22, 1916. The building was completely destroyed.

The majority of the Silver Lake congregation became part of the 1917 merger of the Norwegian Synod, the United Lutheran Church, and the Hauge Synod. Again, the faithful minority, along with Rev. August J. Torgerson, who took over as pastor after his father's death in 1906, could not for conscience sake, go along with the merger.

The congregation, consisting of 27 voting members, reorganized in 1918, joining the newly-reorganized *Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church* (now ELS). Church member Levor Levorson donated a wooded lot of mainly oak trees, on which to build a church and parsonage. Mrs. T.A. Torgerson named the congregation *Somber* (from the French word for "shady place") *Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church*. A parsonage was erected and church services held there for ten years.

In 1928, the St. Petri Danish Lutheran Church in Latimer, Iowa merged with another congregation and donated its church (built in 1903) to the Norwegian Synod. The Synod gave the building to the Somber congregation. The church and all of its furnishings was moved north from Latimer to Northwood and the site where it would serve its congregation for 72 years. On the day of the building dedication, Rev. Torgerson wrote, "We re-



**Somber Lutheran Church, rural Northwood, Iowa
was destroyed by fire July 4, 2000.**

joyce today in our splendid house of worship, we are grateful to the St. Petri Danish-Lutheran congregation for the valuable gift, but above all we give honor and praise and glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who governs, rules and protects His church on earth. Soli Deo gloria!"

The future of the Somber congregation has not yet been decided. Albin Levorson, lifelong member at Somber, and grandson of the man who donated the land where the church stood, says "our parish hall (a separate building from the church) was not hurt. It's about fifty feet from the church. We're deciding to do nothing for a year, and let us think about it." For now, church services will be held in the parish hall.

There are other options for the 35 or so members of this little country congregation. Levorson says, "We're twelve miles from Lime Creek, Lake Mills is even closer, we have many options." As he looks at photos of the Somber cemetery, the beautiful grove of oaks, and thinks of his roots there he says, "I think we should build a new church at Somber."



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(Singing the Same Song, cont. from page 1)

Al verden nu raabe for Herren med fryd ("Ye lands, to the Lord, make a jubilant noise").

This hymn was a metrical version of Psalm 100.

Even the musical tune was new, having been written in Norway only a few years earlier. In time, this hymn was to become a favorite of the Norwegian Synod and was used as the opening hymn at most ordination, installation, and dedication services

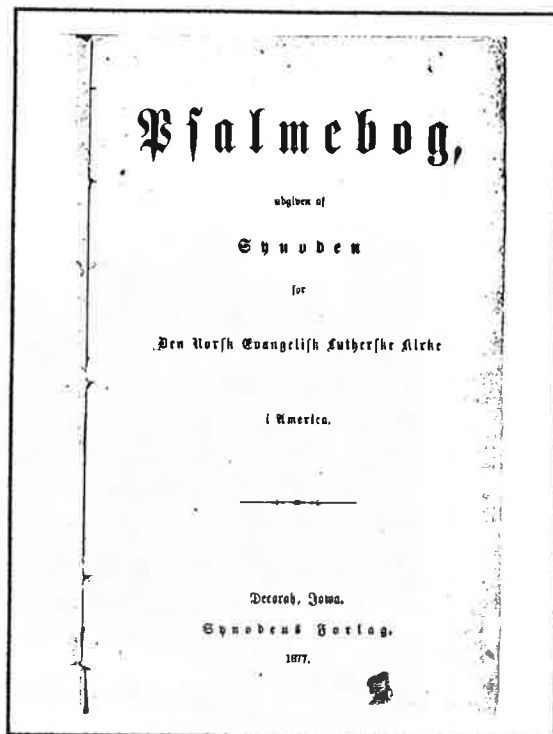
A number of years later, in 1903, the synod's *Salmebog* was revised and reprinted by the Norwegian Synod. Andrew's parents possibly were not completely pleased with the new edition because they were growing older and their eyesight was dimming. Even though the new edition of the hymnbook had all of the same hymns, it was smaller in size. It was only one-half as big as Andrew's old book and the print was only one-half the size also.

