



Frank Italiano:

A Layman's Service

Frank Italiano, Jr.
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How does one describe his own father? A few words have been suggested over the years. “Hard-working,” “talented,” “gifted,” “dedicated,” “a dreamer,” “someone who constantly is thinking of something new,” “energetic,” “he never quits.” He did whatever was needed to get something done, even if that meant buying all the instruments so Luther High could have a band and orchestra, whether that meant personally taking out a loan to pay the musicians when he got conned by a promoter, whether that meant doing a lot of things because no one else would, whatever needed to be done, Frank would do it. Frank Italiano has given so much to so many people. His eighty-three years of life has been filled with serving others. He is an inventor, a businessman, and a founder of many organizations and festivals. He isn’t one to wait for someone to do something. If he sees something that needs to be done, he goes and does it.

When we look at what contributions people have made to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, we tend to think of called workers and what kind of influence that they have had on our church’s theology and structure. Every once in a while, though, a layman makes some significant contributions as well. Frank Italiano has not shaped our synod’s theology, nor has he done much that he would be mentioned in Fredrich’s *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. But, as a layman, he has served for many years and in many ways. He served on the Western Wisconsin District mission board for thirty-six years. He taught for seventeen years at Luther High School in Onalaska, WI. He founded the national Lutheran high school band festival. He influenced countless numbers of WELS musicians who attended Luther High School, and any who attended the Lutheran High School Band Festivals.

The beginning

Francesco Joseph Italiano was born in Red Granite, WI to Sicilian immigrants on December 21, 1915. As good Roman Catholics, his parents Joseph and Mary had him baptized. Soon after, the Italiano family moved to Waukesha, WI, where Frank's dad owned a tavern. Frank's early years were not the easiest. The Great Depression came, and everyone was forced to make the most out of everything. Being an Italian also brought it's problems:

I had the surprise of my life... in Junior high they had three divisions, first, second, and third. They put all of us in the third division, which was the dummies. And I woke up, I said to myself, "I don't want that." My parents were always saying, "Try to go with the kids better than you and do the best you can in school." I thought, "what am I going to do with this situation?" I thought, "well, I'm going to study the best I can." Christmas time ...one of the faculty went to the principal and said, "this boy doesn't belong here." So they put me in the first division. I was on the honor roll from then on.¹

Not long after this, Frank's life was changed forever. He was introduced to music.

In seventh grade the band director came up to me and said, "I want you to play the flute." I had never played an instrument before then... I went home and my parents dragged out the Sears Roebuck catalog... [my dad] looked at the price of the flute and the flute was \$37.50. Then he looked a little further at the price of the clarinet. He said, "We get you the clarinet," which was \$34.50.²

Frank was not a stranger to hard work. In high school, Frank joined the debate team. He spent countless hours at the library studying and researching. Because all the

¹home video from 1997

students on the team went on to Carroll College, their senior year at Carroll they became the only undefeated debate team in the nation.

As Frank poured himself into debate, so he also applied himself to his clarinet. “On the clarinet I really practiced hard.”³ “I also learned a lot by stealing from what other people would do... at rehearsal I would ... say ‘well, how did you do this?’”⁴ Remarkably, Frank only took ten lessons on the clarinet his entire life. The rest he observed and learned from others. But this did not hinder him. Through diligent study, Frank’s skill on the clarinet increased to astounding levels. In 1934 he was the champion state high school soloist, an honor given to only one student out of all the contestants, no matter what instrument he played.

Frank joined any local band that he could, learning from the members and directors so that he could grow in his skills. Later in life, Italiano lamented that he could have had a successful career as a professional clarinetist if he had realized how good he was.

Once Frank graduated from Carroll College with a BA in Chemistry, he got a job in Cashton, WI teaching in the high school. He got the job because they also needed a band director. Although Frank had no experience directing, he did have experience in music. He needed the job and took it. During that summer he went to Madison, where he enrolled in summer courses. There he learned about the individual instruments of the band from Ray Dvorak. “That first year, I was one page ahead of the students.”⁵ Frank taught at Cashton for three years. Proving that hard work and dedication bring results,

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵LaCrosse Tribune, May 7, 1989.

the first time his band competed, they received a first!

