

# The History of the Seminary Chorus

## 75 Years - Singing New Songs to the Lord

It's an organization somewhat unsure of its name. The group's roots lie with a group of singers Prof. Johannes Koehler calls the Seminary Chorus in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, but this is not the choir we know today. The Seminary Choral Society, born in 1931, was renamed the Seminary Male Chorus in 1939 with the thought that the chorus would be more closely identified with its sponsoring school.<sup>1</sup> By 1963 the group was ready for another name change, at least in the minds of some of its leaders, and the choir became The Male Chorus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The present name was adopted in 1985, although it is more accurate to say the name was imposed. Although his stay in Saginaw made him well aware that WELS supports two seminaries, the director *hoc tempore* supposed the average WELS member would associate seminary almost exclusively with the Mequon school and concluded the juxtaposition of "male" and the Mequon seminary was certainly superfluous. Truth be told, the moniker is borrowed, but not from the choir's roots (of which the present director had no knowledge in 1985): the well known student choir at Concordia Seminary had been called the Seminary Chorus for decades. It seems, however, that whatever its official name, people call the group what they please. To be sure, the choir lacks the name recognition of, say, the New York Yankees or even the St. Olaf Choir.

The organization is also somewhat unsure of its history. It is a matter of record—both in the synodical archives and in the archives of *The Milwaukee Journal*—that the choir's first public concert was presented at Grace Church in Milwaukee on April 19, 1931.<sup>2</sup> Faithful librarians and archivists collected concert programs; the synodical archives contain almost a complete set reaching back to 1931. It would be possible to assemble a list of all the churches and schools that have hosted the choir on its major tours and to prepare a data base of all the anthems presented by the chorus on its tours and at its Christmas concerts. An interested historian could gather the names of all the students who participated in the group over 75 years and could mention the names of all the officers. But there is no official history of the Seminary Chorus such as Joseph Shaw's 700-page *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative* (1997). Johannes Koehler gives some insights into musical training at the seminary between 1890 and 1915 in *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, but the scant information he offers pre-dates the formation of the chorus. As his senior church history paper, Paul Prange, now President of Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, produced *The History of the Seminary Chorus* in 1988. This essay is especially valuable since it contains first person information about the actual founding of the Choral Society from men who were key players in 1931. Had Prange not interviewed these men, that history may never have been recorded, since all of the early founders have now passed to glory. Prange admits, however, that his primary purpose is "to fill the gaps of knowledge in the area of the earlier years of the Seminary Chorus."<sup>3</sup> Nor is it possible to interview past directors to gain insights and recollections. All have passed from the scene—interestingly, all during the tenure of the present director. Unfortunately, the present director did not take the opportunity to interview these men when they all gathered for the 1987 Commencement Concert at which all but Prof. Hilton Oswald (by that time a member of the LCMS) directed an anthem. When the chorus was a student-led organization, secretaries kept minutes, and the early minutes are illustrative and interesting. After 1962, however, minutes are sketchy and, after 1985, non-existent. References in faculty and

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Armin Schuetze in a personal letter to Paul Prange.

<sup>2</sup> *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 18, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> Paul T. Prange, *The History of the Seminary Chorus*, submitted as a requirement for the senior course on American Lutheranism on May 2, 1988.

governing board minutes are scarce and likely provide little more than information known via other sources. Another researcher may be willing to commit the time someday (faculty minutes are in German until 1952) to find something of value in those minutes, but the present author is not willing.

While the history of the Seminary Chorus may not have been thoroughly researched and may not even be able to be assembled in any sort of thorough way, the fact remains that every fall since 1931 students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have gathered to volunteer for service as members of the choir. At least over the past several decades unmarried juniors arrive in greater numbers than married seniors. It's an exception when the choir is perfectly balanced by voice; pure first tenors and second basses are rare, and the lack of both is a perennial problem. (Prange records that the choir was cut before the 1932 tour to achieve a better balance.<sup>4</sup>) Some of the students who offer themselves have extensive choral experience from high school and college; a few even have professional voice training. Others have not sung in an ensemble since elementary school either because they were not skilled enough to be selected for high school and college choirs or because they simply didn't care about singing when they were younger. There tends to be a monotone in every choir who is carefully placed between strong singers and encouraged to sing softly in harmony and not at all in unison. In any given year, neither choir members nor directors are able to be certain what the size or the skill of the Seminary Chorus will be.

An uncertain name, an uncertain history, uncertain skills--but the men of the Seminary Chorus have never been uncertain about their purpose. The 1962 constitution states "the purpose of this organization shall be to cultivate music *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*."<sup>5</sup> The 2006 seminary catalogue expands on that concept: "By its public concerts and appearances the Seminary Chorus represents the seminary in the synod and seeks to set a standard for confessional church music."<sup>6</sup> While the group and its directors have worked hard to achieve excellence in musical performance, the message of the Seminary Chorus has always been more important than the musical medium. As students studying for the ministry and as representatives of the seminary, the Seminary Chorus sees as its primary purpose to announce the good news of Jesus Christ in song.

Often without knowing the connection, the chorus remembers the founding of the Seminary Choral Society at its annual appearance at Grace Church, Milwaukee, in the last of the year's midweek Lenten services. In 2001 the chorus observed its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Grace Church, and senior Jonathan Bergemann, grandson of the first director S. J. Bergemann, directed the hymn the chorus had sung to open the first concert, "Jehovah, Let Me Now Adore Thee" (although not the Bach setting that actually opened the 1931 concert). The 2006 Grace concert was held on April 5, only 14 days removed from the date of the first performance, and the anniversary was noted. The founding date was also remembered at Fount of Life Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, CO, where the choir appeared in concert on April 19 (interestingly in a high school auditorium, a far different ambiance than the site of its initial concert). The major celebration was reserved for May so that more pastors might attend the anniversary concert. A festival concert was presented to almost 1,000 guests in the campus auditorium on Wednesday, May 24, 2006. More than 60 past members of the choir, now serving in or retired from the ministry, rehearsed in advance and joined their voices to the 54 voices of the existing choir. Twelve pastors formed a brass ensemble, and several others assisted as accompanists. Highlights of the evening, besides the sound of over one hundred male voices, included a

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<sup>4</sup> Choral Society minutes, May 17, 1933.

<sup>5</sup> Seminary Chorus minutes, September 12, 1962.

<sup>6</sup> Seminary catalog 2006-07, page 29.

