

Member Survey Report on Members' Professional Activity and Employment

The Third of Three Reports from the Marketing Committee

In this final article on the 2014 member survey, the Marketing Committee reports on various aspects of members' professional activity. In previous articles we have reported on members' engagement in AGO programming and general demographic characteristics of the membership. These articles along with the Marketing Committee's full 102-page Survey Report can be found at <https://www.agohq.org/ago-past-present-and-future-member-profile/> or by simply searching for *Member Survey* at **agohq.org**, or by using the QR code found at the end of this article. A 22-page digest of the survey report is also available at that site.

Professional Activity

A remarkable 88% of members report having been active as organists in the last year, playing at least one service or recital or teaching organ lessons. (See Figure 1.) Looking to our youngest members, aged 25-34, we learn that 97% are actively engaged as organists.

Of the 12% of members who replied that they had not been active teaching or playing in the last year, the biggest reason, coming from 3% of members, was *I am not an organist*. Another 2% responded *I am retired as an organist*.

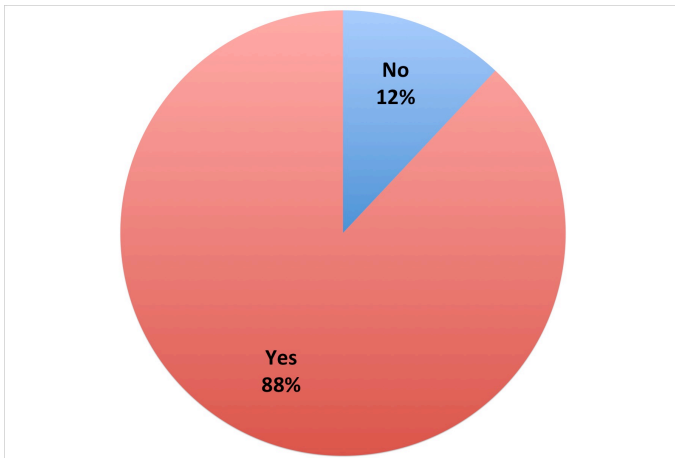


Figure 1 Members Active as Organists in the Last Year

While it might seem obvious that the American Guild of Organists would overwhelmingly be comprised of active practitioners, it is not unusual in organizations to find the tail wagging the dog. The Marketing Committee believes

that the 88% of members who are active organists must be the focus of Guild activity.

When we cross-tabbed professional activity with age we learned that AGO members remain active as organists very late in life. About 80% of members born in the 1930s (aged 75-84) and 70% of members born in the 1920s (aged 85-94) report having taught organ lessons, played at least one service, or played a recital in the last year.

Service at a Religious Institution

Member Respondents Currently Playing at a Religious Institution

An impressive 82% of members currently play the organ at a religious institution. (See Figure 2.) This statistic should remove any doubt as to the importance of and relevance of sacred music to members of the American Guild of Organists, who are overwhelmingly church organists. Additionally, it is worth noting that more than 90% of members born in the 1980s (aged 25-34) currently play the organ in a religious institution, so service playing is clearly an important part of the future of the AGO.

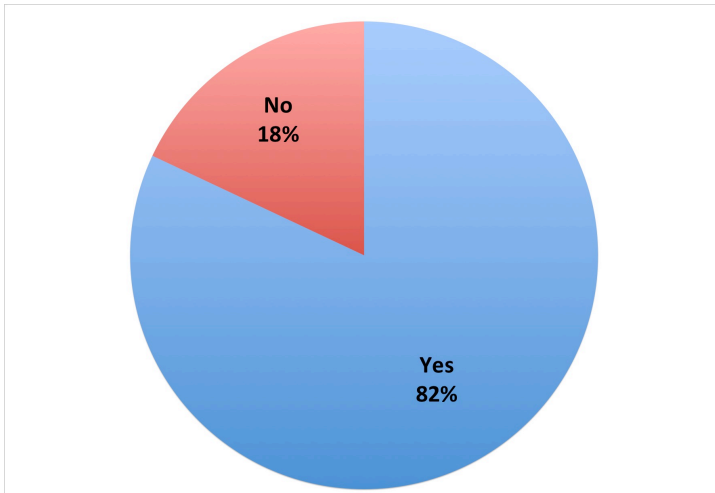


Figure 2 Members Currently Playing at a Religious Institution

Denominations Served by Members

The AGO is primarily made up of members serving four mainline Protestant denominations and Roman Catholicism. Members serving at Jewish temples comprise 5% of membership. Note that because many members serve more than one denomination, the totals shown in Figure 3 exceed 100%.