Then in 1941 he went to Richland Center, WI and taught there. This was quite an honor. Richland Center was the home of the first high school band in America.⁶

“Frank directed the city band which played the boys off to service each week. Without missing a step week in and week out there was a concert... for these heroes to be. In the long run it was Frank who marched off.”
- David Kraehenbuehl

Serving his country

After serving as a high school band director in Richland Center for three years, Frank grew tired of directing the band as local men left to serve their country in the military. Wanting to serve his country himself, Frank enlisted in the Navy in 1944. He put his talents to use for his country.

As a lieutenant, Frank volunteered to be trained to operate a new, secret invention, radar. Of the original eighty or so who volunteered, only thirty were selected. Of those thirty, Frank later learned, he was the top.⁷

As a radar officer, Lieutenant (jg) Italiano was stationed on the *U.S.S. Estes* (AGC-12). Carrying a lot of “brass” onboard, the *Estes* was the flagship of the Seventh Fleet under Rear Admiral William H.P. Blandy. At the battle of Iwo Jima, the *Estes* was in charge of the pre-invasion bombing, which was the biggest of the Pacific Campaign.⁸

⁶David Kraehenbuehl, May 12, 1989 “Frank Italiano’s 50th Anniversary Dinner” video. Note: David Kraehenbuehl was a friend and gifted composer. He followed Hindemith at Yale.

⁷Frank Italiano interview by Frank Italiano, Jr., March 20, 1999

⁸*Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic*. Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1954. 42.

The *Estes* also was present at Okinawa. Again arriving before the invasion, the *Estes* gained valuable reconnaissance information on the island. Although a torpedo was launched from the shore, the *Estes* avoided the torpedo by zigzagging.⁹

During “off” hours, Frank got some of the sailors on board the *Estes* together, found instruments for them in the Philippines, and formed a band on board the ship. Although mostly playing for their own enjoyment, the band also performed for the troops, along with a variety show of “talented” sailors.

After the atom bomb was dropped and Japan surrendered to the United States, the *Estes* entered into the Shanghai harbor. The Shanghai Symphony Orchestra was giving a concert, and it wanted more instruments for Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*. They asked for Frank’s band to join them. “The guy in charge was an army man... I went and I stood in back ... so I could see, and he didn’t know what to do... So I quickly ... went down to the office and said I would like to be a guest conductor.”¹⁰ Thinking it would be a good public relations idea, Admiral Blandy agreed to allow Frank to conduct the orchestra, as long as his name appeared on the program. Representatives of two English papers were present at the concert and raved about it. The orchestra asked Frank to stay on as a guest conductor for the year.

“It was a thrill to have that orchestra. All I had to do, if I got up there, with my hands, and if I just changed like this ...they changed right with you. So you have to watch every moment because they react.”¹¹ The rather wealthy merchants (several were millionaires) of the city prided themselves with their orchestra. They hired many talented musicians who had fled out of Europe during World War II.

⁹Frank Italiano, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. on April 24, 1994.

¹⁰Italiano March 20, 1999

One such musician is worth noting. Frank was rehearsing an all Tchaikovsky concert. During break a certain cellist came up to Frank and told him that he had premiered several of the works under Tchaikovsky. "He told me that Tchaikovsky wanted this like this and that like that. It really was quite a lesson."¹² Again, without formal education, Italiano broadened his knowledge and experience.

<p>"A wonderful conductor! I have never seen a conductor learn so fast." - Leonard Bernstein</p>
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Serving back home

After conducting the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and founding the Shanghai Pops Orchestra while he was there, Frank returned home to Wisconsin. This time he taught band at Logan High School in LaCrosse, WI. He taught at Logan for many years until the school system transferred him to Lincoln Middle School.

On October 1, 1939 Frank had married Doris Brenecke. Together, they had three children: Paul, who was born in 1942, Victoria, born in 1944, and George, who was born in 1947.

