



Martin Tel Honored as Fellow of The Hymn Society

Martin Tel's love of sacred music had its origin in a dairy barn in rural Washington state. In that barn, Martin listened to his father belting out Psalms and hymns while he was milking cows. The love of song formed in those days shaped Martin's musical passion and career trajectory with the result that, in 2026, Martin has been named a Fellow of The Hymn Society in recognition of a lifetime of work with congregational song.

And it is, indeed, a lifetime. In his youth, his parents shared their memories of living in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation, with their roots in the Dutch Reformed Church and their reliance on the Psalms for sustenance and comfort. The only one of his siblings to follow his parents' passion for the Psalms into a career, Martin began playing the organ at his church at age 12. By the time he was 16 (and had gotten his driver's license) he was playing for other churches in the area. This youthful experience solidified his conviction that worship leadership is an important part of faith formation.

Martin holds degrees from Dordt College (BA in music and Dutch), the University of Notre Dame (MMus in organ literature), Calvin Theological Seminary (MA in Christian education), and the University of Kansas (DMA in church music). Today, Martin is the C. F. Seabrook Director of Music at Princeton Theological Seminary, a post he has held since 1996.

His days are filled with directing the seminary choirs, facilitating the music ministry for daily worship, and lecturing on various areas of church music. In his words, "I still sometimes have to pinch myself—do I really get to wake up every day and go to 'work' getting people to sing?"

Prior to coming to Princeton, Martin spent a year in the Netherlands (1995-1996) as a Fulbright Scholar studying organ design and performance as well as congregational song—specifically studying the historical relationship between the voice of the organ and the voice of the congregation in the Protestant churches of the Netherlands. His research took place at the Instituut voor

Liturgiewetenschap at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and his organ study at the Sweelinck Conservatorium of Amsterdam. He subsequently helped to design an organ for Princeton Seminary's chapel which was built by Paul Fritts and Company Organ Builders and installed in 2000.

Martin's work with hymnals has been prodigious. In 2007, Martin began serving as a contributing editor for the hymnal *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, a hymnal for the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. Working in conjunction with Joyce Berger and John Witvliet, Martin was focused on the Psalter portion of the hymnal. As the information was collected and choices were made for this section, John suggested that the knowledge gathered in this process could be used as the starting point for an ecumenical collection exclusively focused on the Psalms. Martin then became the senior editor for *Psalms for All Seasons*, a comprehensive book of Psalm resources. This meant that Martin was working on two hymnals at the same time, necessitating that he take a partial leave of absence from his position at Princeton Seminary. *Psalms for All Seasons* was published in 2012 (CICW/Faith Alive/Brazos Press) and *Lift Up Your Hearts* was published in 2013 (Faith Alive). Martin subsequently served as a contributing editor for the hymnal *Santo, Santo, Santo: Cantos para el pueblo de Dios / Holy, Holy, Holy: Songs for the People of God* published in 2019 (GIA).

Martin's current project is the publication of a collection of songs translated from Korean. This grew out of an interest in multilingual worship at Princeton Seminary and a desire to fill a gap identified by Korean and Korean American students—a need for their culture to be honored in contemporary translations to make their worship engagement more meaningful. Together with co-editor Chang Jang of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW), they have identified a collection of Korean hymns in current use which have not yet been translated into English. With support from CICW, they have set about having these translated—still using their original tunes. Along the way, they are developing a philosophy of hymn translation which honors both the source and target languages. The resulting book will be supplemented by online resources, all published by GIA and planned to be available by 2027.

Martin's days are not so filled that he cannot pursue his love of congregational song through his work with The Hymn Society. A life member, he has served on the editorial board (2018-2020), delivered a plenary address for the 2021 conference (“[Re-]Framing Welcome through Song: A Field Report”), and led sectionals at various conferences. He is currently serving as the chair for the

2026 conference. Over the years, he has encouraged his students to attend conferences through the Lovelace Scholar program—including Melissa Haupt, now president-elect of the Society. Martin has also been an ambassador to The Hymn Society in Great Britain and Ireland (HSGBI), delivering a plenary address in 2025 entitled “How Can We Sing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land?: The Demise (and Resurgence) of Metrical Psalm-singing in North America” which is soon to be published by HSGBI.

Closer to home, the indefatigable Martin has served as a minister of music in Christian Reformed, Reformed Church in America, and Presbyterian congregations. He currently serves as the organist at the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck, where he has served since 2010. He and his wife Sharilyn raised three now-adult children in Princeton in a home enlivened by two small dogs and a rabbit.

In a recent email, Martin reflected, “No organization has been more formative to me professionally than The Hymn Society. And this is inherited, from generation to generation. In high school I was already following the work of Emily Brink, FHS, who was then editing a new hymnal for my denomination. She was the one who introduced me to The Hymn Society. In college I was studying hymnody through the writings of Society stalwarts such as Erik Routley, FHS, and Harry Eskew, FHS. And then, as my career began, my work and research were sharpened by the likes of Alice Parker, FHS, Bob Batastini, FHS, Mel Bringle, FHS, David Eicher, FHS, Joyce Borger ... and so many others. And this continues today. The Hymn Society is so special to me.”

The Hymn Society has rightly recognized Martin’s past, current, and future contributions by naming him a Fellow.

Submitted by Jacque Browning Jones, FHS