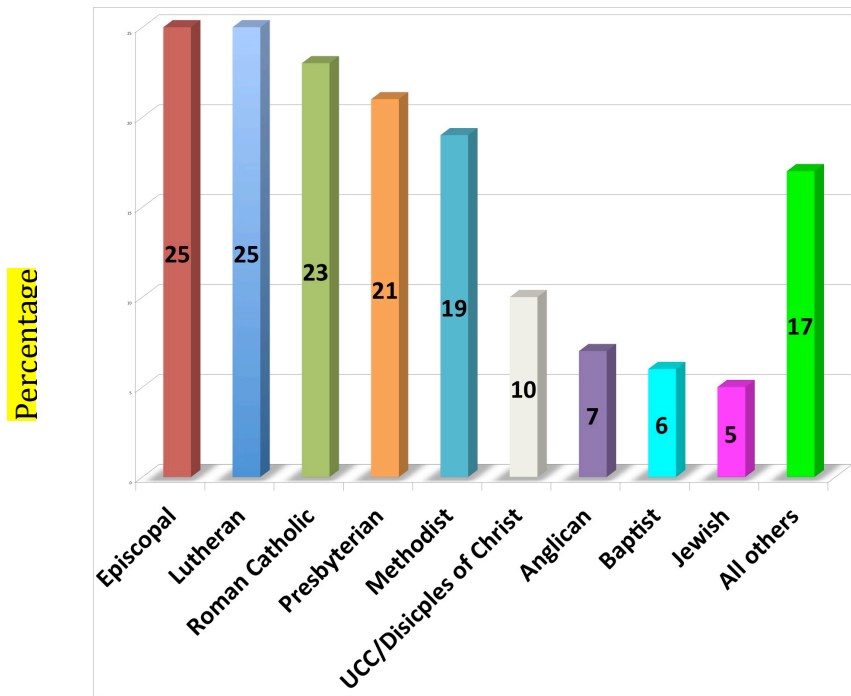


Figure 3 Percentage of Members Serving Various Denominations

AGO denominational representation does not mirror the size of the denominations in the US. It is interesting to note that although similar numbers of AGO members serve Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, this representation varies significantly from the size of those denominations nationally. According to the 2012 *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* published by the National Council of Churches, there were almost four times as many United Methodists (7.8 million) as Episcopalians (2 million) in the United States in 2012, but fewer AGO members serve the Methodist Church than the Episcopal Church. To make another comparison, Baptists are the largest single Protestant denomination in the United States, but they make up only 6% of Guild members. Roman Catholics outnumber Episcopalians in the United States by about 34:1, but about equal numbers of Guild members serve Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches. Thus the AGO is made up of a disproportionately high number of members serving Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian congregations relative to the size of those denominations nationally.

It is important to note that several of the major denominations mentioned above have significant church music organizations of their own: National Association of Pastoral Musicians (Roman Catholic - NPM), Association of Anglican Musicians (AAM), Association of Lutheran Church Musicians (ALCM), Presbyterian Association of Musicians (PAM), and the Fellowship (Methodist). The AGO's new Taskforce on Denominational Music Organizations seeks to build bridges and open communication with these associations.

Years Served as Organist at a Religious Institution

Remarkably, 58% of members report having served 31 or more years as an organist at a religious organization. (See Figure 4.) Looking at the data another way, 86% of members have served as organists at religious institutions for more than 10 years.

These statistics may be helpful to AGO leaders charged with delivering educational materials to members. Whatever their skill levels, AGO members have been discharging their duties as church organists for a long, long time. They are veteran organists. Only 7% of members have served as church organists for less than 6 years. The Marketing Committee urges all Guild committees, especially Educational Resources, to reflect upon these findings, designing products that will deliver benefits to the overwhelming majority of members who have been on the bench for many years.