Andrew wanted a copy of this book to carry with him to services at his church because in the back of the book something new was printed.

For the first time the "liturgy" was printed in a hymnbook! Even though the "liturgy" covered only five pages, it was the first time he had seen musical notes printed in a church hymnbook. This was important because, until this time, his Norwegian Synod congregation had used a service which was very simple and was referred to as the "Shorter Order" of Service. But in Norway a royal decree had authorized a new Book of Service and restored a fuller use of the Ritual of 1685.² The Norwegian Synod felt the impact of this decree and urged their congregations to use this longer form of the liturgy. On June 17, 1899, the following constitutional revision appeared in the Norwegian Synod's *Synoden*:

In order to preserve unity in liturgical forms and ceremonies, the Synod advises its congregations to use, as far as possible, the liturgy of 1685 and agenda of 1688 of the Church of Norway, or the new liturgy and agenda adopted by the Synod at Spring Grove, Minnesota, June 1899, according as the several congregations may decide (the "new liturgy and agenda" was basically the New Liturgy of the Church of Norway).

Andrew placed this revised hymnbook next to his old book. His old hymnbook was getting tattered and worn, but it was still needed because Andrew's edition of the new hymnbook didn't have the prayers and Scripture lessons for him to read at home with his family.



Title page of *Den Norsk Evangelisk Lutherske Kirke i America "Salmebog"*, the first Norwegian hymnbook printed in America. This edition was printed in 1877 in Decorah, Iowa.

Andrew's daughter, Christina, was learning the hymns of the church in Sunday School. Andrew was uncertain about this new school. He had never attended Sunday School and his parents said there was no such thing in Norway. But it was important to teach his children. Pastor Erik Jensen, who was then a Norwegian Synod pastor, had published a Sunday School hymnbook in 1878, the same year Christina was born. This book was called *Sangbog for Børn og Ungdom* (Songbook for Children and Youth) and was published by the Norwegian Synod's publishing house in Decorah, Iowa. This book, according to Gracia Grindall in a 1993 lecture at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, was "something like a textbook to be used in the home, school, church, and choral unions."

This book was also used by Christina in Norwegian school every summer (the Norwegian Synod used Norwegian School rather than Sunday School. It is unlikely that a child would have attended both). Christina was fortunate. There were enough children from her church living nearby that Norwegian School (also called Parochial School) was held in a public school near her home during several weeks in the summer. Other children from her church needed to meet in farmhouses. Here Christina was taught the Catechism, church history, and singing. This all was done in the Norwegian language. Andrew's pastor said this was important so that the children would not be lost to the Lutheran church and also that they would not lose their language and their heritage. It was important to learn the faith in "the language of the heart." The children learned their lessons well.

Christina spoke English when she attended the public school but often spoke Norwegian at home. It was obvious that an English hymnbook would soon be needed. In 1898 the Norwegian Synod published *Christian Hymns for Church, School and Home*.³ This book, prepared especially for the Sunday School, contained 309 hymns and songs, along with "The Order of Morning Service," "The Order of Evening Service," and a "Sunday School Service."⁴ There were even musical notes for piano accompaniment.

As Christina grew, she was to be married and establish her own family. Her grandparents had found their eternal rest in heaven and soon her father also would be gathered there. A new generation of Norwegian-Americans was now living in the land. They were more comfortable with the English language and felt the need for its use also in their church. In 1908 the Norwegian Synod, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the Hauge's Synod elected a joint committee to prepare material for an English hymnbook. This committee worked for the next five years before the publication of *The Lutheran Hymnary* by Augsburg Publishing House, of the United Church, in 1913. *The Lutheran Hymnary* became widely accepted by the congregations of the Norwegian Synod (it contained a revised form of the New Liturgy of the Church of Norway). Norwegian Synod President H.G.Stub reported:

