

Report to NELCSA Synod 2025: Appointed Synod Member for Church Music

1. Introduction

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

The appointed Synod member for church music serves as a two-way link between Synod and the various bodies and activities related to church music within NELCSA. The “up-link” entails creating awareness at Synod about the contributions that music can make to our church life, but also the challenges faced by this ministry. The “down-link” facilitates feedback and guidance from Synod to the music associations and other music-related bodies and activities. I was appointed to this position in 2023, at the previous Synod sitting.

The leaders of the Church Choir Association (Dieter Hinze), the Brass Band Association (Egmont Ottermann) and the IMPACT Music Ministry (Pastor Manfred Müller-Nedebock) will be submitting their own reports to Synod, and I would gladly field questions or inputs on their behalf at Synod.

2. Matters for Synod’s attention

a. Cultural heritage and diversity

This year’s choir festival was attended in large and diverse numbers, and by all indications, the programme was well chosen. This was heartening to see, because the planners of our joint music festivals face an ongoing challenge to find a healthy balance between our heritage of largely German Evangelical-Lutheran church music and the multilingual cultural diversity that has grown from it. When we define and proclaim our identity through music, we should draw on elements from both these spheres. We ask you, whether you are at home or in your congregations or interacting with others, please to keep these issues in mind; please nurture tolerance and a willingness to endure tension. Music can build ecumenical bridges by creating a sense of fellowship and community that transcends the spoken or written word. It is always a good idea to incorporate music at intra- and inter-church events.

b. Workers for the harvest

Many, if not most, leaders / conductors and participants in church music are lay volunteers with varying gifts and degrees of experience. There is a continual need for

- moral support, nurturing and recognition of good work,
- honest discussion of problematic aspects or mismatched expectations,
- formal training or informal fostering at the appropriate levels, including the identification of potential mentors / successors / collaborators.

The Church Choir and Brass Band Associations have, in the past, arranged formal training for conductors, and will continue to do so as the need arises. However, it should be noted that no such support structure exists for our church organists / accompanists. They are largely left to their own devices, and if they require help, they must, at best, rely on private lessons or informal guidance from more experienced players. Some Church Council members and I have recently started to reflect on these issues, with the aim of promoting this ministry, e.g. by developing a more structured support system for our church organists.

3. Closing thoughts

Roots and branches require a healthy, nurturing environment and time to grow leaves and bear fruit. We are stewards, Christ is the ultimate Gardener. The music in our church is by no means in dire straits, nor

are we experiencing any crisis, but our co-workers in church music do require support and fostering in facing their challenges and realising their potential. We are grateful for your prayers, your guidance and your contributions to conducive environments.

♪ | ♪♪ Mark Rohwer, 25 July 2025 ♪♪ | ◦ |