

A Letter From the Dean

Dear Members and Friends,

Happy 2021! Finally this week, we had enough snow and winter weather to have it looking like an actual Michigan winter. I know my kids were excited about the prospect of a snow day, snowmen building, and cross-country skiing (if it stays cold enough long enough to fit all these things in!) We grumpy grown-ups might not be as thrilled about it, but since we're all staying home so much more these days, maybe it is OK to curl up with a good book and cup of tea, and watch the snow fall for a day or so. And I have to tell you, climbing up the hill at Van Raalte farm and riding down on a sled for a couple hours is pretty good exercise, as well as being fun, and keeping my toes, nose, and fingers pretty warm. Highly recommended.

Your board met this week over Zoom to discuss the upcoming winter and spring, and come up with a few events we can hold, pandemic or no. Keep reading to hear news of those events. But first we're going to hold a kind of COVID AGO Memorial for AGO friend and long-time member Mike VanDoornik. I asked some of the folks who knew him well, or interacted with him in various ways over the years to share memories of Mike.

Roberta Kraft -

George and I got to know Mike VanDoornik during our years as Directors of Traditional Worship and Music at Community Church of Douglas. Mike played the organ regularly and his music was very appreciated. He was greatly loved by the choir and always greeted each member by name. He was always encouraging of us in our work in the church; I especially appreciated his praise of my choral directing.

Mike bravely faced his adversity; it was marvelous to see his positive attitude. He could still play the piano with his left hand and a couple times we performed simple duets with my playing the upper voices.

Mike was a blessing to us in his retirement years. He had served many churches as a pastor of the Reformed Church where I know he was loved and appreciated before we knew him.

John Eisenhauer -

I don't recall the very first time I met Mike, although it was only roughly eight years ago. He graciously substituted for me at Peace Lutheran a few times, and I remember enjoying his company as an audience member at some organ recitals. But my fondest memories are several occasions, only shortly after I did get to know him, when I would be at home on a Saturday morning, and would receive an unexpected visit from Mike, bestowing his homemade banana bread and his special brand of warmth and good cheer, which soon captured the affection of my wife and son as well as my own. We were graced with several such visits of this type, and once had him to our house for dinner. Mike had a capacious and affable heart, and expressed his appreciation for every plateful lavishly. We will always cherish those happy moments. I visited him several times after his stroke, and, despite how difficult it was for him to speak, his kind heart always shone through.

Rick Van Oss -

Mike Van Doornik was involved in the selection of the Casavant organ at First Reformed Church in Holland when he was attending Western Seminary. After retirement, and after his wife died, he was able to play that organ for evening services for several years. He was very grateful for the opportunity and said it really helped him in the grieving process.

Rhonda Edgington -

I remember Mike always being a friendly and welcoming presence at AGO meetings. In fact, he loved to wear his Freedom Village name tag to AGO events, and made especially sure to greet newer faces, as he seemed to remember vividly how it felt to be new in Holland. I remember one AGO meeting in the old organ studio at Hope College, when Mike brought banana bread for our refreshments after the meeting, and I was surprised to learn that he had baked it himself. Another time, my husband and I were attending a Hope College dance department show at the Knickerbocker (with some rather avant garde music and dance performances), and I was again surprised to see Mike there, who told us he loved attending all kinds of Hope College events, from basketball to dance. A man of many surprises, Mike!

We held an AGO gathering at Freedom Village a number of years ago, in one of the social rooms, on behalf of Mike, who at that point could not get out anymore. His joy in seeing each of us there was obvious, and in spite of his difficulty speaking as clearly as he once had, he still was happy to sit and talk with us.

In September 2013, the Grand Rapids AGO held a regional installation of officers service at LaGrave, and invited area chapters to participate. Steve as sub-dean, Paul as newsletter editor, and Mike as chaplain drove to LaGrave with me to represent our chapter. In 2014, we held such an event in Dimnent Chapel. We asked Mike to participate, and I found a lovely picture of him on our website greeting the congregation (scroll down to find 2014.)

<https://www.hollandareaago.org/index.php/photos>

You can also see on that page a picture of the 2017 event at First United Methodist, when we inducted Mike into our League of Distinguished Service – he was brought from Freedom Village in his wheelchair. If you scroll further, you can find Mike in quite a few of them – performing in the member's recital in 2015 (at Western Seminary, where he attended as a student), with Jim demonstrating his home organ, and in the audience in many others.

Elizabeth West -

My memories of Mike are of his kindness and thoughtfulness and warm smile. For example, I remember his bringing homemade banana bread to an AGO meeting and how pleased he was to be able to share that with everybody. I remember that at an AGO meeting I offhandedly mentioned that I didn't have a good arrangement of Great Is Thy Faithfulness. Mike said that he did, and not long afterwards he sent me a copy in the mail. I also remember when I started playing at Community Church of Douglas, replacing Mike after his stroke. I was struck by how much he was missed and how much he was loved by the people there. Obviously, he cared a lot about them; they had felt that, and they cared about him. The last time I saw Mike was when we went caroling at Freedom Village in December 2019. Rhonda has already mentioned how amazed we all were that he could sing along with us, in harmony and from memory. I was also struck by his joyful face despite his suffering.