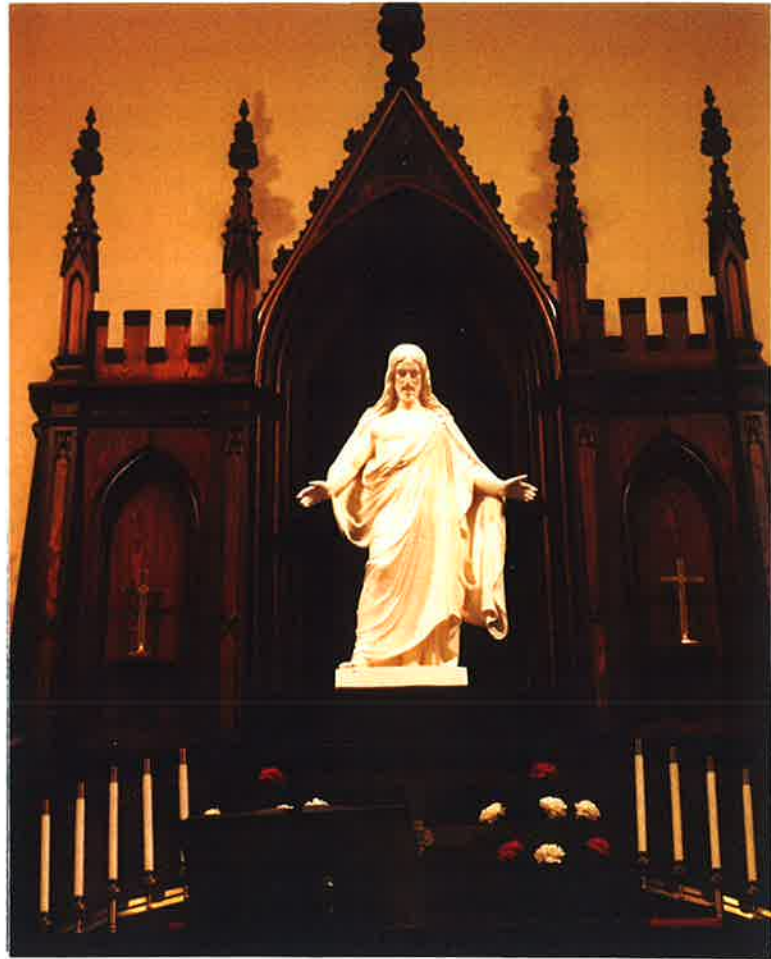
*"The English Hymnbook—'The Lutheran Hymnary'—is the hymnbook which we hope will find the greatest possible propagation in our fellowship, together with the United Church. It is of great significance that we have received such a treasure of hymns in the English language, and that it was composed of a committee of the three fellowships; who have given final adoption to the common report on the call, conversion, and 'opgjør.'*⁵

(continued on page 8)

"Koren Country" Tour Highlights

Top: The church altar at Washington Prairie Church, rural Decorah, Iowa. This marble statue of Christ was chosen by Elisabeth Koren, wife of pioneer pastor U.V. Koren, when she attended the World's Fair.

Bottom: 26 members of the historical society gather at the U.V. and Elisabeth Koren gravestone at Washington Prairie Lutheran Church.





Top: The Pioneer Memorial at Luther College, Decorah. The limestone monument lists all of the pastors and congregations in the Norwegian Synod in 1857, the year the college was founded.

Bottom: Trinity Lutheran Church, Calmar, Iowa. This ELS congregation was organized by Pastor Koren in 1853. The church was built in 1946. The tour group gathered here for a Vespers service. Rev. Craig Ferkenstad read a homily written by Rev. Koren, and the group sang the familiar hymn *Ye Lands, to the Lord*, also written by Koren. Afterward, the Trinity Ladies Aid served the group a delicious potluck supper.



In the same year, 1913, a new committee was elected to publish a Norwegian-English songbook for children and youth. This resulted in the 1916 publication of *The Lutheran Hymnary Junior*. In the Preface, the committee stated this hymnbook "should for some time to come meet every justifiable demand as a book for children and youth of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America." This hymnbook was unique in that it was bilingual with the Norwegian and English texts of the same hymn being printed side-by-side on the same page.

Shortly after Christina was married, her church began to sing hymns in English from the new black book: *The Lutheran Hymnary*. There were two editions of this hymnbook. One edition was small, like her old *Salmebog*, and contained only the words for the hymns. But now there was also a large edition which had musical notes. Christina was pleased with this because now she could play the hymns at home on her piano. Also, for the first time, words for the first verse of each hymn were printed between the musical staves.