While he was teaching at Lincoln Middle School, Frank and Doris divorced. It was a rough time for Frank. He found a room to rent ^{From} by a former student's parents. Ruth and Arthur Haefner, parents of Lenore, boarded Frank in their second floor room.

As a student of Frank's, Lenore Haefner had shown great talent in playing the clarinet in both the band and the orchestra. Lenore had even babysitted Frank's children.

¹¹Television interview, WKOW channel 19 in LaCrosse, WI, May 5, 1989.

¹²Frank Italiano, March 20, 1999

She graduated from Logan High School in 1951 and went on to DMLC in New Ulm.

While she attended school there, Frank started to visit her on the weekends. Being seventeen years her senior, the couple was the “talk of the campus.” Because classes were still being held on Saturday mornings, Frank sat in on Lenore’s classes. They played clarinet duets together in the music building and attended church together. Slowly he grew to appreciate the Gospel message of the WELS.

Because of Lenore’s influence, Frank started taking information classes from Pastor Gutzke at Immanuel in LaCrosse. “There was no question, if I was going to marry him, he had to be Lutheran.”¹³

It took several years for Frank’s family to accept the fact that Frank was no longer in the Roman Catholic church and that he had married Lenore. But they eventually accepted it. Frank and Lenore were married on December 21, 1952, during the Christmas break of Lenore’s Sophomore year. Originally, Lenore was going to go back to New Ulm and finish her schooling. But she decided to stay in LaCrosse and help Frank raise his three children.

In the summer of 1951 Frank attended Tanglewood and studied conducting under Leonard Bernstein. Evidently, Bernstein was quite impressed with Frank. In a letter dated March 15, 1960, Bernstein wrote:

Mr. Italiano is known to me as a conducting student at Tanglewood in the Summer of 1951. He showed a real grasp of musical ideas and a charming and direct way of communicating those ideas to the orchestra. I have not been able to follow his progress since that summer, but if his gifts at that time were any indications, he should by now be a fine conductor.

Italiano recalls that Leonard Bernstein even offered Frank the opportunity to

¹³Lenore Italiano, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. on March 20, 1999

be his understudy in New York. But because the money was less than he received as a high school teacher and the cost of living was so high in New York, Frank declined.

“Because teaching gave me an income to support a family... I had to turn down Bernstein when he offered me to be his assistant with the New York Philharmonic because [it] paid so little money.”¹⁴

During many of the summers of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s Frank studied under Dr. Thor Johnson at Fish Creek, WI. For five years, the Peninsula Symphony of the clinic voted him to conduct them in a special concert.

“A wise man once told me, ‘be careful of what you want out of life because you are likely to get it.’ Francesco Italiano is a man who chose his goals very carefully and then proceeded to achieve them. There are too few people like him in the arts, we need more.”

- Charles Christopher Mark
1978 NPR broadcast

Serving the people

It was during these years that Italiano ^{fr}exploded in serving the community. This was done, in no small part, with the help of his wife, Lenore. In anything and everything Frank came up with, Lenore was there to manage it and make Frank’s dream ^{become} come a reality. Frank conducted the Coulee Region Symphony for many years.

When the Wisconsin Music Teachers’ Association split over an election, and ended up with two presidents, they asked Frank to be president and help settle their problems. Frank accepted and served over five years as president of this private instrumentalist and piano teacher association. The two factions were willing to listen to

¹⁴Television interview, May 5 1989

Frank, who was considered an outsider, but was also looked upon with respect for the work he had done in the state.

It was during this time that Pleasoning seasonings appeared on the market. After enjoying the gourmet food prepared by the rich Shanghai merchants' chefs, food just didn't taste right when he came back to the United States. He tried to fill the need for better tasting food with what was on the market.

I bought a certain seasoned salt that's on the market, and this was in 1946. With my chemistry and biology background I looked at it... and so I said, "why can't someone do it better?" ... I began to buy different herbs and spices. Every Saturday afternoon I spent a couple hours fooling around. ... I taught myself and after five years I developed this seasoning.¹⁵

As Frank played around with the different herbs and spices, he used his musical training and knowledge to blend the ingredients. As he hushed certain instruments in an orchestra so that the solo voice would come through, so he hushed the ingredients in his seasonings so that the salt flavor would come through. The result was a very low sodium line of seasoning blends that tasted much saltier than they actually were. Always wanting to make improvements, Frank would try his latest blend on co-workers at school, on friends, and of course, on his family.