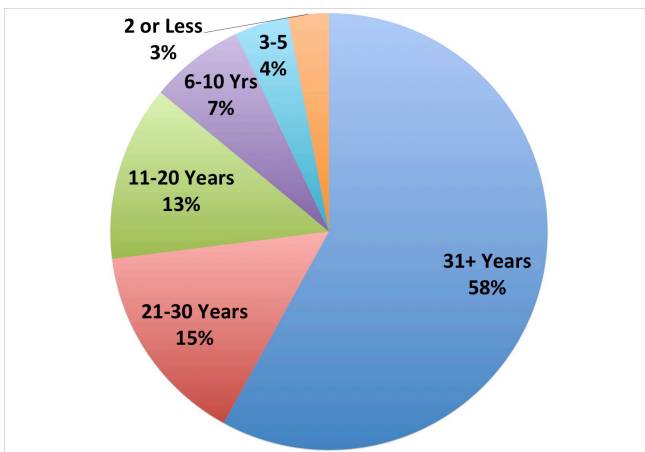


Figure 4 Lifetime Years Served as an Organist at Any Religious Organization

Member Respondents Seeking Other Employment at a Religious Institution

Only 15% of members report that they are actively *looking for a better or more satisfying job*; 66% of members report they are *satisfied in their current position* and are not looking for a better job; 13% of members report they are not looking for a better job because *other factors* prevent their leaving their current job.

Young members are considerably more likely to be actively looking for a better job than members born before 1980. This statistic suggests that the AGO’s job referral services are a particularly valuable benefit to the coveted “young member.”

Type of Instrument Played

More members play an electro-pneumatic instrument than any other type of organ: 46%; another 24% play an electronic/digital instrument; 15% play a mechanical action instrument, and 9% play an electronic/digital-pipe hybrid. (See Figure 5.)

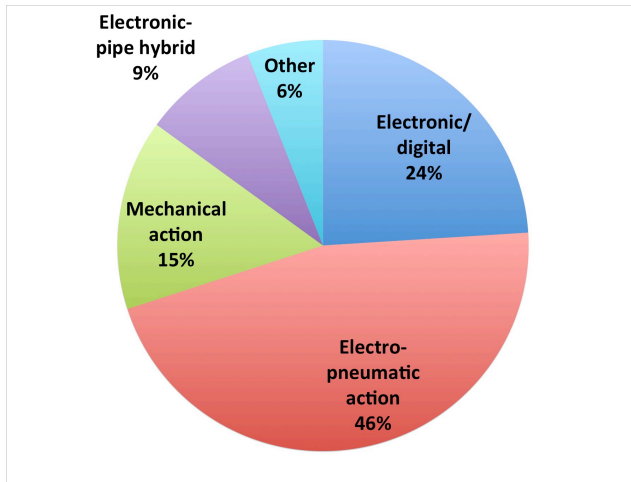


Figure 5 Type of Instrument Played Professionally

Member Respondents Directing Musical Ensembles

Some 46% of member respondents report that they direct some type of musical ensemble. Approximately 40% of members direct an Adult Choir; 18% direct a Junior Choir; 18% direct a Handbell Choir; 14% direct an Instrumental Ensemble; and 5% direct a Praise Band or Praise Singers. With 40% of members conducting an adult choir, programmatic materials in choral music can have relevance to a large sector of membership.

Music degree-holding members are significantly more likely to direct an ensemble than members without a degree: bachelor's 51%; master's 61%; doctorate 59%. This finding suggests that programming in the choral area will be of particular interest to members with the greatest academic training and much of it should possibly be geared to the Master's level member.

Challenges in Working with an Adult Choir

Recruiting new members emerged as the biggest challenge to members who conduct an adult choir. It is a *big problem* for 37% and a *problem* for another 42%. Taken together, this becomes the most significant problem identified in this survey, identified by 79% of members who direct an adult choir. Dealing with problem voices was identified as an issue for 38% of members who direct an adult choir. Inspiring regular attendance is problematic for 36% of members who direct an adult choir.