PowerPoint® presentation telling the history of the chorus and the introduction of the families of all past directors. Taking the podium near the end of the concert was Dr. Arnold Lehmann, age 92, who directed his arrangement of “The Church’s One Foundation,” sung for many years by his Northwestern College Choir and now sung regularly by the Seminary Chorus. Included in the program was a setting for male voices, organ, and brass of “In Trembling Hands,” commissioned especially for the anniversary tour by Prof. Robert C. Potratz. The tune of the hymn was composed by Prof. Martin Albrecht, who directed the chorus for 32 years.

The intention of this presentation is not to look at the present choir or to chart its future. The purpose of this essay is to summarize the history of the chorus. To relate the early history I cannot improve on what Paul Prange produced in 1988. A fair amount of what follows is based on Prange’s research and is presented in his essay.

### **The Seminary Chorus and Prof. Johannes Ph. Koehler**

Since he was interested in music and the arts, Professor Johannes Ph. Koehler took the lead in offering musical instruction to seminary students after his arrival on campus in 1900. Koehler’s history mentions that music had been a part of the students’ training before he arrived.<sup>7</sup> William Boeppler was a Reformed preacher who came to Milwaukee and established himself as a music instructor. He founded a choir made up of Lutheran school teachers and named it the A Cappella Choir of Milwaukee. Boeppler also taught at the Milwaukee Conservatory and at the Wauwatosa seminary. When Boeppler left for Chicago, he was succeeded as director of the A Cappella Choir by Franz Salbach, a vocal teacher trained in Germany, who also taught music at the seminary, at Northwestern in Watertown, and at the Lutheran High School in Milwaukee.

One gathers that seminary students were often involved as tenors and basses in the A Cappella Choir even before Koehler arrived on the scene. Koehler records that seminary Director Adolph Hoenecke asked him to become involved with the A Cappella Choir as a steadying influence, and one assumes Hoenecke made this request for the sake of the seminary and not for the general musical good of the city. Apparently the group prospered for a short time with Koehler as its president and Salbach as director; the choir prepared and performed many of the Lutheran chorales as well as the St. Matthew Passion. But Salbach’s deficiencies apparently could not be overcome, and the A Cappella Choir dissolved. Koehler volunteered to resurrect a music program of some sort, primarily, it seems, for the sake of the seminary students.

“Seminary Chorus” is a name which the common man has very quickly coined for a loose connection of singers in Milwaukee that has rallied around the person of its director or around the songs that they sing. In 1909 I was entrusted by the managing Board of the Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa, at my own request, to care for the musical part of the instruction of the students...I thought it important then that students be involved in the actual practical work...In order to sing numbers in their original form, a mixed choir was necessary. I looked for a boys choir, and then a choir of women, but nothing came of that...and so I was satisfied with a male chorus of students. In the fall of 1910, circumstances were finally good for forming a mixed chorus. The women came from the Lutheran high school, and

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<sup>7</sup> Johannes Ph. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. Pertinent information is found on pages 219-222 and on page 238.

we sang at Christmas first at Pastor Kionka's congregation and then at Pastor Dietz'.<sup>8</sup>

Koehler's intention for this choir almost certainly was to acquaint first seminarians and then the local Lutheran population with the original rhythmic versions of the Lutheran chorales. These had been championed in the Missouri Synod by C.F.W. Walther, and Koehler would have come under that influence while he was a student at Concordia Seminary. Koehler put a great deal of work into gathering scores for these chorales and other Reformation-era anthems, and the group was ready for its first concert at the Milwaukee Auditorium in 1911. At this and subsequent concerts Koehler presented informational essays on the Lutheran chorales. He "explained the history, text, and music and brought home to the audience the beauty of the chorale, acknowledged by the world's historians as the gems of all musical literature." As far as the singers were concerned, Koehler notes:

They were induced by their director to devote themselves to church music and in part to early church music. In a very short time the director succeeded in turning these raw recruits into technically proficient singers, resulting in a noticeable improvement in the church music of our congregations throughout the state.<sup>9</sup>

It isn't difficult to imagine that even a man with as strong a personality as Koehler would not have been able to maintain a commitment to this kind of group for very long. Koehler also notes that synodical politics interfered with the choir's work. There is no mention of the group after 1915 when Koehler says he was still looking for original chorale scores. But Koehler had his lectures in print and a captive audience of seminary students. The 1928-1929 seminary catalogue seems to be reflecting usual custom when it states that Prof. Koehler conducts "practice in choir singing" under the discipline of liturgics.<sup>10</sup> This was known as the "Singstunde" and was held during a regular class period at which all students were expected.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Seminary Choral Society**

Prof. Koehler's relationship with other members of the Wauwatosa faculty is well known, as is his role in the Protes'tant Controversy. The 1929-1930 catalog lists him as "on leave of absence," with Prof. August Pieper as acting president. Pieper did not succeed Koehler as liturgics professor, however; that course was given to the new man on campus, Prof. Max Lehninger. Not surprisingly, Lehninger did not continue Koehler's hymn lectures or the "Singstunde." According to a man who was a student at that time, the only remnant of Koehler's class was a student body rehearsal<sup>12</sup> of the TTBB hymns that students were to sing in chapel the following week. These hymns were unaccompanied; the chapel piano only supplied the opening key. The student body elected student directors to lead these rehearsals, but the situation wasn't a happy one. Directors resigned and students skipped.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Johannes Ph. Koehler, "Seminarchors," a lecture at Milwaukee Lutheran High School on May 12, 1911. *Quartalshrift*, July, 1911, Vol. 8, No.3), pages 209, 211, 212.

<sup>9</sup> Johannes Ph. Koehler, "About a Concert of Our Church Chorales," *Faith-Life* (March, 1964, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3), page 11, a translation of "Under Kirchenlied im Konzert," *Evangelisches Gemeinde-Blatt* (November 15, 1900) by W. P. Hess.

<sup>10</sup> Seminary catalog, 1928-29, page 9.

<sup>11</sup> William Stuebs, "An Evaluation of Prof. Koehler's Dealing with the Problem of Poor Singing," church history paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, March 11, 1977, page 12.

<sup>12</sup> Prof. Hilton Oswald in a letter to Paul Prange, February 10, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Prof. Erwin Scharf in an oral interview with Paul Prange on February 7, 1988.