Frank conducted the LaCrosse Symphony Orchestra for several years. While there, he realized that if the orchestra was to grow, they needed a strong feeder program. Originally intended to be run by the orchestra, Frank started the La Crosse Youth Symphony in 1967. The LaCrosse Symphony never saw the need for a youth symphony, so Frank kept it going even when he no longer conducted the LaCrosse Symphony. Lenore, true to her nature, was the manager of the LaCrosse Youth Symphony for years. Today, the program has grown to include two orchestras, one for middle school students,

one for high school students. It also has a beginning group for students who have just started lessons. It yearly holds both a piano competition and instrumental competition, the winner of each performing in concert with the orchestra accompanying them.

In the mid 1980's, Frank started the DaCapo Musical Reunion band. It was a band for anyone, both young and old alike, who hadn't played their instruments for some time and wanted to pick it up again. After high school or college, opportunities to play are very limited, so Frank filled that need and started this band. Meeting every Saturday afternoon, the band just enjoyed getting their lips back in shape, frequently showing the public their progress in concerts. Now conducted by Frank's son-in-law, Paul Boarman, the band still performs in parks for the enjoyment of the community.

In 1960, Frank founded what became the Symphony School of America. He brought together ideas he had picked up under Thor Johnson together with his own manner of learning music. He founded the five week summer music camp with the "apprenticeship" concept. The first chairs of each section of the orchestra were staffed by professional musicians from throughout the country. The rest of the orchestra was filled in by gifted high school and college students who had passed auditions. This way the students could learn directly by observing the professionals in rehearsal and also in private lessons. As usual, Lenore managed the massive camp. "I was very fortunate that my wife Lenore developed the knack of managing people...Now I could leave all the nitty gritty to her."¹⁶

Throughout the twenty-eight years of its existence, the Symphony School of America reached national and even international attention for its concerts. Perhaps the

¹⁵Television interview, WEAU channel 13 in Eau Claire, November 14, 1985.

¹⁶*LaCrosse Tribune*, May 7, 1989.

most prominent was the National Dvorak Festival held in Spillville, Iowa in 1979. Dvorak had spent the summer of 1893 in Spillville. Wanting to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of composer Antonin Dvorak's death, Frank approached the small village in Iowa with his idea. The village didn't quite know what they were getting into. Italiano acquired nationally renowned soloists, such as Nathaniel Rosen and Rudolf Firkusny. The orchestra and soloists performed throughout the week in the small town. *Newsweek* picked up on the unique festival and ran a two page article in its August 20th issue. The concerts were broadcast on NPR here in the United States and on *the Voice of America* in Europe.

The Symphony School had guest artists frequently join them. Charles Rex, associate concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic soloed with the orchestra any summer his schedule allowed him to. Mischa Mischakoff, concertmaster of the NBC orchestra under Arturo Toscanini, came the summer of 1976. He enjoyed ^{it} so much that he returned the following year and performed Mozart's *Symphonie Concertante for Violin and Viola* with his daughter.

In the summer of 1980, Fred Rogers of *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*, joined the orchestra for a children's' concert. The following summer Bob McGrath of *Sesame Street* joined the orchestra. That same year a slimmed orchestra joined Barbara Mandrel in a concert.

The Symphony School of America was also known for its concerts in Governor Dodge state park, west of Madison. Every year, Italiano would direct Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, complete with fireworks. In 1982, Frank collected any local musician, along with local hunters to fire blanks, and many, many fireworks. Representatives of

the Guinness Book of World Records recorded how many people were present, the amount of fireworks set off, and, of course, the decibel level. I could not find if it was actually published as “the most phenomenal 1812,” but I’m sure if it was, the record has been broken.

