

THE NEW ORGANIST

RECRUITING AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Naomi Rowley

The shortage of organists is a frequent topic of conversation among church musicians today. While voicing reactions to the problem has value, organists should be encouraged to move beyond a reactive approach to one which is proactive. Individuals in their respective churches can have a positive effect on recruiting new organists. The following suggestions will inspire, one hopes, those who wish to make a proactive response to the crisis.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Readers who are familiar with the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey (Simon and Schuster) will recognize this statement as habit num-

ber five. When applied to the teaching field, it can have a very positive effect on student-teacher relations, especially if the instructor is the one who seeks first to understand the new organ student. Several examples presented here illustrate this concept.

1. *Seek first to understand* the frantic schedules often maintained by individuals today.

Solution: Approach a potentially prospective organ student with an initial short-term commitment to the instrument. For example, pulling stops or turning pages for the organist on a given Sunday. Or, program a charming duet for organ where the *primo* part can be played with a "non-organ" keyboard tech-

nique. An excellent example is Robert Cundick's *Three Pieces for Organ Duet*, published by Concordia.

Result: A short-term commitment may inspire the individual to pursue serious study of the instrument.

2. *Seek first to understand* that not all styles of organ music are equally appealing to every new organist. The person who is smitten with jazz and modern idioms will find the "Hornpype" from Roesch's *Suite for Organ* (Flammer HH-5045) or Langlais's "Pasticcio" from his *Organ Book* (Elkan-Vogel) to be real winners. A Baroque enthusiast, however, might prefer the F-major Prelude from the *Eight Little Preludes and Fugues* attributed to J.S. Bach.

Solution: Provide the new organist with choices. Demonstrate excerpts from several pieces which have been selected by you for their pedagogical merit as well as for the variety of styles they represent. Let the student make the final selection of the piece to be studied.

Result: The teacher will become more familiar with the new organist's musical tastes and how they can gradually be expanded. The student, having input regarding some of the lesson material, should have a greater commitment to practicing the entire assignment.

3. *Seek first to understand* the frustration of advanced keyboard players who start organ and are relegated to very simple repertoire while learning to coordinate hands and feet.

Solution: Be aware of such challenging manuals-only repertoire as "Les Anges" from *La Nativité* by Messiaen or one of the English voluntaries.

Result: The student will feel musically challenged by these selections and will therefore be more willing to invest time in the tedious process of building a solid organ technique.

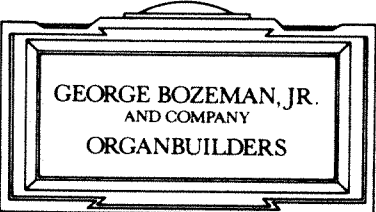
4. *Seek first to understand* that an organist often feels isolated while making music. By contrast, colleagues who sing or play other instruments have group experiences through choir, band, and orchestra.

Solution: Create frequent opportunities for a student to be involved with the organ in a public setting. For organ demonstrations ranging from pre-school groups to adults, even the newest of the new organists can be involved by pulling stops or playing an excerpt from a current piece. Of course, playing for some aspect of the church service should be encouraged as soon as the student has acquired adequate confidence and skill.

Result: Isolation of the organist will be diminished. Support from peers will increase. More interest in the organ will be generated and possibly a few more new students will be asking for lessons.

It is quite apparent that suggestions reflecting the "seek-first-to-understand" approach could continue indefinitely. May the ideas presented in this brief article be a source of inspiration for proactivity among many church organists who, in turn, will experience how successful the "seek-first-to-understand" concept can be in teaching.

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