



Randall Sensmeier Honored as Fellow by The Hymn Society

Mary Louise Bringle, FHS. Sally Ann Morris, FHS. Delores Dufner, OSB, FHS. Ruth Duck, FHS. Herman Stuempfle, FHS. Carl Schalk, FHS. Sylvia Dunstan, FHS. What would modern hymnals be without the work of those venerable Fellows of our Society? And add to that list the work of David Gambrell, Jacque Jones, Benjamin Brody, David Bjorlin, myself, and others who populate the contributor's index in many recent collections of congregational song. What do we have in common? Our work has been cultivated, encouraged, and championed by our editor, Randy Sensmeier. Over the course of three decades working for GIA Publications, Sensmeier brought his keen eye and congregationally oriented sensibility to his role in developing author and composer collections—well over thirty of them. A quick survey of *Glory to God* (the 2013 Presbyterian hymnal) finds that at least sixty-four texts and tunes came from collections Sensmeier edited. In *Voices Together*, the 2020 Mennonite hymnal, the number is eighty.

As the list of names above reveals, Sensmeier has been willing to work across a spectrum of denominations, bringing his Lutheran perspective to those conversations, all while working for a publisher best known for serving Catholics. His ecumenism has made GIA one of the leading publishers of congregational song over the last few decades.

Sensmeier's work has always been rooted in the church. He is a deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. His most recent music ministry is with San Marcos Lutheran Church, San Marcos, California. He previously served several churches in Chicago. He is also widely published as a composer in his own right, with tunes ranging from rugged angularity to awe-struck beauty.

It was in 2007 that I received one of the most exciting emails of my life—a note from Randy, accepting my sub-mitted hymns for publication. That first contact has led to a formative relationship. His suggestions and gentle nudges have invariably sharpened my work. He has encouraged me to develop my own voice and style, never imposing but always inviting refinement. I am a better writer because of him. In 2013 he travelled to my home in Goshen, Indiana, to support Sally Morris, FHS and me in a recording project. One of my most vivid memories from that hectic week is when Randy plopped him-self down on the floor to play with my then-toddler son.

Over the years (and through the process of editing 250 of my texts) I eventually sensed something new in our conversations. Randy would invite my opinion on someone else's work. I would suggest a new writer to him, and the result would be a new collection. He would often disclose nuggets of editorial wisdom. Every year at Hymn Society conferences we would share a meal or a drink and discuss the world of church music. I think that he knew before I did that I would eventually follow in his footsteps at GIA. When we last met in person (at the 2019 conference) and he asked me to have breakfast with him the last morning, I came prepared to ask if he'd

thought about what might happen upon his retirement. To my surprise, he brought it up first and asked me to be his successor. I saw in retrospect the many ways that he had prepared me for that conversation and this vocation. His mentoring over the previous twelve years led to that moment.

One of my first projects with GIA was *Beauty's Blaze*, a collection of twenty of Sensmeier's tunes published in honor of his retirement. It includes tributes from authors and composers who have worked with him over the years. A few lines from Benjamin Brody will reveal that my experiences are not unique: Randy "is always looking to highlight the gifts of others . . . Those of us who have been blessed to have him as our editor have appreciated the careful critiques which have served to sharpen our compositions."

It is fitting that Randy Sensmeier now joins the ranks of many of the writers and composers whom he has edited. He rightly stands among the luminaries of The Hymn Society as a Fellow. Congratulations!

This information was prepared by Adam M. L. Tice and is provided for release by J. Michael McMahon, Executive Director of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, 5 Thomas Circle, NW, 4th floor, Washington, DC 20005-4153. For more information, please contact Dr. McMahon at mike@thehymnsociety.org or 800-843-8966.

Founded in 1922, The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada is an ecumenical organization of people who are passionate about hymns and congregational song. The Hymn Society community, open to all, is made up of scholars, church musicians, poets, composers, choir directors, choir members, clergy, worship planners, song leaders, music publishers, music educators, and people who love to sing. We believe that the holy act of singing together shapes faith, heals brokenness, transforms lives, and renews peace. Our mission, therefore, is to encourage, promote, and enliven congregational song.