All his work for the community did not go unnoticed. In 1972 Frank Italiano was awarded the “Governor’s Award in the Arts.” Later in 1982 both he and Lenore received the “Wisconsin Governor’s Award in Support of the Arts.” On February 6, 1980, Frank received the “Distinguished Alumnus Award” from Carroll College.

“Mr. Italiano, a professional band and orchestra instructor, was among the founding fathers of [Luther High]. It was only natural that he would be interested in its music department.”

- David Adickes

Serving Luther High School

It is important to see all that Frank Italiano had done and continued to do for the public. It is this man who was in such public view that became the first band director at Luther High School in Onalaska, WI. When his oldest son, Paul, approached high school age, he saw the blessings of Christian education that Paul and the rest of his children received at Mt. Calvary Lutheran grade school. However, there was no place for secondary Christian education. Frank saw a need and helped fill that need. He became one of the “founding fathers” of Luther high, serving as secretary of the board that called Pastor Wayne Schmidt to be the school’s first principle in 1957.

Before then, he used his musical talent and helped raise interest in a Lutheran high school in the area.

During the years before the opening in 1957 of Luther High School, Pastor Steubs and I had organized a German band of adults which visited area congregations. We played for social functions and even presented a minstrel show. All this was to promote the idea of a Lutheran high school.¹⁷

The twenty-fifth anniversary book of Luther states, "It was only natural that he would be interested in its music department." Pastor Schmidt recalls the origins of the band:

Frank Italiano was a man who was very sensitive to public relations. And one of his early endeavors was to get a band started and to get a band on the street. The purpose was not to show off to the community of LaCrosse, but to make our constituency - the Wisconsin Synod churches in the LaCrosse area aware of Luther High School.¹⁸

Frank adds,

I believed that it could be a valuable mission and public relations tool. The public often judges a school by what they see in a parade. Therefore, the better the marching band - the better their concept of the school.¹⁹

The first year of Luther's existence only twenty-one students attended Luther. Frank got every one of them to be involved in band. The first year the band marched with First Lutheran grade school band (also under the direction of Italiano). But by the second year, the Luther band had its own uniforms and marched in parades as its own entity. Having a band on the street was very important for Italiano. "The band was a major factor in getting the publicity out," said Schmidt. Luther's present band director, Keith Wordell says,

The recruitment aspect for marching band is a very large thing. As we go out to the area cities...we have a great exposure to the populace in that town as well to our own future students. So that we can show the cross and crown, if you will, the back of our uniforms have that symbol on them, show the cross of Christ and the crown of Christ - what we stand for

¹⁷Frank Italiano, *Die Heidelberge Zeitung*, Fall 1987.

¹⁸Pastor Wayne Schmidt, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. on April 1, 1999.

¹⁹Frank Italiano, *Die Heidelberge Zeitung*, Fall 1987.

as a marching band - as we go down the street. So marching exposes Luther high School to the community, probably more so than any other single event up here at Luther High. If we take all the other spectator events together... it doesn't even come close to matching the amount of people that see Luther on the street.²⁰

God blessed Luther High. After only six years of existence, Luther had gone through numerous building projects and had an enrollment of 223. The band, of course, grew as well. It received recognition from the community as one the best.

One unique aspect of the Luther High band was its corner on the parade rout. While he was teaching at Richland Center, Frank developed what became known as the "square corner." It was "much more flash and excitement" than a normal "pinwheel" corner. The band was divided into equal squares. When it approached a corner, the front square would keep marching through the intersection as far as the far curb. At the sound of a whistle, the squares would then rotate towards the new direction. Once done rotating, the front square stepped off in the new direction while the remaining squares marched through the first. "It looked very, very complex. People would gather at the corners... they wanted to see that thing take place," says Adickes.²¹ Wordell adds,

We have a black cape on the back and a white front to the uniform... and finally when it comes to step sixteen, everybody is lined up in a similar direction again. You have gone from all different colors and flashes of colors to the same in one instant. As they step off it makes for an incredibly huge cheer because it does provide a unique visual aspect as well as accomplishing our purpose of turning a corner.²²

In 1966, Walt Disney held a national competition for high school bands. The movie Mary Poppins had just come out, and Disney offered a free trip to Disneyland for the band that came up with the best field show based on the movie. Contestants were to

²⁰Mr. Keith Wordell, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. March 26, 1999.