It seems that no faculty member was able to fill the breach Koehler left as far as musical instruction was concerned.

The better singers and more musically gifted students took the lead in an effort to change the situation. A document from the time states: "During the first term of the school year 1930-31 a considerable amount of dissatisfaction prevailed among the students in regard to the curricular singing period. While the student body was attempting to improve conditions, it became obvious that the idea of a seminary chorus would meet with the approval of a great number of students."<sup>14</sup> In January 1931 the student body elected a committee to study the matter more completely. Members of the committee were Heinrich Vogel, Neelak Tjernagel, and Hans Meyer.<sup>15</sup> The group had three responsibilities: to investigate the possibility of organizing a chorus, to gain the sanction of the faculty for such an endeavor, and to secure an experienced director.

The committee met with quick success. From a student body of 67, 40 students indicated interest in participating in a choir. One member of the body added:

The urge to sing beyond the preparation for chapel singing took refuge in this organization. Nobody at the Sem had a job. We were all together in the dormitory. Nobody had a wife and family to take care of. So we had time!<sup>16</sup>

The faculty also expressed its complete support and approval.<sup>17</sup> The last objective of the committee was to secure a competent director, and to this task first year student Erwin Scharf brought his recommendation that Mr. S. J. Bergemann would serve well. Scharf had become acquainted with Bergemann while the two had worked in Fond du Lac, Scharf at the newly-formed Winnebago Lutheran Academy and Bergemann at St. Peter School. Bergemann had recently accepted a call to Jordan, West Allis, and was close enough to Thiensville to take on the position.<sup>18</sup>

On January 14, 1931, 38 students attended a meeting called specifically to form a choir. These 38 became charter members of the Seminary Choral Society. They elected Neelak Tjernagel as president; Gilbert Thiele as vice-president; and Erwin Scharf as secretary. (A list of the charter members is added at the end of this essay.) The charter members agreed that each member would seed a treasury with \$1.50 for music and the director's honorarium.<sup>19</sup>

Several days later a group of students went to visit Mr. Bergemann in West Allis and invited him to serve as the director of the new group. The society offered him \$3.40 for each rehearsal.<sup>20</sup> Bergemann accepted and agreed to come to the seminary one evening each week. He remembered those events in a letter to Paul Prange 57 years later:

Though I had led mixed choruses for some twelve years and had been a member of two male quartets, I now had a male chorus! What a challenge and genuine

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<sup>14</sup> "A Record of the Organization and Meetings of the Seminary Choral Society." WELS Historical Archives, January 14, 1931.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., May 8, 1931.

<sup>16</sup> Oswald, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Choral Society minutes, op. cit., January 16, 1931

<sup>18</sup> Scharf, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Choral Society minutes, May 8, 1931.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, May 8, 1931.

pleasure that became! The society was serious about its work. The singers were enthusiastic and cooperative. In our first rehearsal in January of 1931 (Tuesday, January 20), we studied two or three pieces. When I returned a week later and proceeded to further study, the men had memorized them! With such spirit there was no problem in preparing for a concert in the spring of that year.<sup>21</sup>

After several months of rehearsing, the chorus was ready for its first performance. On April 18, 1931, the following announcement appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal*:

### **Students' Chorus in Sacred Concert**

The students' chorus of the theological seminary of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod at Thiensville, under the direction of S. J. Bergemann, will appear for the first time in a sacred concert Sunday at 8:00 p.m. in Grace Lutheran Church, Broadway and East Juneau Avenue. Several organ numbers will be given by Gilbert Glaeser, organist at Grace Church.

The program from that concert lists ten anthems performed by the choir. Mr. Gilbert Glaeser, organist at Grace Church, provided an interlude of six pieces. The opening anthem, a setting sung in German by Johann Sebastian Bach of "Jehovah, Let Me Now Adore Thee" was repeated in English as the opening anthem of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary program.

The first concert didn't come off without a hitch, however. At 9:00 p.m. the regular whistle of the Blatz Brewery, located across Juneau Avenue from Grace Church, blew and got itself stuck.<sup>22</sup> Neither the society minutes nor Paul Prange record if the whistle ever became unstuck before the end of the concert. It seems as though the choir was forced to endure the whistle as it now endures sirens and traffic rumblings in its appearances at Grace.

As the 38 members of the choral society rehearsed the ten anthems for the opening concert, a committee of five prepared the organization's first constitution: Fritz Reuter, Martin Franzmann, Hilton Oswald, Alfred von Rohr Sauer, and Waldemar Pless. The committee completed its work, and the society ratified the constitution on April 27, 1931.<sup>23</sup>

### **A Touring Choir**

When the new school year began in the fall of 1931, 39 of the seminary's 71 students became members of the Choral Society. The group's first appearance that year was on November 12, at the dedication of Calvary Church in Thiensville. Interestingly, the present chorus appeared at Calvary on November 12, 2006, as the congregation observed its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The first Christmas concerts were held at St. Lucas, Milwaukee on December 13, Jerusalem, Milwaukee on December 15, and Trinity, Freistadt (LCMS) on December 17.<sup>24</sup>

As 1932 arrived, the society was beginning to sense its value as an agent and representative of the seminary. Invitations began to arrive from local congregations, and the members of the chorus were eager to accept them.<sup>25</sup> Erwin Scharf became the group's president when Neelak Tjernagel resigned, and immediately began planning a spring choir tour. For the next 54 years, the officers

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<sup>21</sup> S. J. Bergemann in a letter to Paul Prange, February 24, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Scharf, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Choral Society Minutes, May 8, 1931.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, January 25, 1932.

<sup>25</sup> Scharf, op. cit.

and members of the chorus would take the lead in planning and organizing the tours. Scharf and his committee arranged for concerts in Beaver Dam, Waterloo, Kenosha, Racine, Milwaukee, Manitowoc, Green Bay, Appleton, Fond du Lac, Thiensville, and West Allis.<sup>26</sup> The tour extended over two weekends and the intervening week. Travel was by motor coach driven by a driver named Percy. The tour program consisted of 15 anthems, four arranged by Bach (including “Jehovah, Let Me Now Adore Thee” in German) and a new arrangement of the old gospel hymn “Softly and Tenderly.”<sup>27</sup> This anthem was also repeated on the 2006 anniversary program, but without the negative reaction it received in 1932—people at several congregations walked out as the anthem was sung! At the end of the year, the society agreed to sing at the graduation service, an innovation then that continues to this day.