Jane Bosko -

When I think of Mike, I am always reminded of his welcoming smile and incredibly friendly nature. Several years ago at a Pillar Noon Organ Concert, I saw Mike and chatted with him following the recital. I had just assumed the position of AGO Dean and really needed help and advice. Knowing that he was an organist, I asked him if he had any ideas about AGO recruitment and what could be done to let more area organists know about our chapter. He readily agreed to serve as hospitality coordinator and start by calling and sending letters to all the area churches and inviting organists/keyboardists to attend our programs. He became the face of welcome to anyone that was interested. Following his stroke, I saw Mike several times at Freedom Village, usually at the Sunday afternoon Vespers when I played for the service. Mike always sat in front near the organ and I was surely blessed to hear his strong voice singing every word of the chosen hymns for the day. He was content, happy, even in adversity, and he greeted me with his amazing warm smile. Mike will be missed and I am grateful that I knew him.

Paul Dalman -

I met Mike in 1966. Carol and I were going to be married in the church where she grew up, a small RCA church in New Jersey, and Mike was their pastor at the time. We met with him at the parsonage to plan the service and I noticed there was a baby grand piano in the living room. When the subject of music came up he moved to the piano and proceeded to play selections from some of the traditional wedding repertoire for our consideration. I was impressed!

Fast-forward to the 1990s. Carol and I were in Holland for one of my Hope College class reunions. We were walking through campus when someone we passed exclaimed "Carol?". It was Mike and he recognized us, and we hadn't seen each other since our wedding! It turned out he had graduated five years before me and his class was also having a reunion. What a small world! In 2002 we moved to Holland and would then see him everywhere.

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Thank you, everyone who shared your memories. This reminds me of playing for funerals of older church members, and how many times, during the spoken remembrances, I would learn so much about a person – often seeing sides of them I had never imagined, or of the vast lives they'd lived before I encountered them. I'm sure each of us learned new things about Mike by reading how others experienced him during his years in Holland. Thank you for sharing.

New Board member Karen Howells has been helping us all out by taking minutes of our board meetings, which has the added benefit that I can reproduce them for you all in the newsletter, and no one forgets or doesn't know what we talked about there!

Thanks and best wishes -

Rhonda

Holland AGO Board Meeting Minutes -

January 25, 2021

The January board meeting of the Holland AGO was held on January 25 on Zoom. Those attending were: Rhonda Edgington, Gordon Bruns, Rick Van Oss, Linda Fulton, Paul Dalman, Alex Cross and Karen Howells.

The programming for the winter and spring months was discussed. It was agreed that the Zoom meeting which featured ideas for Advent was well received, appreciated and easy to plan. Not only were different ideas about possible music presented, but also methods of how churches were solving problems related to the pandemic involving recording and presentation. It was agreed that hearing how others handled the challenges helped not only the musicians but also the clergy. This has been a difficult time for us all and it was helpful to hear how others were managing and being creative.

Rhonda wondered if a similar program for the Lent and Easter Season might be beneficial to our members. After discussion, Gordon and Rhonda agreed to chair the event on Monday, February 8 at 7:30. That is 1½ weeks before Ash Wednesday. A list of others asked to present that night included friends who have contributed and others who might be willing to share for the first time. Persons can present in person or by giving suggestions to another person. (See Zoom information in the Upcoming Events section, below. Ed.)

The next Newsletter will include a section to remember Mike VanDoornik who was a much loved and important person to the Holland AGO.

In March, Steve and Rhonda will present an on-line session with the topic being “Ten Tips to Recharge Your Keyboard Playing.” It will include playing and talking and a chance for people to type in questions and comments.

In April or May, depending on the weather and the pandemic, we hope to have an outdoor social. We will ask friends to bring their own snack and chair. It will be an opportunity to see and talk in person. We will aim for Sunday afternoon, April 18 but will change the date to accommodate weather conditions. It will be in Kollen Park.

Rhonda is hoping to update the website. If one has any content to add about things happening in your church, in the community, or any interesting and fun organ events, please send it to Alex Cross for the Facebook page. (An interesting event could be something such as Salisbury Cathedral in England offering organ recitals while people come to receive their COVID vaccine.)

Rick suggested that when things open up again after the pandemic, that we present a Memorial Recital to honor loved ones during this time. A list of names of those remembered will be gathered at that time. Although other groups are planning similar memorials, it was decided to go ahead with an organ recital.

In April or May ideas of future plans for programming will be discussed.

Linda Fulton reported that Larry Sue of the handbell duo Larry and Carla Sue (who played for us in September) will be starting cancer treatment. Please keep him in your prayers.

Mary Overway's (organist from Zion Lutheran who was inducted in our League of Distinguished Service) husband passed away, and the AGO sent a note to her.

The Holland AGO sent a memorial gift to honor Mike VanDoornik to Music at Third.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Howells, Secretary

Upcoming Events -

Monday, Feb 8, 7:30pm – Console-side Chat with members re. Lent/Easter

Topic: Holland AGO Lent and Easter Sharing Meeting

Time: Feb 8, 2021 07:30pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83821829838>

Meeting ID: 838 2182 9838

Passcode: 956446

Monday, March 15, 7:30pm – Console-side Chat with Steve Jenkins and Rhonda Edgington:
10 Tips to Recharge your Keyboard Playing – Online, link to come

Sunday, April 18, 3pm, Kollen Park – Members social gatherings (in person!)
Bring your own lawn chair, drink, and snacks
(dependent on weather – watch for details)

Chapter Officers for 2020-2021

Dean - Rhonda Edgington

Sub-Dean - Linda Fulton

Secretary - Karen Howells

Treasurer - Gordon Bruns

Board Member - Rick Van Oss

Student Board Member - Alex Cross

Newsletter Editor - Paul Dalman

Website – hollandareaago.org