²¹Dave Adickes, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. April 5, 1999.

²²Wordell, March 26, 1999.

send in a reel-to-reel film of the show. Frank Italiano heard about the contest and set out to win it. He developed an elaborate field show. It included Mary Poppins giving an injured football player a “spoonful of sugar” to revive him. The band formed a kite, controlled by a streamer which a young boy had (this was Frank’s son, Dan). For the finale, “Feed the Birds,” the band bowed, tipped their hats, and released the “birds” - small white balloons that were hidden inside the hats. It made quite an impression, as the balloons went soaring into the air. The only problem was that Luther did not have the best equipment. They filmed it on 8mm, but they had to record the sound separately. That meant that when Disney received it, they had to play the video film and the audio at the same time. It was virtually impossible to get the two to line up. Luther did not win this national competition. But they did get second place. The judges commented that Luther had the most original field show. If they had had better equipment, they might have won the competition. Frank’s son, George was a senior that year. “It was a lot of fun. Dad was always good getting everyone enthused. He had no problem doing that. It was natural for him.”²³

On October 12, 1967, the Interstate 90 bridge across the Mississippi River was dedicated. The governors of both Minnesota and Wisconsin were present. Since Luther High had students from both states in its student body, and since Luther was known for having a good band, it was chosen to play for the dedication ceremony. Even though strong winds nearly blew the flags off the bridge, the band gave a memorable performance. In a letter dated October 25, Governor Warren P Knowles of Wisconsin wrote:

I attend many programs like this during the course of a year. Many of the

²³George Italiano, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. April 3, 1999.

events have bands and similar musical groups on their programs, but seldom have I heard a band that approached the excellence of the Luther High School musicians, and never have I heard one that surpassed it.

In 1962 (1961 according to Rev. Schmidt) Italiano started "Heidelberg Day" at Luther. It was an opportunity to enjoy fellowship, food, and entertainment provided by the music department. At first, no one thought anyone would come to it, Schmidt included:

That was one of the ideas that most of us thought had come off the wall, or that Frank had dreamt of when he was just not totally in his right mind. We had a German heritage, a German culture and so he, with the name of Italiano, was trying to have an evening at old Heidelberg. Well if he wanted to have the evening, we'll go along with it and have it. But it will very likely be somewhat of a flop or a moderate success at best. We were all absolutely wrong. The people came in droves the first year.²⁴

Over 700 people came the first time. No one had expected that many people, and they ran out of food! After better organization and planning the following years, over 2,000 people each year have enjoyed celebrating their German heritage and eating good food while listening to good music. It also provided any opportunity for association members to walk in the halls of their high school, which encouraged them to take ownership of it.

In 1966 Italiano formed the first and only orchestra in the Lutheran high schools of the Wisconsin Synod. Even among public schools, this was not that common. Luther was one of four in western Wisconsin that had such a program. The orchestra was fed by a string program at Mt. Calvary grade school. It received several awards on the district music level. Unfortunately, when Italiano left Luther, it did not take long until the orchestra was disbanded.

One unique thing about Frank's teaching music was what he called the "point

system.” Grades were given on the basis of the amount of work, and not on who could play the best. It put everyone on the same level. There was a list of certain things the student had to do. Once he or she completed an item satisfactorily, a point was given. Seating within each section of the band was determined not by grade, but by who had the most points. This way Freshmen could challenge Seniors. It fostered a healthy competitive mood. The Seniors did not become lazy. All worked hard for their position. Dan Italiano, Frank’s son, and himself a high school orchestra director, says, “It worked marvelously at Luther High. They had something to work towards.”²⁵

Under his baton, Luther High gained a reputation for having highly skilled bands. This was in no small way because of Frank Italiano’s dedication. When the band needed instruments, Frank bought them with his own money. Because Luther was unable to pay him a fair fee, Frank still taught at Lincoln Middle School. He taught band at Luther during his lunch break. He never gave up on his students. He inspired them and gave them all a love for music, even if they themselves couldn’t make music. Finally, in 1974, Frank resigned because of conflicts with a new principle. He also felt that the board, in limiting the band in certain areas, was not giving the students the best education they could give.