The 1932-33 school year brought another first: for the first time the Christmas Concert was presented on campus in the chapel. Students planned another tour, this one to take place on four weekends in May and June. This tour is notable because of a tragic event that took place on a warm Sunday afternoon after the chorus returned. Two students, Arnold Gatz, a member of the choir, and Chester Bender, who was not a choir member, were the first of a group of students who ran down to the Milwaukee River for a swim. Not realizing the strength of the current, they dove in and drowned. The society carried out its obligations to the congregations at which it had scheduled concerts, but undoubtedly did so with heavy hearts.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Seminary Quartet**

Paul Prange’s essay includes several pages about the first notable seminary quartet.<sup>29</sup> This is an interesting story, but concerns the general history of the chorus in only one way.

The original members of the group were Alfred Schewe, Paul Heyn, and Otto Engel. They had sung together at Northwestern College, but came to the seminary looking for a second bass. They found one in Erwin Scharf who agreed to join the group.<sup>30</sup> Programs indicate that this quartet regularly performed in concerts during their time as members of the choral society.

The Great Depression was ravaging work opportunities, and the four found themselves without jobs for the summer of 1933. With some encouragement from Prof. John Meyer, the four set out to tour WELS congregations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, and Ohio. They began their concert tour on June 13 and ended it on July 22, with only a five day reprieve in Niagara Falls.

What is notable, however, is that the group needed an organist to play interludes and accompaniments. Once again Erwin Scharf suggested a Fond du Lac connection, a young teacher assigned in 1929 to service at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Martin Albrecht. Albrecht’s association with the choir began in the fall of 1934 and didn’t end until 1985 when he retired after serving as the director of the chorus for 32 of its 75 years!

### **The Albrecht Choir: 1934-1943**

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Scharf recalled to Prange that some objected to this anthem, but others thought it was the best anthem on the program.

<sup>28</sup> Choral Society minutes, June 13, 1933.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Prange ob. cit., pages 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Scharf, op. cit.

As the 1933-1934 school year began, the Seminary Choral Society was back in action with S. J. Bergemann as its director. A group of 31 choir members presented the annual Christmas concert in the seminary chapel and participated in a spring tour of congregations in eastern Wisconsin. As the year came to an end, however, Mr. Bergemann informed the society that he had accepted a call to St. Mark Church in Watertown and would be obligated to resign as director of the choir.

It is not possible to report here when and why Martin Albrecht decided to come to the seminary to study for the pastoral ministry. As a graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, he lacked the prerequisite language training ordinarily required for enrollment at the seminary. He served as a pastor for only four years, from 1940-43 and was certainly a teacher at heart and in attitude, even in the pulpit. Did his thoughts begin to turn toward the pastoral office through the influence of his friends in the seminary quartet? Would he have come to Thiensville in the fall of 1934 had Mr. Bergemann not resigned as director?

Martin Albrecht was born in 1909, the son of Richard Albrecht and Selma nee Zielke. After serving as a Lutheran elementary school teacher at St. Mark, Watertown, and Jerusalem, Milwaukee, Richard Albrecht accepted a call in 1917 to teach pedagogics and German at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm. Martin attended the parish school in New Ulm and took piano and organ lessons from Prof. Emil Backer who had married his sister Erna. He displayed his musical abilities as a singer and performer but also as a leader, being appointed as the director of the college band. He was assigned to the Fond du Lac academy upon his graduation in 1929.<sup>31</sup>

Especially in Fond du Lac Albrecht was influenced by the a cappella choral movement that was beginning to sweep across the United States in the mid-1930s. He himself gives credit for this influence to Hans Schlei, a high school teacher from Sheboygan and son-in-law of the well known Fond du Lac pastor and synodical president, G. E. Bergemann.<sup>32</sup> This is the same movement that F. Melius Christiansen was championing at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN, and which moved Lutheran choral singing away from the orchestrally accompanied Wagnerian and Mendelssohnian choruses that were so prevalent in America and Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through Schlei's influence and with his own study, Albrecht had come to see that even high school students could learn to sing the "straight" tones that were essential in the a cappella tradition.

Albrecht's musical ability was recognized by the seminary students and his leadership was accepted. Though he was a fellow student, chorale society members gave him gifts of appreciation.<sup>33</sup> Already during these years he displayed his talent for arranging SATB choral music for TTBB voices. He added new entries to the home-made hymnal that students used for their a cappella chapel singing and was able to include on concert programs some of the great choral works he had arranged for male voices. While all were not arranged during this tenure as director, the chorus files contain TTBB settings of over 200 hymns from *The Lutheran Hymnal* as well as dozens of arrangements of classic choral works such as Pachelbel's "On God and Not on Human Trust" and "Now Thank We All Our God" and Gretchaninoff's "Our Father." Picking up on a program addition Mr. Bergemann had made in the 1934 tour program, Albrecht began placing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" as the opening anthem of every spring concert. This custom continued for twenty years until the mid-1950s and then began again when Albrecht returned to the seminary in 1962.

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<sup>31</sup> C.T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship Handbook*, pages 630-631.

<sup>32</sup> Prof. Martin Albrecht, oral interview with Paul Prange, February 11, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Choral Society minutes, December 5, 1934.

Upon his graduation from the seminary, Albrecht was reassigned to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, but was asked to continue to serve as director of the Choral Society. One senses there were a few discipline problems during those years as Albrecht tried to control the choir from afar.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps a few church leaders understood the difficulty involved in this arrangement, because in 1940 Albrecht was called to serve as pastor and upper grades teacher at Calvary Church in Thiensville. Obviously, he continued as director of the chorus.

In 1943 Martin Albrecht was called to join the faculty at Dr. Martin Luther College where he served for the next 19 years as organ instructor, choir and band director, and professor of religion and liturgics. It was during these years that he worked with his brother-in-law, Prof. Emil Backer, to develop and edit the DMLC choir series, used by hundreds of WELS choirs. He also developed a music curriculum and singing course for Lutheran elementary schools. He was well known as a strict disciplinarian. Upon the sudden death of Prof. Backer in 1958, Albrecht essentially took over the leadership of the entire DMLC music program.<sup>35</sup> Since he had experience as a parish pastor, he was also called upon to start a new congregation in New Ulm, St. John Lutheran Church.

