

POINTS OF CONSIDERATION FOR CHURCHES AND CHURCH MUSICIANS

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DEAN'S MESSAGE

We hope that you will find this new document generated by our Professional Concerns Committee and approved by the Executive Committee helpful if you enter the church musician marketplace or change church positions in the future. Most of us who have considered the content of this paper are pleasantly surprised at the care and detail of examining all aspects of the church musician's position, in terms of support both musical and fiscal. While most of us tend to think of the new church position in terms of travel time, organ and salary, there is much more which must be considered in the acquisition of a new job. I think you will be surprised by the details which really make a church musician's place comfortable and rewarding.

Special thanks go to Rick Gremlitz, who chaired the subcommittee which prepared this checklist.

KATHERINE D. METIVIER

GENERAL

1. What are the musical resources of the church?
 - a. instruments
 - b. choirs
 - c. music library
2. Number of regular weekly services
3. Number and type of special services
4. What is the recent musical tradition (refer to bulletins)?
5. What percentage of a full-time position is the musician's position?
6. What is the title of the position—does this title accurately reflect the scope of the job and the intent of the church?
7. Does the position include direct or indirect responsibility for Sunday school music programs?

8. What are the expectations for service music—frequency, length and style of preludes, postludes and offertories?

ORGANIZATION

1. To whom is the musician responsible at the staff/administrative level?
2. To whom is the musician responsible at the policy-making level?
3. Is the musician an ex-officio member of music and/or worship committees?
4. Does the musician order music and authorize payment for same?
5. Does the musician have final authority on music selection?
6. How are hymns chosen?
7. Are regular church staff meetings held?
8. Does the musician arrange repair and tuning of instruments?
9. How does the musician participate in the budget formulation process?
10. Are office space and secretarial services provided?

CHOIRS

1. What are the times and places for choir rehearsals?
2. What is the duration of Sunday warm-up rehearsals?
3. Is there any simultaneous scheduling of events with choir rehearsals?
4. What are the membership demographics of each choir?
5. Are any choir members compensated?
6. What is the frequency and nature of choir social events?
7. Are there any choir organizational structures or officers?
8. How is choir growth handled; who is responsible for promoting growth?
9. How frequently does each choir sing in a service?

FISCAL SUPPORT OF MUSIC PROGRAM

1. What is the annual salary and payment schedule?
2. What benefits are offered: health insurance, life insurance, travel allowance, retirement plan?
3. What additional benefits will be shared by musician and the church: private lessons, continuing education, dues payment, music purchase?
4. What is the annual vacation time? Who is responsible for substitute musicians?
5. What is the compensation for the substitute and how is payment arranged?
6. When may vacation be taken?
7. What provisions are made for paid sick leave and does it accumulate?
8. Does the musician have private teaching privileges?
9. If private teaching is allowed, may students use the church facilities for practice?
10. Who is responsible for music at weddings and funerals?
11. May the musician set the fees for weddings, rehearsals, consultations and funerals?
12. In what way are salary negotiations handled?
13. What provisions are made for salary increases based on merit, cost of living, advanced study, longevity?
14. Is additional compensation offered for special services?
15. What is the termination notice period for both church and musician?
16. What is the current budget for music, including new music, soloists, instrumentalists and instrument maintenance?
17. Does the church offer a written contract for musicians?

GET IT IN WRITING: THE CASE FOR CONTRACTS

Donna J. Hackler, AAGO

Dozens of church and synagogue musicians each year find themselves unexpectedly unemployed or working in conditions unpleasantly different from those outlined in the employment interview. One tool that can help cushion the blow is a current, written contract.

The AGO places such value on the contract that a sample document is available on the Web site <www.agohq.org/docs/pdf/modelcontract.pdf>. This was recently revised by the Committee for Career Development and approved by the National Council in April 2001. Using the thorough provisions of this contract as a model, versions for individual situations can be adapted with a high degree of success.

Contracts also make an appearance in the Code of Professional Standards:

Employment Matters:

i. Members agree to employment only after reaching a clear understanding of the position, the employer's expectations, and the lines of accountability.

ii. Members request written contracts that protect employee and employer.

One of the most valuable side effects of contract negotiation is the conversation that must take place to work from assumption and expectation to mutual understanding. Invariably, there are items that, for one reason or another, weren't covered in the interview process. Taking time to wrestle with lists of responsibilities for both the employer and employee can mean a clear and common vision of ministry.

Contracts should include a job description, compensation and benefit information, performance review plans, an understanding concerning weddings and funerals, and other items relevant to the individual situation. Agreement on termination and severance pay when the waters are calm can make navigation in stormy weather less frightening.

Isn't a verbal agreement sufficient? Accretions of just one more service or

choir rehearsal without additional compensation can build up inexorably. Clergy and congregational leaders come and go. Remember that in the first chapter of Exodus, a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. As a result, an entire nation was enslaved. Memories may fail, but a written document can be referred to again and again.

It's easiest to initiate contract talks at the beginning of employment, but even years later, it isn't too late for this important process. If that is your situation, try preparing a contract as complete as possible, then inviting the clergy-person or personnel adviser to go through it with you. It can be easier to revise than to create. Emphasize that a well-constructed contract will protect both the institution and the musician.

Are contracts a cure-all? No, but they can be a powerful vaccination against misunderstanding and the beginnings of conflict. Try putting it into writing.