²⁴Pastor Wayne Schmidt April 1, 1999

²⁵George Italiano, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. April 3, 1999.

“[Frank] was always concerned with presenting our mission congregations in a very positive light and doing it in a very tasteful way.”

- Pastor Donald Buch
chairman of mission board

Serving his District

For a remarkable thirty-six years, Frank Italiano served on the Western Wisconsin District mission board. He was elected to the board in 1960. Almost immediately, the board had to deal with the ramifications of the split with the Missouri Synod. As a result of that split, the joint campus center in Madison had to be dealt with. Eventually, the board started their own campus ministry, calling Pastor Richard Balge to be its first pastor.

Throughout his thirty-six years on the board, Italiano served in various roles, such as secretary and treasurer. Coming from such a varied background and life experiences, Frank offered a unique perspective to the board. Pastor Donald Buch, who was chairman from 1992 to 1996, recalled, “the thing that impressed me was his varied talents.”²⁶ “While he was a business man... he never tried to make mission a business.” When Buch came to the board in 1986, Frank was the veteran on the board. “He was a little bit of a historian ... to give us a better perspective on what was going on in those missions.”

Frank’s “zeal was obvious.” “He was always concerned with presenting our mission congregations in a very positive light and doing it in a very tasteful way.” Frank was also concerned with getting the true message of the Gospel out there. “He was

always looking for ways to bring the truth of the WELS...so people would have a clear idea of what the truths were in the WELS that could really be blessings to them in their spiritual lives.”

Being on a mission board in Wisconsin, the heart of our synod, brought its challenges. Throughout the years, the board would waive starting a new mission in its district so that another district could open a mission in a seemingly more receptive field. For some reason, Illinois missions offered problems. Many of the missions closed or struggled to remain open. “He was always concerned with the health of the missions.” Another challenge was the Prairie du Chein situation. When MLPS closed, Grace entered some rough years as it tried to establish itself without the school.

But it also brought its blessings. The DeForest congregation experienced tremendous growth, as well as the campus ministry in Madison.

Some places that were under the board jurisdiction are, Grace in Prairie du Chein, Trinity in Goodview, MN, Mt. Olive in Monroe, English Lutheran in Viroqua, St. Paul’s in Moline, Peace in Janesville, Immanuel in Mosine, St. Mark in Eau Claire, Hope in Belvidere, Gethsemane in Davenport, Iowa, and Christ Lutheran in Baraboo. In later years, South Rockford, Wisconsin Rapids, Portage, Verona, Waunakee were added.

Frank also served his District as a delegate to the conventions. Frank attended District Convention in 1956, only four years after converting to Lutheranism and marrying Lenore. He was a delegate again in 1960, 1962, 1964, 1988, 1990, and 1992. Unfortunately, for the years between 1964 and 1988, the proceedings do not list the names of the delegates. I’m sure that for the majority of them, Frank was present.

²⁶Pastor Donald Buch, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. March 27, 1999.

|| Serving his Synod

As well as being a delegate to district conventions, Frank also served as a delegate to the 1957 and 1987 synod conventions.

While Frank was teaching at Luther High, he thought of something that has brought together the area Lutheran high schools and preparatory schools of our synod. Depending on who you talk to, Frank started the Lutheran high school band festival in 1961 or 1962. He got together with Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee and had a joint band concert. Since then, the festival has grown so large, that every other year two regional band festivals are held, with a national in the intermediate years. All twenty-three Lutheran high schools participate. The students enjoy fellowship and making good music. At first, the conductors of the bands directed the mass bands. But, starting in the eighties, notable clinicians were hired to direct, thus giving the students a unique experience they could not get elsewhere.