The congregations which reorganized the Norwegian Synod in 1918 also used *The Lutheran Hymnary* as their English hymnbook. Christina carried this hymnbook to church, every Sunday, for her entire life.

But her daughter, Margaret, was introduced to another hymnbook in 1941. The Norwegian Synod was a member of the Synodical Conference which, at that time, was one of the largest groupings of Lutherans in North America. The synods which composed the Synodical Conference published *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1941. Christina never wanted to use this hymnbook. The music sounded different. Many hymns didn't have the "straight time" of her hymnary but rather was the rhythmic form of the Lutheran chorales. Margaret wasn't pleased either because of the omission of the Order of Service which had been used among Norwegian Christians for more than 250 years.⁶

Christina never saw this hymnbook placed in the hymn racks of her church. But that day was to come. The congregation used the old black hymnbook as long as they could be purchased. They continued to use them even after their appearance dictated their replacement. Finally, when tape and love could no longer hold the hymnaries together, new red hymnbooks were purchased. Margaret preferred the solemn color of the blue book (*The Lutheran Hymnal* was published with a choice of colors). Because the new books were too big to fit in the hymn racks, the racks had to be lowered. But Margaret did like having the first four verses of words printed between the staves of music. She thought that made it much easier for the choir to learn the new songs such as *For all the saints, who from their labors rest*.

Today Christina's grandson sings to the same God of salvation using yet another hymnbook. In 1996, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod published the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* "endeavored to retain and combine the elements of [*The Lutheran Hymnary*] and [*The Lutheran Hymnal*] traditions along with new hymnody and liturgical music representative of the liturgical movement of the last thirty years."⁷ This new book sought to combine the best items from its two most immediate predecessors. The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* contains the Order of Service used in earlier generations of Norwegian Lutherans (Rite I). It also retained the Common Ser-

Guess Who?

The couple pictured on page seven of the Spring, 2000 issue of *Oak Leaves* is the Rev. Arvid Gullerud and his wife, Eleonore (Odegard). The children are Eugene Engrav and Karen Anderson (Soaper), both members of West Paint Creek Synod Lutheran Church, rural Waukon, Iowa. The photo was taken October 11, 1948, following a "mock wedding" program held in the couple's honor, at the West Church. The photo is taken next to the church. The children played the "Little Bride and Groom" in the program. The Gullerud's actual wedding date was September 15, 1948.

Rev. Gullerud was ordained at East Paint Creek Synod Lutheran Church, rural Waterville, Iowa on July 6, 1947. Gullerud's brother, C.M. Gullerud, Vice President of the Norwegian Synod, served as Ordina-



The Reverend Arvid Gullerud,
1953.

tor. Assisting clergy were Rev. H.L. Bremner, Rev. M.H. Otto, Rev. H.A. Preus, Professor B.W. Teigen, and Student of Theology Ted Aaberg.



vice which Christina learned after 1941 (Rite II).

Today, in English, Christina's grandson can sing her favorite hymn from the old *Salmebog* which has been included in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. It is again sung to the favorite Norwegian folktune of previous generations:

*In heav'n above, in heav'n above
Where God our Father dwells:
How boundless there the blessedness!
No tongue its greatness tells.
There face to face, and full and free,
The ever-living God we see,
Our God, the Lord of hosts! [ELH 542]*

Rev. Craig Ferkenstad

J. S. BACH

1685-1750

His Contribution to our Hymns and Church



On July 28, 2000, we commemorated the 250th anniversary of the death of Johann Sebastian Bach, the most influential Lutheran musician who ever lived. You may wonder what Bach has to do with the history and heritage of the ELS? The answer is: More than you might think! The style of hymn singing that Bach used is different from the way most of the Lutheran chorales were written. Luther and others wrote in the late Renaissance style with rhythms that might seem hard or complicated to us, but were very lively and standard at that time. By the age of Bach it seems that the way many of these hymns were sung had been simplified, with most syllables getting one beat. For most of us in the ELS, that means the difference between hymns from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) and the *Lutheran Hymnary* (1913). The straightened-out style is also what Bach used in his chorale settings for organ and for choir. The hymns were also sung this way in Norway when our forefathers immigrated to this country, as is shown in the *Koralbog* by Magnus Landstad and others.

