

"Borning Cry" songwriter dies at age 79

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [April 12, 2017](#) issue

John Carl Ylvisaker, a songwriter and composer best known for "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry," died March 9 at age 79 at his home in Waverly, Iowa.

His website gives the cause of death as complications from cancer and multiple system atrophy.

He studied music and history at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and during part of the 1960s traveled around the United States working for civil rights causes, counting activist and folk musician Pete Seeger as a major influence, his website notes.

His ministry "introduced to the Lutheran church a new genre of church music—the contemporary folk hymn—a combination of folk song and rock 'n' roll," Concordia wrote in an alumni publication. He wrote more than a thousand songs and created three songbooks titled *Borning Cry I, II, and III*.

He spent 15 years working for the American Lutheran Church, a predecessor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including as a composer-in-residence and a radio show producer. He also directed music in parishes and led workshops, retreats, and youth gatherings.

"His workshops provided a message of encouragement to both clergy and laity that worship music on all but high feast days is to be easily sung by those in the pews, making the service participational by all instead of a performance by a few," his website notes.

The Wartburg College campus plans to offer [live streaming of Ylvisaker's memorial service](#), which he created, on April 26 at 1 p.m., as well as an archive version.

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