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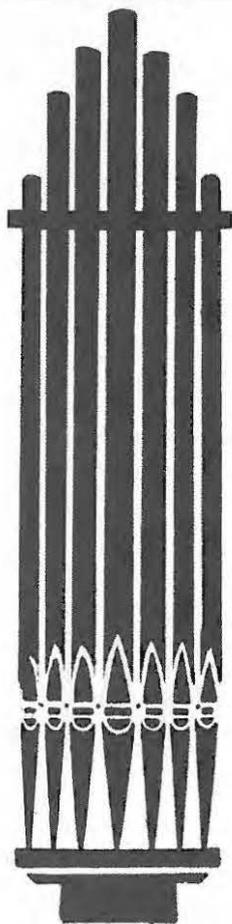
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## LIZZIE PLAYALOT'S ADVICE COLUMN FOR SUBSTITUTE ORGANISTS

(as related to m.j. nelson, scribe)

IT JUST occurred to me that I haven't paid my chapter dues yet, so maybe the powers-that-be won't print this helpful advice until I pay up! But let me introduce myself. Yours truly has been around since pianos and pump organs were the keyboards of church choice, and the old-fashioned "call-out-your-favorite-number" hymn sing was the highlight of the summer. So my collective experience should be worth something to posterity!

Lately, I've been pondering how long I can carry on with this subbing business, so I decided to share my multitude of experiences with those of you who have continued to use your God-given talents to cover the territory for those fortunate enough to have church employment of their own.

First and foremost, substituting is definitely *not* for the faint-hearted. If you're comfortable sitting in the congregation, relaxed and fulfilled by the efforts of the music department and the preaching of the Word, maybe that's where you belong. But if you feel that you're sitting on the wrong side of the pulpit and wasting good talent, then you certainly belong on that organ bench.

Your second decision is to get out your map and draw a circle, with your home in the center, showing how far you intend to travel to a subbing job. Don't forget to count your time and distance to rehearse before your Sunday appearance. You just have to learn to say no when the map says "no go"!

A third consideration is whether you are or are not willing to participate in choir rehearsals. By all means, don't forget to ask if that is an expectation of your acceptance of the sub job. Also, ask if you would be the rehearsal accompanist, or are you expected to direct the rehearsal, that is, if the rehearsal is part and parcel of your acceptance. Lots of things to think about here.

Next on the list: Are you willing to play electronic organs, including those with twelve toothpick pedals, or even five-rank pipe organs? While we're on the subject of the instrument, be sure to find out from the incumbent organist if there are any quirky stop combinations already set up. Then you won't be surprisingly embarrassed when you innocently punch the General Cancel and unknowingly activate the Trumpet-en-chamade in the process!

Unless you luck out with a glorious instrument at a familiar location, don't plan to blow away the congregation with your rendition of the Widor "Toccata" before you discover there aren't enough manuals to go around. You might have to scale back your repertoire and plan to shape it around two-manual instruments, keeping in mind that they may or may not be in good "shape" when you get there. Even the mighty instrument at the National Cathedral has many dead notes and non-working stops. (However, if Washington calls, you might want to disregard that circle on your little "go-and-no-go" map!)

Number five leads to insisting on having copies of the anthems, solo, and/or hymns a week ahead of time—or at least by the day that you intend to make a trip to the church to practice—then pray that someone doesn't

change them between that occasion and Sunday morning. Those things do happen sometimes.

Advice number six: By all means, state your fee right up front. If that is a stumbling block, it's better to stumble on the first phone call than to stumble off the organ bench after the Sunday service with a \$15 check in your hand or a bushel of apples to carry home! I, for one, have learned to "open my mouth" at the right time—after some deflating experiences.

Unlucky seven is your answer to: "Will you or will you not play for weddings?" If you are accustomed to very high standards of wedding music, you may want to think twice about your answer to this one. Will it give you indigestion to accompany a soloist singing "The Hawaiian Wedding Song" or a selection from "West Side Story"? Or if Uncle Dudley shows up in the middle of your prelude music insisting that he is going to surprise the bride with a violin solo, and plops the music on the rack for you to sight-read, will you be able to cope?

Number eight involves funerals, which are mostly sad, but more easily accompanied than high-wired weddings! But, here again, discuss your fee up front for either of these events, and try to find out if the fee is coming from the church, the family—or the mortuary. In my experience, I turned down only one funeral—where the deceased had indicated before his demise that he wanted the casket rolled out at the end of the service to the tune of "Off We Go into the Wild, Blue Yonder"—because I couldn't find the music. I don't know who played for that service. I didn't ask.

Oh yes, my number nine advice should probably be at the head of the list. It would be an excellent idea to know how to turn on the chancel or balcony lights (wherever the organ is placed) in a strange building. Make certain that someone will meet you at the church the first time you go there, either for practice or for the church service, to let you in on little secrets, such as "Where is the key to the organ hidden?" or "Where is the nearest restroom?" If the instrument is activated by a wall switch twelve feet away from the bench, that is an essential bit of knowledge to be filled in on.

Finally, be prepared to wear a smile when approached following the service with comments concerning the fact that you had played the service or the hymns faster or slower than is the norm for that congregation. Remember, variety is the spice of life . . . and keep smiling! You can always say "No" the next time the phone rings.

Not my words, but from a friend who has spent hours upon hours substituting on one or another organ bench, "Enjoy! It's fun . . . and you can always say . . . thank heavens that isn't my choir, or thank heavens I don't have to listen to that pastor every Sunday!"

Please do not regard my comments necessarily as Lizzie's "Ten Commandments" but rather as "Ten Advices" that may help smooth your road to substituting, with potholes few and far between. Happy traveling! May the wind be at your back, but the air-conditioning not turn your pages before you're ready!