

# PART-TIME CHURCH MUSICIANS

## A PLEA TO CLERGY WHO EMPLOY MUSICIANS IN A PART-TIME CAPACITY

(AGO members are encouraged to photocopy this page to give to their church/synagogue leadership or to a non-AGO member to do likewise.)

### To the Pastor, Rabbi, or Church Administrator

Dear Friend:

If I might borrow a page from our good friends in the Public Broadcasting world, there is something that organists and, by extension, places of worship share with NPR and PBS. You have heard the pitch during the infamous "pledge drive" on most public broadcasting stations, reminding listeners that many of us enjoy and use public radio and television but never contribute a dime to their support. One of the pleas for giving actually is rather persuasive. It goes something like this:

If you listen to our programs regularly, won't you pledge a few cents a day, or a dollar a week in support? All this sonic beauty comes your way; how could you not contribute the equivalent of the cost of your designer coffee drink once a week?

So they pitch. And many of us, even reluctantly, agree. We make our pledge.

If you are a pastor and employ an organist for your weekly worship, the compensation, one would hope, is just. But does your organist live on bread alone? Or do you encourage professional development and nourishment for your musician that goes beyond their salary?

Here comes the pitch (*pace* NPR and PBS): For a mere \$92 a year you can give your organist support, in the form of a membership in the American Guild of Organists (AGO). For this small investment, you will be giving a gift of a wealth of professional networks, educational opportunities, and benefits that ultimately will pay off in happiness and even greater musical richness and beauty each week in your worship.

This is a small price to pay for such weekly rewards. \$1.84 a week is a lot less than the price of a latte with a single shot of espresso!

What will you get for this investment in your organist's professional development? A subscription to THE AMERICAN ORGANIST (TAO) Magazine, "the most widely read journal devoted to organ and choral music in the world." That in itself is a bargain for its cor-

nucopia of articles and information in the realm of church music. Beyond TAO, the Guild offers free local chapter meetings where organists and choral musicians can network, share information, hear music specialists, and develop skills in music leadership, hymn playing, choral accompaniment, and discover repertoire new and old. Chapters also promote study through competitions and scholarships for young musicians.

Like most learned societies, the AGO offers other publications (beyond TAO), plus many forms of continuing education via workshops, certification study, and more. Thus, there are practical as well as scholarly benefits.

Before my retirement (for 25 years I taught sacred music courses to hundreds of future ministers at the seminary) I always found time to offer my students some thoughts on their ability once ordained to greatly empower music in worship by valuing their musicians. I suggested that they encourage young people to consider church music a worthy profession. I said that pastors have a unique position from which to foster great art, great music in their ministry mainly by uplifting talented leadership. And I pointed out that my own path to a lifelong profession began with one kind pastor leading me to the organ bench and suggesting that I transfer my pianistic talents to the organ. The church as a patron of the arts over centuries has actively promoted greatness in our civilization, especially in the realm of sacred music. Why shouldn't pastors follow suit, and encourage their musicians to improve. How? By making membership in the AGO a real benefit to them.

If each religious leader, from seminary professor to pastor or rabbi, and even to the music minister or colleague, valued membership in a professional organization such as the American Guild of Organists, the resulting vitality in worship music would certainly be worth a lot more than the price of a latte with a single shot of espresso! I hope you will support your organist by gifting this professional membership.

JAMES A. YEAGER, DMA  
Member, Task Force on the  
Part-Time Church Musician  
E-mail: jyeager@wildblue.net

Organist-Assistant Choir Director  
First Presbyterian Church  
Albuquerque, N.Mex.

Professor Emeritus of Sacred Music  
Pontifical College Josephinum  
Columbus, Ohio

The AGO Task Force on the Part-Time Church Musician recently met in Baltimore to consider ways to promote the Guild more broadly to non-member colleagues. The Baltimore AGO Chapter has offered generously to support the work of the task force. Perhaps other chapters could do the same.

joby@jobybell.org  
www.jobybell.org  
www.music.appstate.edu

**JOBY BELL**  
ORGANIST

Hayes School of Music  
Appalachian State University  
Boone, NC 28608  
(828) 262-6467



**Foley~Baker Inc.**

Quality Pipe Organ Services  
Throughout America

January, 2010

*St. Saviour R.C. Church,  
Part I of General Reconditioning Work*  
Brooklyn, NY

info@foleybaker.com • 1-800-621-2624 • www.foleybaker.com