Most of us in the ELS have come to be pretty familiar and comfortable with singing the hymns either way, and each style has its own beauty and appeal. The rhythmic settings (ELH 518, for example) have a strong powerful meter that drives the melody. The isometric settings (ELH 544, for example) allow for more variation and complexity in harmony and give a different character to the hymn. Bach used this style to set his hymns differently, even within the same larger work, such as the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Interestingly, some of the strongest leaders of the old Norwegian Synod (Koren, for example) tried to restore the rhythmic chorales and published *Rhythmisk Koralbog* in 1904. Yet the isometric form, familiar to the lay people, continued to be preferred and used in the congregations and was the favored choice in the *Lutheran Hymnary*, published in 1913, which contained only a few rhythmic settings.

But Bach's influence on our church body goes beyond that since our Synod founders also lived through the great Bach revival of the 19th century. His music came to be well-loved

and appreciated by confessional Lutherans around the world, and he still holds center place in our Lutheran musical heritage. Bach chorales became very familiar to church choirs and the mass choirs of past Synod conventions.

We also share with Bach a deep concern for orthodox Lutheranism. Also, in a time when Lutheranism was threatened on all fronts, from emotionalistic Pietism and the beginnings of Rationalism, Bach held to the old ways, as did our ELS forefathers in 1918. He made extensive use of the "old" chorales by Luther, Crüger, and others. We honor him also by relearning these hymns for ourselves and teaching them to our children, not just because they are old, but because they preach the gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Today it is easier than ever to learn and appreciate what we share with this magnificent musician. Through modern recording technology we have the tremendous privilege of listening to Bach every day in our homes and at work. If we listen to Bach's *Cantatas* and *Passions*, we will gain more than a musical treasure, but will also recommit ourselves to the orthodox Lutheranism that is so evident in Bach's works and learn with him to sing of Christ in all that we do. Choirs and organists can sing and play his works for services and Bach settings of hymns can be sung. The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* has several of them: (47, 118, 124, 172, 272, 276, 329, 335, 472, 477, 492, 530, 544, 569, 584, 596).

Many of Bach's manuscripts begin: "*Jesu Iuva*" (Jesus, help!) and end with *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God alone be glory). May our commemoration of this hero of the faith also reflect glory to our Maker, Redeemer, and Comforter, until we may sing with this masterful musician of the Lutheran Church in the heavenly choir.

Soli Deo Gloria

Mark DeGarmeaux
Chaplain,
Bethany Lutheran College

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Singing the Same Song Footnotes:

1. E. Ylvisaker, Synod Centennial Program, quoted by L. Vangen, ELS Synod Report, 1967, p. 34.
2. For a fuller explanation of the development of the Danish-Norwegian Order of Service, see *About God's Service in the Church* by Rev. C. Ferkenstad in the June, 1982 *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.
3. The first attempt to produce an English hymnbook for Norwegian Lutherans was the *Lutheran Hymnal for the Sunday School*, published by D.G. Ristad of the United Church, in 1898. It contained 25 hymns.
4. In 1891 the Norwegian Synod also had published an English edition of *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations* (containing the "shorter form"), a handbook of ministerial acts translated from the Norwegian.
5. 1913 *Synoden*, p. 124. "Opgjør" is the Norwegian word for "settlement." It here refers to the document which allowed for the 1917 merger of three Norwegian Lutheran church bodies.
6. *The Lutheran Hymnary Junior*, preface, page xii. Lutheran Publishing House, Decorah, Iowa, 1916. Some congregations chose to paste a form of the Danish-Norwegian Service prepared by Rev. N. Oesleby into the cover of their new books.
7. 1997 *Synod Report*, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, page 116.

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Oak Leaves welcomes articles of both synodical and local significance for publication. Articles may be edited for style, clarity, or length to allow for publication. Submitted manuscripts will be deposited in the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Membership

All membership renewals due **June 1**

Voting Membership:

\$10/year: individual
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