

NEW GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES AND CODES OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

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IT HAS come to the attention of the Committee on Career Development and Support (formerly known as the Professional Concerns Committee) that these documents need revision, and after diligent reworking, these new documents were approved by the National Council of the American Guild of Organists at its meeting on November 15, 1999. The number of cases of questionable or wrongful termination has increased dramatically in the past year. Societal pressures on churches are growing, which often results in financial pressures, and these pressures can ultimately, in a variety of ways, be transferred to the music program. In a word, the church musician is in many ways more vulnerable than ever before. It is critical that the Guild do whatever it can in order to ensure a situation where its members can practice their art and continue faithfully to perform their professional duties. These documents make some important changes that will significantly affect the strength of the Guild in supporting this fair treatment of its members.

There's an old adage about a chain being no stronger than its weakest link. I don't like to characterize Guild members as impersonal "links," but in truth, our strength does lie in numbers. It relies on our support of each other, and in our collective response to employing institutions and the way in which we wish to be treated.

I ask you to read these documents carefully, to take them seriously, and to do all that you are able to do to help preserve and ultimately transmit our vital heritage.

My thanks to the members of this committee who have worked diligently to provide these documents: Karen Rich and Donna Hackler, committee directors, and committee members Craig Chotard, Lee Ridgway, Margaret Witschard, and W. James Owen. Our work is based on the foundation provided by this committee under the previous direction of Maureen Jais-Mick and my predecessor, David Vogels.

Why do we need these new documents?

The National Councillor for Professional Development and the Committee on Career Development and Support (formerly known as Professional Concerns) have been dealing with an increasing number of situations of wrongful termination of our members by their employing institutions. While our goal is to help our members "head off" a difficult situation before it becomes critical (through workshops, articles, chapter programs on the "people side" of our jobs), the fact is that institutions increasingly seem to be viewing our members as "disposable" (or dispensable) commodities, terminating them without offering the possibility of mediation, without giving adequate notice or an appropriate severance package. [Note: the severance package issue will be addressed in a new model contract that will be presented in the near future.]

What's new about these Grievance Procedures?

The new *Grievance Procedures* are clearer and easier to follow, more streamlined, and they have more reasonable timetables.

What is really the biggest change?

They have more "teeth" than ever before. The AGO is not a union, nor does its membership wish it to be one. However, it seems appropriate for the Guild to do everything within its power to enable its members to enjoy employment with adequate compensation and fair, secure working conditions. It is also appropriate that the Guild support its members in cases of wrongful termination and help them receive adequate compensation for their services in such a situation.

And exactly what are these "teeth"?

An AGO member is now specifically *prohibited* from seeking or accepting regular employment at an

institution under investigation or one found to have terminated a member wrongfully.

What do you mean, "prohibited"?

An AGO member may perform interim services for the institution in question, but may not "seek or accept regular or permanent employment" while the *Grievance Procedures* are pending, or if it has been determined that wrongful termination of an AGO member has taken place.

Where "caution" on the part of a member seeking employment at such an institution was formerly encouraged, the new *Grievance Procedures* direct specifically that *no Guild members may seek or accept a position at this institution if an institution has wrongfully treated one of our members.*

And what actually happens if an AGO member applies for this job?

If an AGO member applies for "regular or permanent employment" in a job that has been made vacant by wrongful termination (or for one whose status is pending under these *Grievance Procedures*), that member is subject to procedures outlined in the *Discipline*, which could result in expulsion from the American Guild of Organists.

Expulsion from the Guild? Is that really such a big deal?

Guilds are bands of individuals with common interests, skills, and goals. They provide mutual personal and professional support; they offer educational and professional resources. The salaries and benefits of many organists in this country have been increased due to the work of the Guild through the Compensation Guidelines and the Wedding and Funeral Guidelines that have been issued over the years. Employment conditions have been greatly enhanced by the Sample Contracts issued by the Guild. Membership in a guild such as the AGO is to be valued highly,

and removal from the rolls of the Guild is the strongest deterrent available to us.

When do these new Grievance Procedures take effect?

The new *Grievance Procedures* are in effect as of their adoption at the November 15, 1999, meeting of the National Council.

What about the new Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Standards?

The *Code of Professional Standards*, in common with the codes of many other professions, outlines the skills we pledge to maintain and the way we expect to treat others and to be treated in employment situations. It lists our aspirations, the principles of conduct that are desirable for a member of our organization.

The *Code of Ethics*, on the other hand, articulates rules by which we promise to conduct our professional lives. Violation of any of these rules is actionable and may be dealt with by procedures outlined in the *Discipline*, which could result in expulsion from the American Guild of Organists.

How are the new documents different from the previous documents?

They spell out our policies in greater detail than before and they address issues and situations that had not been dealt with in previous versions.

Such as?

They include such obvious issues as the need for truth and honesty in representing oneself on a resume, or the need for a member not to claim "health problems," for example, when he/she is actually leaving an institution in order to take another job.

Why am I asked to sign the Code of Ethics every time I renew my membership?

It is important for each of us to be reminded, on an annual basis, of the rules to which we subscribe as members of this Guild. The conduct we can expect from others and the behavior they can expect from us can only be ensured if we individually adhere to these rules. While assent to this *Code* is

implied simply by one's membership in the American Guild of Organists, it will be included with the annual membership renewal forms distributed from Headquarters, beginning with the 2000–2001 membership year. A member must affirm by signature that the *Code* has been read and will be adhered to.

When do the new Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Standards take effect?

These new Codes are in effect as of their adoption by the National Council on November 15, 1999.