Upon Albrecht's departure from Calvary, Thiensville, the Seminary Male Chorus (newly named in 1938<sup>36</sup>) began to search for a new director. The choir began the year with a student director, Henry Paustian, who directed the choir in several congregational appearances and prepared the group for the 1943 Christmas concert. In December of that year the president of the choir, Walter Schumann, invited Mr. Emmanuel Arndt, a teacher at Christ Lutheran School in Milwaukee, to serve as director.<sup>37</sup> Arndt was the formal director from January 1944 to March 1945, although there is an indication that students carried on much of the regular work of rehearsing and planning. For example, the students set out to edit the chapel hymnal and selected as chair of the project a young student musician whose name would reappear both at the seminary and on the WELS musical scene in general, Kurt J. Eggert.<sup>38</sup>

### **Prof. Hilton Oswald at Northwestern and the Seminary, 1945 – 1960**

For many years there had been a general recognition that music instruction for pastoral students was not all it could be.<sup>39</sup> In 1941 the Northwestern Board of Control reported to the synod convention in Saginaw its desire to provide better instruction at Northwestern and the seminary. The convention resolved that the board of the two schools should be authorized to call a man to serve both schools.<sup>40</sup> When the boards met in the summer of 1943, they noted the responsibilities they hoped to cover:

At Northwestern to

Conduct the male chorus, the mixed chorus, and the band  
Give courses in elementary music in the preparatory department  
Give optional courses in music on the college level

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<sup>34</sup> Prof. Erwin Schroeder in a personal letter to Paul Prange on February 3, 1988.

<sup>35</sup> C.T. Aufdemberge, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Male Chorus minutes, May 25, 1939.

<sup>37</sup> Male Chorus minutes, November 30, 1943.

<sup>38</sup> Male Chorus minutes, November 16, 1944.

<sup>39</sup> Oswald, op cit.

<sup>40</sup> Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, (Saginaw, MI, August 6-11, 1941), pages 49-50.

At the seminary to

Acquaint the students with music appropriate for use in the congregation  
Teach the relation of the music to the text of hymns  
Give a course in the history of church music  
Direct the Seminary Male Chorus<sup>41</sup>

From every possible point of view, this was an unrealistic expectation. That one man could handle the music instruction of primarily male students across the ages of 14 to 25 was preposterous—and then that the schools he served would be 45 miles apart. The *Northwestern Lutheran* gave evidence to this in a September 1943 notice:

The Seminary and Northwestern College Boards met in joint sessions on September 29 to call a professor of music. After a lengthy discussion it was resolved to postpone the selection.<sup>42</sup>

Hilton C. Oswald was a charter member of the Seminary Choral Society in 1931, and after graduation had served as a pastor in South Dakota. So highly did Northwestern consider Oswald's language gifts that the school called him to serve as professor of English and Latin in 1939. Remembering that he had played an instrument, the board also called him to direct the college band. When Prof. Bolle died several years later, Oswald also took on the campus choirs. This was the man called in 1945 to endure the joint position. Oswald declined the call at least once, pleading insufficient preparation in the music field.<sup>43</sup> The Board, and especially NWC President Kowalke, were persistent, however, and Oswald was persuaded. Prange summarized the fascinating story as Prof. Oswald himself related it in a 1988 letter:

Then the hard work began. I took courses in organ, music history, ear-training and sight-singing, harmony, counterpoint, musical form and analysis, and whatever else in the Milwaukee conservatory offerings I thought I could use. World War II was in full flower with its gas rationing, and after a car accident on a Sunday morning preaching mission I was suddenly without transportation because repairs were not to be had. So once a week I got on the train in Watertown at 7 in the morning, did my several lessons at the Conservatory in the forenoon, and caught the Interurban from Milwaukee to Thiensville, arriving just in time for the last period in the morning. In addition to the prescribed three-year cycle of courses, part of the period was used to rehearse chapel singing. Then came a free dinner for me with the students, and then chorus rehearsal. This was all pure joy, on my part at least. I returned to Watertown on the Pioneer Limited at 1:00 a.m. The Lord hovered over all of this with his miracle-laden care for some 15 years.<sup>44</sup>

Prof. Oswald served faithfully under very difficult circumstances. It was during his tenure as music director that the Northwestern sports teams reached their zenith, first in basketball and then in football. The choral interest that was so evident in the 1930s couldn't hold up as the student focus turned to winning sports teams. Bruce Backer remembers that the sports fellows who did sing weren't minded to get too serious over musical training!<sup>45</sup> These were also the years during which the battle between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods raged, and the liturgical arts were

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<sup>41</sup> The *Northwestern Lutheran* (Vol. 30, No. 14, July 11, 1943), page 221.

<sup>42</sup> The *Northwestern Lutheran* (Vol. 30, No. 20, October 3, 1943), page 317

<sup>43</sup> Oswald, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Backer in an email to James Tiefel, May 8, 2006

too often connected by naïve students (and some professors) with extreme positions in Missouri. More students were beginning to find work after World War II ended, and some were married. Add to this that the young men arriving in Thiensville already had sung under Prof. Oswald over the span of eight years and that his style tended to be long on precision and short on passion,<sup>46</sup> and it doesn't surprise that membership in the Seminary Male Chorus dwindled. Membership in the fall of 1958 was 12. Student directors such as Bruce Backer and Wayne Schmidt<sup>47</sup> prepared these smaller groups in some notable presentations,<sup>48</sup> but generally the outlook for the Seminary Male Chorus was glum as the 1960s dawned.

