

DAVID E. EICHER HONORED AS A FELLOW OF THE HYMN SOCIETY



David Eugene Eicher was honored by The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada at its Annual Conference in Montréal, Québec, in July 2023. This award, the highest honor given by the organization, was conferred because of his work as a hymnbook editor, promoter of congregational song, and for his service to The Hymn Society.

Eicher was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He credits his love of hymns to both of his parents; his dad was a pastor and his mom was always humming hymn melodies while doing housework. A favorite game during road trips was trying to remember all the verses of a specific hymn text. The family were able to sing in four parts with his sister on the melody, his mom on the alto, his dad on the bass line, and later, David on the tenor. With this grounding, it was an easy move to be involved in the church, as the seeds had been planted early. While a young child, David started piano lessons and filled in at church when needed. Organ lessons began during his high school years. Plans to study medicine were overtaken by his love of music and the church.

Eicher studied piano from 1962–78. His organ teachers include H. Leroy Lynn of Springfield, Ohio; R. Gary Deavel from Manchester College, Indiana; and Philip Gehring of Valparaiso University, Indiana. Additional studies with Sue Seid-Martin at the University of Notre Dame were followed by independent studies in Doetinchem, The Netherlands. In 1976, Eicher graduated with Distinction from Manchester College with the degree Bachelor of Science in Applied Music (organ). He graduated in 1978 from Valparaiso University with the degree Master of Arts in Liberal Studies with concentration in organ and church music.

In September 1981, Eicher was ordained a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Over the years, he has served the Presbyterian church (PCUSA) and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians (PAM) in various capacities. For the PCUSA, he served as a member of the Service Music Task Force (1996–2002), editor of *Holy Is the Lord: Music for Lord's Day Worship* (2002), member of the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, and for the Presbytery of Wabash Valley, organist for that stated meeting for ten years, and chair of the Theology and Worship Committee for four years. Eicher's involvement with PAM has included workshop leader, Conference Director for the 1998 PAM Albuquerque Conference, President (2000-2002), and member of the Executive Board (1996–2004). The Presbyterian Montreat Conference Center has benefitted from his work as children's choir accompanist and Professional Concerns Class leader in 2000 and on the planning team for conferences in 2003 and 2008. The highlight of his career was as hymnal consultant and editor for the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (2008–2020), which culminated in the renowned hymnal *Glory to God* (Westminster John Knox Press).

Other places in which Eicher has shared his gifts include as Dean of the Northwest Indiana Chapter (1994–1995) of the American Guild of Organists. From 2004–2005, he was Assistant to

the Presiding Member, Association of Reformed and Liturgical Worship, and a member of the Steering Committee. He was a faculty member and conference musician for the Seattle Institute for Liturgy and Worship, Seattle University, Seattle, WA (2003–2006). From 2006–2007, he was Interim Executive Director for the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. He was a contributing author to “A Primer for the Visiting Organist” (GIA, 2007).

His music ministry has spanned over fifty years in various churches and denominations from Ohio to Indiana and Illinois. His longest tenure was at The Presbyterian Church of LaPorte, Indiana (1979–2005), where he conducted European concert tours by the handbell choirs (1993, 1996, and 2005). He served as accompanist for the Northwest Indiana Symphony Chorus (2006–2007) and the South Bend Chamber Singers (1990–2007). While living in South Bend, Indiana (2014–2020), Eicher was the Staff Associate for the Department of Music and accompanist for the College Choirs at St. Mary’s College and served as the organist at Grace United Methodist Church. Retiring in 2020, he and his spouse, Joe Smith, moved to Silver City, New Mexico—fulfilling a long-awaited dream.

Eicher’s involvement with The Hymn Society began in 1982 with his attendance at the Atlanta conference. Over the years he has missed very few conferences. He was honored to serve as Treasurer (1996–2000) and President (2006–2008). Four times, Eicher was selected as organist for hymn festivals at the annual conferences. He was the morning worship coordinator at the 2017 conference, working with the Lovelace Scholarship students, and has led workshops as well.

Speaking of her friend and colleague, Sharon Beckstead said “David Eicher brings joy to everything whether it be big or small. His skills as a musician and leader have guided The Society over the years. Of course, if one could find a similarity to an episode of *I Love Lucy*, all the better. His joie de vivre is infectious. I count myself as the lucky one, having worked together on the Executive Committee of The Hymn Society and continuing with a cherished friendship.”

Submitted by Sharon L. Beckstead, Associate Musician at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, Toronto, Ontario, and editor of *All God’s Children Sing* (Wood Lake Books, 1992).