

THE SHORTAGE OF ORGANISTS IN AMERICA

AN OFFICIAL POSITION STATEMENT BY THE AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

As American organists and choir directors reach retirement age, will there be qualified individuals to fill their vacancies? This question has been a popular topic for many religious institutions since news of a shortage of organists in the United States began to appear in the press in the early 1980s. Religious institutions that offer professional salaries for professional services rendered, in general, have not suffered from the shortage of organists. However, those institutions that are unable or unwilling to offer attractive salary packages have most often experienced difficulty in finding and retaining competent organists.

Statistics collected and published by the National Association of Schools of Music indicate that the number of degree-pursuing organ majors, relatively stable during the 1990s, is now once again in decline. During the 1985–86 academic year, 728 students were enrolled as organ majors, 608 in 1993–94, and 527 in 1999–2000. The AGO has responded to this trend in declining enrollments in organ and sacred music programs in colleges, conservatories, seminaries, and universities throughout the United States, and is committed to addressing the need for more organists, and supporting these individuals with programs in education, certification, and professional development.

The organ plays a vital role in musical experiences in religious institutions and concert halls all around the world. There is no shortage of instruments for organists to play. The Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America report that the organbuilding industry is healthy, with a backlog of orders for new and renewed pipe organs.

In 1988, the AGO initiated an aggressive campaign to regenerate interest in the organ and careers in sacred music. Without the AGO's exhaustive efforts to

reverse this trend, many religious institutions would find themselves unable to employ competent organists. They would be forced either to turn to less qualified individuals to play their organs, or would have to use instruments other than the organ to provide music for worship. Ultimately, the entire future of the organ would be jeopardized.

Three of the AGO's flagship programs are designed to attract and introduce non-organists to the organ, the "King of Instruments," through instruction in organ playing, design and construction, history, and repertoire. Informational videos and brochures are available.

PipeWorks is a two-week school curriculum designed for intermediate-grade students with little or no music background. It integrates science, social studies, and music using a small, portable pipe organ as the medium for activity-based instruction, and provides opportunities for exploration of the musical instrument.

Pipe Organ Encounters are regional summer organ institutes designed to introduce teenagers to the organ and the sacred music profession. They provide individual and group instruction, opportunities for ecumenical worship, and a chance for young musicians to meet others with similar interests. More than 1,000 young people have participated in this program since its inception. An outgrowth of the POE program has been the formation of the Association of Young Organists.

Pipe Organ Encounters+ is another regional summer program, designed for adults who have a music background but who have not previously studied the organ. Participants receive individual and group instruction that introduces them to the organ and organ playing.

In 1996, in another effort to promote interest in the organ and organ playing,

the AGO, in cooperation with the American Institute of Organbuilders, the American Theatre Organ Society, the Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America, and the Organ Historical Society, produced *Pulling Out All the Stops*, a 56-minute documentary on the pipe organ in America that has been broadcast nationwide on PBS and is available on VHS cassette from AGO National Headquarters. In addition, *A Young Person's Guide to the Pipe Organ*, published by the AGO, appeals especially to young readers. The book is available from AGO National Headquarters and can be found in electronic form on the AGO's official Web site.

Because most organists are responsible for negotiating their own salaries and benefit packages with their employer, the AGO publishes a national *Salary Guide for Musicians Employed by Religious Institutions* and *Model Contract Provisions for Church/Temple Musicians* to assist its members with these negotiations. Suggested salaries are based on the organist's level of training, expertise, and hours required to perform the job.

The American Guild of Organists is the national professional association serving the organ and choral music fields. Founded in 1896 and chartered by the Board of Regents of the State of New York as both an educational and service organization, the AGO seeks to set and maintain high musical standards and to promote understanding and appreciation of all aspects of organ and choral music. The purpose of the AGO is to promote the organ in its historic and evolving roles, to encourage excellence in the performance of organ and choral music, and to provide a forum for mutual support, inspiration, education, and certification of Guild members. The Guild currently serves more than 20,000 members in 343 local chapters throughout the United States and abroad. THE AMERICAN ORGANIST Magazine, the official journal of the AGO, the Royal Canadian College of Organists, and the Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America, reaches an audience of more than 24,000 each month. The official Web site of the AGO is <www.agohq.org>.

Prepared by the
COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING
AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Approved by the
AGO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
January 28, 2002