We can't pass the Oswald era, however, without noting some very positive contributions. Since Oswald was also involved in touring with the Northwestern Choir, the custom of touring in alternate years became a standard practice that remains. In 1949 Mrs. Charlotte Sperling of Watertown, SD, gifted the seminary with a ten rank Wicks pipe organ, and for the first time in the seminary's history students began singing the melody line of hymns accompanied by the organ. In 1955 copies of *The Lutheran Hymnal* appeared in the pews.<sup>49</sup> In 1953 the chorus appeared for the first time in choir robes: black gowns with white satin collars and short choir stoles.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Interregnum: Kurt Eggert, 1960-1962**

Prof. Oswald detected a loss of hearing during the late 1950s and in 1960 accepted a call issued from Concordia Publishing House to serve as one of the editors for the American Edition of *Luther's Works*. And so Prof. Oswald returned to languages, his first love. In Prange's opinion, it was at this time that the chorus came as close as it ever did to disbanding.<sup>51</sup> He credits Warren Widmann for keeping a small group of singers active at the seminary. But in October a small note appeared in the minutes: "Pastor Kurt Eggert is the new choir director. Things are looking up."<sup>52</sup>

Kurt Eggert had a well deserved reputation on the WELS music and worship scene. In 1955 he and Northwestern's Ralph Gehrke began publishing *Viva Vox*, a small pamphlet focusing on worship and church music. His influence on those who knew him was deep. David Valleskey, an upper classman and student director during Eggert's tenure, remembers being very impressed with Eggert, "not just with his directing, but with his whole approach to music and worship. He was the one who instilled in me what has turned out to be a lifelong interest in worship."<sup>53</sup> Eggert picked up where Oswald had left off, directing the choir and teaching the course in church music. His concert programs at the seminary display the same creativity that marked his work with the Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee over 34 years. Eggert saw to the purchase of a grand piano used for the first time at the chorus' Christmas concert in 1961 (built by the Chase Company and still in use). He also featured the chorus in a television venture on Milwaukee's WITI-TV.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Pastor David Valleskey in an email to James Tiefel on May 15, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Backer, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Backer had prepared Bach's cantata *Ach wie wichtig, ach wie fluechtig ist der Menschen Leben* for the 1955 Christmas concert at which Oswald directed.

<sup>49</sup> Seminary Chorus minutes, November 7, 1955.

<sup>50</sup> Seminary Chorus minutes, January 19, 1953,

<sup>51</sup> Paul Prange, op. cit., page 14

<sup>52</sup> Seminary Chorus minutes, October 1960.

<sup>53</sup> Valleskey, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Seminary Chorus minutes, December 3 and 10, 1961.

When Northwestern College moved to call a music director for exclusive service on its own campus in 1962, the seminary board realized it could not stand idle. President Carl Lawrenz relinquished his courses in education in order to carry out administrative duties, and the board saw fit to authorize a call for church music and Christian education. Since Eggert was serving already and seemed to possess the necessary gifts, many assumed he would receive the call. Synodical lore has it that a notable member of the seminary board disallowed the call, however, opining that Eggert's preference for the cassock and surplice made him "unsafe"<sup>55</sup>—not a surprising reaction in the liturgically charged atmosphere of the early 1960s.

### **The Albrecht Years: 1962-1985**

The board turned to a man it knew and trusted, a man who had served already as the longest tenured director of the choir, Prof. Martin Albrecht. The move to Mequon was not an easy one for Albrecht. He had deep roots in New Ulm, familiarly and professionally. His six daughters attended the college and its preparatory department, and the move left parents and children separated by many miles. For five years he and his wife Zelma were obligated to live in an off-campus home since no campus housing was available. And the discipline that he so easily carried out in college classrooms and rehearsals simply didn't work at the seminary. At the end of the first quarter of his first year in the classroom, he distributed a test. Seminary students were not at all used to being tested in that era, and they unceremoniously handed the unfinished tests back to him!

Albrecht experienced greater success with the chorus. Fred Fallen, the secretary of the 1962-63 choir, records, "There were backslaps and handshakes all around as forty (40!!!) members were present for the first meeting."<sup>56</sup> The officers of the choir planned a tour to congregations in western Wisconsin in the spring of 1963. The second tour in the spring of 1964 was much more notable. The choir planned a trip to Arizona and California where they presented concerts in Tucson, Tempe, Glendale, Phoenix, and Flagstaff, AZ, and in Los Angeles and Pomona, CA, as well as in congregations on the way there and back. Highlighting this tour were two appearances in congregations on the Apache Indian Reservation. To mark this notable event, Albrecht programmed a musical setting of a text written by missionary pioneer Dr. Francis Uplegger and prepared the chorus to sing it: "Ihidna! Ihidna!"—"Life, True Life." The concert program was entitled *Cantate Domino*, and the chorus sang the anthem by the same name composed by Hans Leo Hassler. When the choir returned to the reservation in 1995, that same Hassler anthem appeared on the program. This was a first: the first time a synodical school choir had traveled outside the Midwest and would prove to be the first of many such tours as the synod expanded its boundaries beyond Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan.

Another long tour in 1966 carried the choir to congregations in Washington and Oregon with stops along the way in the Dakotas, Montana, and Minnesota. A recording was made of this concert program, and the profits helped keep the choir on a solid financial footing. In 1968 the choir headed for the Dakotas and then toured congregations in Florida in 1970. In 1972 the choir traveled to Arizona and California again (apparently with a smaller ensemble<sup>57</sup>). The 1974 choir arranged for its first "foreign" destination, as the group presented a concert at St. Paul in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada on Easter Sunday and then visited congregations along the East Coast. The 1976 tour traveled to congregations in Texas, and the 1978 choir toured congregations in Florida again.

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<sup>55</sup> James P. Schaefer in a conversation with James Tiefel about 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Seminary Chorus minutes, September 12, 1962.

<sup>57</sup> Prange, op. cit., page 14

The 1980 terminus destination was Denver with concerts in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota along the way there and back.

In 1980 Prof. Albrecht was 71 years old. His wife had been diagnosed with Huntington's Disease and was not able to stay alone at home. She had accompanied him on the 1976 and 1978 tours, but was not able to travel in 1980. Literally at the last minute and with his suitcases in hand, Albrecht decided to stay home, and student James Renz conducted the choir until Albrecht joined the group in Minnesota on its return trip. The chorus didn't take a long tour in 1982 because of Albrecht's inability to accompany the group. Students planned a tour to Florida in 1984, but again Albrecht did not accompany the choir; Mark Wilde was the student director. As Prof. Albrecht approached his 75 birthday, it was obvious that his long tenure as director of the choir and professor at the seminary was sadly drawing to a close.

Despite its unhappy ending, it must be said that the Seminary Chorus flourished under Albrecht's directorship. His time at Mequon coincided with growing student enrollments, and his choirs often had more than 50 members. Although he was not always appreciated in class, Albrecht was respected and liked by choir members who found him more easy-going outside the classroom. The music he prepared with the many choirs he directed was interesting and enjoyable to sing. Always the teacher, Albrecht's programs were invariably themed and included program notes aimed at the people in the pews. He ran effective rehearsals and conducted without mistakes. Albrecht expanded the choir's repertoire as he continued to arrange classic SATB choral works for the male chorus and programmed old spirituals as well as works by more contemporary composers such as Leland Sateran and Knut Nystad. He prepared all the choir's programs on his personal typewriter and duplicated them (as well as a great deal of the music) on the off-set printer he purchased and located in his basement. He regularly produced recordings of the choir's major tours. And he made money. The chorus was financially independent throughout his tenure (and is still today) and had \$32,000 in the bank (in a fund for a new chapel organ) when he retired in 1985.