Training as a Choral Conductor

AGO members represent considerable diversity in their training as a choral conductor. Roughly equal segments reporting that they:

- a. never studied choral conducting (20%),
- b. are largely self-taught (20%),
- c. studied choral conducting as part of an undergraduate degree (24%)
- d. studied conducting as part of a graduate degree (22%).

Member Respondents Religious Employment Satisfaction Drivers

When asked, *What keeps you going in your work at a religious institution?* three responses stand out. The top two responses--*love of the instrument* and *the joy of leading worship*--were rated as *extremely important* by 79% of the members. *Service to God* was rated as *extremely important* to 73% of members. Only 35% of members said that *economic necessity* was an *extremely important* factor. It is perhaps worth noting that these findings do not vary significantly when we compare the responses by level of training as an organist. Responses from members with a DMA and members with a few or many private lessons are remarkably consistent. These findings suggest that the AGO will have to carefully negotiate the sacred-secular divide, ever mindful of the strong religious motivation of a majority of its members.

How Guild Members Earn Their Income

How Guild Members Earn Their Income

To understand how members put together their livelihood, we asked survey respondents to tell us all the musical activities for which they receive compensation. Analyzing these responses we learned that 84% of AGO members received financial compensation for playing the organ in a church or synagogue last year, *i.e.*, the overwhelming majority of Guild members are *professional church or synagogue organists*. A third responded that they *taught piano or organ privately*. This large number of members teaching privately suggests that Organ Pedagogy could well be considered as an area for Guild certification.

Principal Income-Generating Activity

Beyond knowing whether members are paid to play the organ, we hoped to learn how important that income was to their livelihood. We asked members to choose from a list the activity that generates the largest part of their income. (See Figure 6.) From these responses we learned that the AGO is just about equally divided between people who make most of their income playing the organ and people who do not: 41% of respondents report that they generate the highest percentage of their income by *playing the organ for a church or synagogue* while an identical 41% report that they earn most of their income through *other* activities.

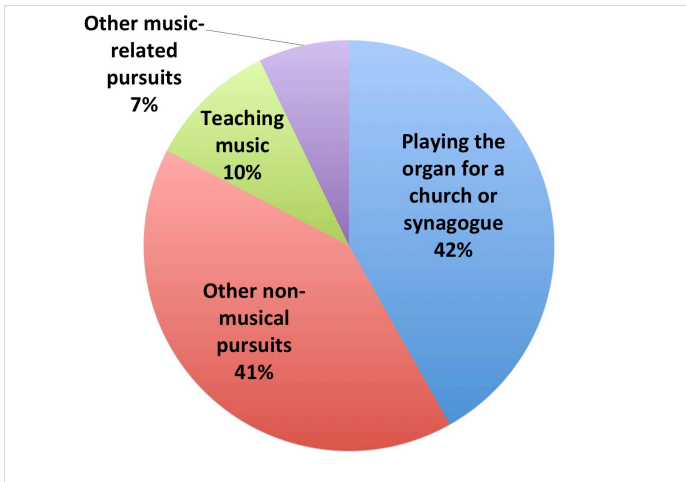


Figure 6 Members' Largest Earned Income Source

Looked at another way, a majority (58%) of members derive their principal source of income from activities other than playing the organ in a church or synagogue. And while members are overwhelmingly *professional church organists*, (84% are paid for their services), *only 42%* of members derive their principal income through playing the organ at a religious institution.

Members' Weekly Employment as an Organist

Only 15% of members report being employed 40 or more hours a week as organists. (See Figure 7.) More than three times as many members (48%) are employed as an organist 10 hours or less each week. Another 19% work 10-19 hours while 12% work 20-29 hours and 6% work 30-39 hours a week.