The band festival of 1972 was hosted by Luther High. In typical Italiano fashion, Frank wanted to do something “big.” What else, then the *1812 Overture*? Even though it was an indoor concert, Frank “had everything we could imagine that could make the battle.” That included steel drums, ten gauge shotguns with blanks, cherry bombs, firecrackers, the works. Because of the nature of it all, they never practiced with the “battle” equipment. Dave Adickes, the choir director at Luther, would light the firecrackers on the stage, and that would be the signal for everyone else to start. Adickes recounts, “I didn’t have any music. Frank said, ‘when you hear the theme, that’s when you start.’” What Frank didn’t tell me is that the theme comes in and then

it's repeated and the battle scene isn't until it comes in the second time."²⁷

Well, Adickes heard the theme (the first time). "So I lit the firecrackers."

Everyone followed. Frank's daughter, Ruth, was in the band: "Because we were inside, in a gym, everything just echoed and so we couldn't hear each other play and it was just a fiasco."²⁸ Italiano was forced to stop the band. Once everyone had run out of ammunition, Frank hollered through the smoke, "you're 64 measures early!" He then started the band where they had stopped and finished without the big ending. "We had already shot all our weapons off!"²⁹

Throughout the many years, many students have participated in the band festivals. It has broadened their horizons and given them musical experiences that they never forget.

<p>"[Music] was a way of life." - Ruth McCabe Frank's daughter</p>
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|| Serving his family

Besides raising Frank's first three children, Lenore also bore four more children for Frank: Dan, born in 1953, Ruth, born in 1957, Kathy, born in 1959, and Frank, Jr., born in 1972. Life in the Italiano household was by no means normal.

When asked what life was like growing up in the Italiano family, all the siblings responded with the same word: "busy." Ruth said, "there wasn't any time to get into

²⁷Dave Adickes April 5, 1999

²⁸Ruth McCabe, interviewed by herself, March 26, 1999.

²⁹Ibid.

trouble.”³⁰ Her sister adds, “there was always stuff going on. But it was the way we were.”³¹ Their brother, Dan, remembers, “I don’t ever remember it being calm. There was always something going on, and normally three or four things at once. Sometimes it was hard to find time to relax.”³²

Classical music was the norm. “We never listened to anything other than classical music. I had to sneak to the neighbors [to listen to the Beatles].”³³ In such a musical household, practicing wasn’t easy. “I didn’t like to practice when they [Frank and Lenore] were home, because they could be anywhere in the house and they would yell out, dad a lot, would yell out, ‘That’s wrong!’ It wasn’t nice practicing with them. I tried not to do it when they were around.”³⁴

Although not an outspoken man with his faith, Frank did make sure his children went to church and heard the Word of God. He sent them to Christian day schools and high schools. He tried to live a Christian life as an example for his children.

But Frank was not perfect. His Italian temper could be fierce. When he became excited, which is easy for an Italian, he raised his voice and sounded angry to everyone else. Many students were afraid of him. His booming voice was not something you wanted aimed at you. By working so close to Lenore in so many things, arguments over his ideas tended to be very heated. Frank always was coming up with new ideas for things. Often, they would be so grand, that they just weren’t practical. When Lenore or someone else pointed this out, he did not like it. At times, this caused a lot of stress in the house.

³⁰Ruth McCabe March 26, 1999.

³¹Kathy Boarman, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. March 20, 1999.

³²Dan Italiano, interviewed by Luke Italiano. April, 1999.

³³Ruth McCabe, March 26, 1999.

But for all his faults, Frank had a love for his students. Lenore comments, “He was a very exciting teacher. I think one of his successes in the teaching field is he is persistent... so he does encourage and is persistent.”

For over fifty years, Frank Italiano has served others with his many and varied gifts. His contributions to the Wisconsin Synod may not be great and glorious. But he has influenced many of his students with his love for music. Several generations of WELS musicians know his name and probably could tell you a story of when they had him as a teacher or when they went to band festival. I hope and pray that every layman realizes what kind of impact and contribution they can make on our synod, just as Frank Italiano has.

³⁴Kathy Boarman, interviewed by Frank Italiano, Jr. March 20, 1999.

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