Two notable undertakings need to be mentioned for the historical record. Together with Prof. Meilahn Zahn, director of the Dr. Martin Luther College Choir, Albrecht produced a series of three audio cassettes entitled *Our Favorite Hymns*. He sold literally thousands of copies of these recordings; in fact, he liked to say that he sold more cassettes than Robin Yount had hits (and Yount had over 3,000 hits). Albrecht also was deeply involved with several major choral endeavors sponsored by the Milwaukee Federation of WELS Churches that were held at Milwaukee's Performing Arts Center in the early 1970s. These concerts, which invariably had the Seminary Chorus as one of the anchoring choirs, were received with overflowing enthusiasm and are memorable in the minds of students who participated in them. Albrecht also directed the 400 voice choir that participated in the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's birth in 1983. The service was held at the Milwaukee Auditorium and attracted an enormous throng of WELS members.

After retirement Martin Albrecht purchased a home in Grafton and lived there until his death in March 1993. His funeral service was conducted at Calvary, Thiensville. Members of the chorus took turns standing at the sides of his casket during the visitation, and a bouquet of fifty roses, one for each member of the 1993 choir, was presented by the group in his honor. A large group of pastors under the direction of Pastor Kurt Eggert sang his TTBB arrangement of "For All the Saints," and the chorus presented his tune and setting of Herbert Filter's paraphrase of Luther's Evening Prayer.

### **The Seminary Chorus: 1985-2006**

The list of names nominated to succeed Prof. Albrecht was short. His were big shoes to fill, and not many men in WELS had both the musical and theoretical experience the call demanded. Kurt Eggert had just accepted a call to head up the synod's new hymnal project and would not have had the time to handle both these responsibilities and those of a full-time seminary professor. It was no secret among faculty members that Albrecht hoped the board would call his nephew, Bruce Backer, who certainly had the most extensive musical training of the men on the list. The board selected a colleague of Backer's at Dr. Martin Luther College, Prof. Mark Lenz. Lenz certainly had the academic credentials and had directed the mixed choir at St. Croix Lutheran High School in West St. Paul, MN, during a previous tenure there. When Lenz returned the call, the board extended the call to a very surprised James Tiefel, then serving as pastor at St. Paul Church in Saginaw, MI.

Tiefel had neither the academic nor the musical training that the call required. He was a member of the choir as a student and one of its accompanists. He did have parish experience, however, and the board seemed interested in securing a younger man with that qualification. He also seemed to have gained the recommendation of several Michigan men<sup>58</sup> who were close to the WELS worker training system and had witnessed his work in Saginaw. The new director arrived on campus with his young family in August of 1985. While he audited the courses in Christian education during his first year, he immediately began teaching the liturgics courses and directing the chorus. The first Christmas concert under his leadership was held in December, 1985.

As a student, Tiefel had been involved in planning the 1976 choir tour to Texas. It didn't quite dawn on him that he should not pick up where he had left off, and began planning the 1986 tour to the Pacific Northwest District at Albrecht's suggestion. From that point on, tours have been arranged by the chorus director and not by students or officers of the chorus.

Beginning in 1932, the chorus' Christmas concerts were always held in the seminary chapel. Crowds grew, and two performances became necessary; but even then the chapel was severely taxed. After Calvary, Thiensville, dedicated its new church in 1976, Christmas and Commencement concerts were held at Calvary. When Tiefel arrived on campus, plans were complete and construction was ready to begin on a large auditorium/gymnasium that would serve as the new thousand seat "concert hall" for the chorus. Area WELS members soon recognized that they would be able to find a seat at these concerts, and crowds approaching 2,000 regularly attend the two performances of the Seminary's Christmas concerts held on the second Sunday in December.

In 1988 the choir followed its new director to his old home base, the Michigan District; only 28 students accompanied the tour, the smallest touring group in many years before or since. Since he lacked the skills to arrange anything but simple hymns for the male voices, the chorus commissioned Mr. Robert C. Potratz to compose a three-part motet on the hymn "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage," a favorite in the Michigan District and almost the school song at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. The concert program in 1990 featured nine of the eleven sections of Bach's great motet, "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" in a compendium of arrangements by Albrecht, Oswald, and Prof. William Heyne, long-time director of Concordia's male choir. The program was fairly long-haired, but congregations along the way to Denver and back seemed to enjoy the chorus' visits. In 1992 the director planned a trip that led the chorus as far south as New Orleans and as far east as Atlanta. Congregations in Texas invited the choir to take its 1994 tour in the South Central District and witnessed the new blue choir robes that were generously funded by the

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<sup>58</sup> Board chairman Edward G. Zell, pastor in Redford, and John C. Lawrenz, president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw.

Seminary Auxiliary. Both in 1992 and 1994 the chorus was so large that a student-driven van accompanied the motor coach (driven by driver George Cedzo who has driven the chorus on most of its major tours since 1985).

In late 1992 the WELS hymnal project was coming to a close; the book's manuscripts had been delivered to an Indiana publisher, and the new book was to be presented at the 1993 synod convention in Saginaw. It was becoming obvious that the life of the hymnal project director was also coming to a close. Kurt Eggert's health had been precarious since 1986 when he suffered a major heart attack, and by the early 1990s he was subject to occasional serious health problems. In October of 1992, Tiefel approached Dr. Carl F. Schalk, the notable Concordia-River Forest composer and a close friend of Eggert's, and asked him to arrange a male chorus setting of "Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See." Eggert had composed a tune, *WEDDING GLORY*, for this text when it had been removed by the hymnal committee from its status as the final stanza of Paul Gerhardt's hymn, "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth." The chorus received the arrangement in manuscript form and prepared it for the 1993 Commencement Concert. Eggert and Schalk were invited to the concert and both were present when the chorus presented the anthem. A memorable afterglow followed at the Tiefel home as Eggert and Schalk, perhaps representing the best in church music in each of the former sister synods, reminisced over very dry martinis. It was the last musical event Eggert would attend. He was soon hospitalized and died in June 1993. Tiefel programmed "Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See" as the final anthem of the 1994 tour program and each time explained its origin before the choir sang the piece. The magnificent text, tune, and setting have met with such approval that it has become the chorus's signature anthem and concludes every concert appearance.