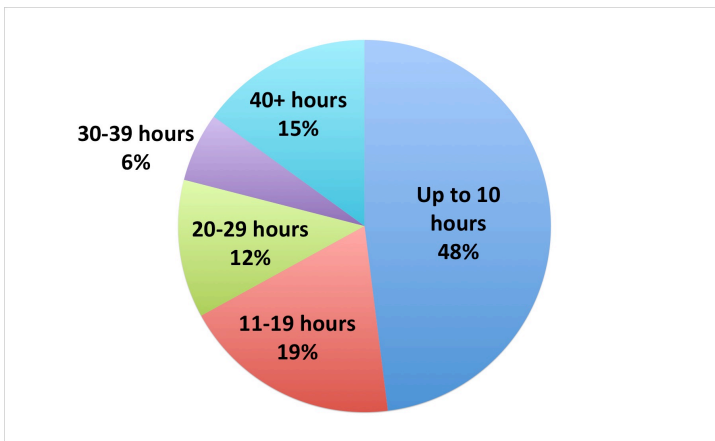


Figure 7 Hours Per Week Employed as an Organist

The pie chart above helps us see that close to half of all AGO members are employed *up to 10 hours a week*. It should be noted that many organists work well beyond the hours for which they receive compensation, and some are not compensated for their responsibilities at all.

Survey Summary

With 77% of its membership over the age of 60, the AGO faces a significant membership challenge in the coming years. Communications preferences of young members vary significantly from those of older members, and alternatives to traditional print publications will be needed to engage young organists in the organization.

Approximately 52% of members hold a BA, MA or DMA in organ performance or church music. Members whose training consists of *many private lessons* constitute the largest single category in terms of training as an organist, representing 31% of members. Adding members who are self-taught and those with just a few private lessons, we have learned that 48% of Guild members do not hold degrees in organ. The Marketing Committee believes leaders at all levels need to ponder the implications of this divide, recognizing that the Guild is *almost evenly divided between members* with and without degrees in organ.

AGO national leadership tends to draw heavily from the ranks of members with advanced degrees and certifications. Historically, those degrees and certifications have been viewed as credentials for Guild leadership. While it is important to have leaders with this experience in the field, we believe it is also important to consciously recruit Guild leaders who represent the 48% of members who did not spend four or more years at college studying organ. The Marketing Committee believes that the AGO must diversify its offerings, at all levels, seeking to better serve members without a degree in organ as well as those members with undergraduate and advanced degrees in organ.

- We look forward to dialogue with the Convention Committee to seek ways to better serve the 46% of members without a degree in organ who have never attended a convention.
- We look forward to dialogue with the Committee on Membership Development and Chapter Support to find new ways to connect with and deliver value to the 52% of members without a degree in organ who did not attend a single chapter meeting last year.
- We look forward to dialogue with the Committee on Continuing Professional Education to explore ways ways to inspire and encourage the mid-career organist, recognizing that 86% of AGO members have served as church organists for more than 10 years.
- We look forward to dialogue with the Committee on Professional Certification to discuss how the certification program could be reconceived to make the program more attractive and relevant to that 81% of members who have never taken a certification exam.
- We encourage all Guild leaders to be mindful that 48% of all members and 64% of members without a college degree in organ work 10 hours or less a week as an organist. Not surprisingly, non-music-related pursuits are the primary source of income for 71% of members without a degree in organ, i.e. 71% of these members are organists “on the side.” How can Guild programming be made more relevant for these members?
- Because members employed full-time as organists represent only 15% of the entire AGO membership, we believe that each and every Guild leader must take up the challenge of serving the 85% of members who are part-time organists, recognizing that they constitute the overwhelming majority of members.

The Marketing Committee hopes that the 2014 survey will help Guild leadership understand the tremendous diversity that is represented in its membership and the challenges facing the organization. We hope that every committee will take time out of its busy agenda to stop and reflect on the full survey report. The Marketing Committee has issued an invitation to all Guild committee chairs to meet with us to help interpret the data and discuss specific implications and recommendations. We hope they will accept our invitation.

Beyond the Guild's formal committee structure, are eager to harness the creative thinking of the entire Guild membership in addressing the challenges identified in the survey. We would be grateful if you would care to share your best ideas, strategies, and innovative approaches with us at the email address listed below. We would especially like to thank each of the 5,692 respondents who affirmed their faith in the future of the AGO by participating in this survey.

AGO Marketing Committee

Preston Dibble, Chair

Nelson Dodge

Linda Everhart

Anne Laver

Wyatt Smith

Mary Stutz, Councillor for Communications

Sarah F. Harbison, Ph.D., Survey Advisor

The Marketing Committee invites
your comments
at Marketing@agohq.org.

