

A Position Statement from the American Guild of Organists on the Use of Prerecorded Music for Worship

Since its inception in 1896, the American Guild of Organists has supported the role of its members in worship. Its central purposes are "to advance the cause of organ and choral music, to increase their contributions to aesthetic and religious experiences, and to promote their understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment."

As we anticipate the new century, the Guild appreciates what technology has to offer clergy, musicians, and congregations. At the same time, the Guild strongly believes that the human element in worship leadership, whether it be from the lectern, pulpit, or organ loft, is irreplaceable. Because worship is an encounter between the God of life and human beings created in God's image, its modes of expression should be authentic expressions of living persons.*

Prerecorded substitutes cannot replace living, breathing worship leaders who interact with living, breathing congregations. The use of recorded choirs, organs, and cantors, although it may seem to serve an immediate need, has the effect of discouraging the local community from marshaling the resources necessary for authentic celebration.**

The Guild urges churches and synagogues to resist the temptation to replace the offering of the community with such impersonal devices as taped accompaniment tracks, instrumental reproductions, prerecorded sermons and prayers, and the like. Rather, the Guild advocates the cultivation of live music making, preaching, and praying in communal worship.

Critical to this endeavor is the continuing development of musicians who will be equipped to serve congregations now and in the future. For its part, the Guild is encouraging new organists through its Pipe Organ Encounter projects around the country, training current musicians through its continuing education efforts, and recognizing outstanding achievers through its certification and competition programs. The Guild urges all worship leaders, lay and ordained, to join in a commitment to programs that will assure integrity in worship and worthy praise of Almighty God.

*Paraphrased from "Resolution on the Use of Prerecorded Music in the Liturgy," National Association of Pastoral Musicians, July 12, 1991, paragraph 2.

**Excerpted from "The Snowbird Statement on Catholic Liturgical Music," November 1, 1995, page 9.