A friendship with two brothers who would be members of the 1994-1995 choir led the director to consider an unusual trip to the Arizona-California District that would be scheduled for the spring of 1995. Anticipating long coach rides to and from the West (and determined not to repeat the overnight trips of the 1986 tour), Tiefel planned ahead and asked the faculty to schedule the Easter recess to cover two weeks. As it turned out, the father of the two students convinced the director to fly the choir west and helped to find reasonable ticket prices. The choir flew to Phoenix on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, presented 21 concerts over the next 14 days, and flew out of Las Vegas on the Saturday after Easter. Not only was the tour too long, but sickness plagued choir members all along the way. One student had to be sent home, and the full choir performed at only the first and last of the concerts. It remains, in the memory of both the director and students, the "tour from hell" as one student coined it along the way.

In 1998 the choir traveled to congregations along the East Coast from New York to Georgia. The 2000 tour celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wisconsin Synod, and the choir traveled almost in a square from Wisconsin to Ohio to Michigan to Wisconsin to Minnesota and to Nebraska and presented concerts in congregations with historic synodical connections.

No synodical school choir had ever visited the WELS congregations in Alaska, and a visit to that state seemed an obvious extension of a 2002 tour to the Pacific Northwest District which had not hosted the choir since 1986. WELS President Karl Gurgel was very supportive of the venture and released \$19,000 from WELS funds to make the trip to Alaska possible. The choir flew again—from Milwaukee to Chicago to Seattle to Anchorage to Juneau to Seattle to Chicago and back to Milwaukee—without so much as a missed beat or a bit of turbulence. Concerts were scheduled in Kenai, Anchorage, and Juneau and were attended by overflowing crowds of visitors and very appreciative WELS members, many of whom hadn't heard a WELS choir in years.

Although on crutches, Tiefel accompanied the chorus on a Florida tour in 2004. He had fallen on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral in London on March 15, endured surgery to repair a ruptured quadriceps tendon on March 18<sup>th</sup>, and climbed on the tour coach on April 7, well-attended by junior Nathanael Scharf who endured the ignominy of having to "shoe" the director before each concert. The 2006 tour, to Denver and back, was much less notable, although it marked the first time a son of a director participated as a member of the Seminary Chorus.

As the Seminary Chorus celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is obvious that the group has been able to build on the legacy presented to it by past singers, student leaders, and directors. Participation remains popular; it is not uncommon that half the student body is involved in the Christmas concerts, although not that many remain in the second semester for the spring engagements. The chorus continues to be well received by congregations, and students make good impressions as they are hosted by members on tour stops. But the times are changing. The chorus made special efforts to introduce to congregations the new hymns and liturgical settings of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (1993) and *Christian Worship: New Service Settings* (2004). Albrecht encouraged students to use their individual talents as organists and instrumentalists, but he might not have anticipated the day when more students would have guitar and percussion skills than keyboard and trumpet skills. He would occasionally cringe at the repertoire selected by the present director; there was a rather stormy discussion over a somewhat unusual rendition of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in the late 1980s. Although recent programs have leaned heavily on traditional repertoire (the choir presented both Brahms's "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place" and the opening chorus of Bach's Cantata No. 4, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Dark Prison" on its 2006 tour), the group has also presented the percussion based Nigerian Christmas song "Betelehemu" and Leon Robert's "This Is the Day" accompanied by guitar, percussion, and clapping. With anthems such as Peter Hallock's "Peace" and Eric Whitacre's "Lux Aurumque" the choir has taken on harmonic challenges that go beyond what is the norm for WELS choirs—and listeners. As WELS musical sophistication advanced and people began criticizing the quality of its recordings, the choir began to record with the services of a professional (the same gentleman who records St. Olaf). It now produces CDs, not LPs or cassettes. As today's seminary students travel far beyond the Midwest and even overseas, chorus members themselves are suggesting that the choir visit congregations in Europe with which WELS is in fellowship and which they themselves have visited and served.

### **Singing New Songs to the Lord**

In his 1988 essay Paul Prange commented on a photo of the men of the Seminary Choral Society preparing to leave on the 1932 tour and noted that the choirs of his day would not have looked much different. The same can be said of today's choirs. There is nothing very sophisticated about a group of several dozen young men practicing choral anthems, spending long hours on motor coaches, playing sheepshead on the back of the bus, or preparing for yet another concert. The Seminary Chorus possesses neither the notoriety nor the aplomb of the St. Olaf Choir. Whether in 1931 or 2006, the chorus isn't really much more than a group of young seminarians with little or no musical training who are willing to spend long hours preparing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and then taking them by car or coach to fellow Christians across the length and breadth of this land. Make no mistake: great fun is had along the way. But the stories that can be told by each generation of chorus members are not the stuff historical essays are made of. Let it be enough to say that the Seminary Chorus remains committed to its purpose to preach the gospel in song and that it retains this commitment with joy and enthusiasm.

The Seminary Chorus awaits its own Joseph Shaw to produce *The Seminary Chorus: A Narrative*. But perhaps the readers of this essay can come away from it with just a little more knowledge

about a group of singers that has become well known and deeply appreciated in our little synod.  
And with that small objective, the author is content.

James P. Tiefel

### **Charter Members of the Seminary Chorus**

Harold Backer	Norbert Paustian
Louis Bleichwehl	Walter Paustian
Ewald Blumenthal	Waldemar Pless
Arthur Dobberstein	Henry Pussehl
Martin Drews	Gerhard Redlin
Siegfried Fenske	Fritz Reuter
Martin Franzmann	Helmut Rutz
Hugo Fritze	Alfred Sauer
Roland Hoenecke	Gerhard Schaefer
Ernst Kuehl	Erwin Scharf
Herbert Lemke	Waldemar Schuetze
Kurt Lescow	William Schweppe
Alfred Maaske	Gilbert Thiele
Gerold Martin	Neelak Tjernagel
Hans Meyer	Louis Vater
Norbert Mielke	Heinrich Vogel
Walter Nommensen	Sieghard Westendorf
Hilton Oswald	Albert Winter
Erhard Lankow	Raymond Zimmermann

