



# American Guild of Organists

## Chapter Leadership News

October/November 2019

I recently had the privilege of attending the AGO's Membership Committees' meeting, facilitated by David Lamb, councillor for membership. Under David's leadership the committee members discussed opportunities for officer leadership development programming, designing education that supports inclusivity and the benefits of creating a mentorship program. I feel extremely fortunate to have spent time with some of AGO's most passionate volunteer leaders, who are all committed to developing new initiatives that will strengthen our chapters, engage our members and help our organization grow.

As the meeting that took place near the Kentucky border, it provided a great opportunity to schedule some chapter visits. Thus, began my amazing road trip through Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana, visiting five chapters in five days. Thanks to Google Maps, great weather conditions and dedicated chapter leaders who made time to meet with me, it was an extremely successful trip. I want to thank the Lexington, Dayton, Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Fort Wayne chapters for their gracious hospitality and all they do to elevate the chapter experience for their members. They shared many wonderful initiatives that they have undertaken, many of which you will read about in this issue. This month we will cover:

- ✓ **Preserving chapter records**
- ✓ **Chapter events that go beyond program recitals**
- ✓ **Creating a chapter organ academy**
- ✓ **Scope of Membership Committee Duties**
- ✓ **Creating a Chapter Ambassador Program**
- ✓ **Hosting a POE**
- ✓ **IRS Compliance**
- ✓ **Compilation of ideas for chapter programs**
- ✓ **San Diego Chapter Organ Crawl**

Here's to a *spooktacular* Halloween!



Elizabeth George, CMM  
DIRECTOR OF MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT  
[Elizabeth.George@agohq.org](mailto:Elizabeth.George@agohq.org)

## Preserving Chapter Records

Many thanks to those who responded to last month's question regarding how your chapter keeps and preserves its important records.

**From David Engen, Organ Database Chair, AGO Twin Cities Chapter:**

"Everything is on our website, [www.tcago.org](http://www.tcago.org), listed under the 'About Us' option on our homepage." Kudos to Twin Cities for their commitment to preserving their chapter history. You can learn more about how, why and where, [here](#).

**From Jane Scharding Smedley, Historian for the AGO Memphis Chapter:**

"I have been the Memphis Chapter's archivist/historian for several years. Prior to this, documents moved around, stored in various churches depending on who was dean, secretary, or other long-time member, including my late college organ teacher. I 'inherited' them from him. In preparation for our chapter's centennial in 2014, I began organizing them to write our history. Several years have no documents at all (I know they are forgotten in some former officers' attics!). Our archives reside now in a file cabinet next to my church office, along with our chapter banner. Each summer, the secretary and treasurer give me copies of the year's minutes, treasurer reports, newsletters, programs, etc., to file. I also have made individual folders when a member passes away. I cannot stress enough the value of maintaining records. Ours show the life of our chapter and the dedication of those who came before us."

**From Susan Lohnas, Dean, AGO Eastern NY Chapter:**

"Some years ago, the Eastern NY Chapter established their archives in the New York State Library. This is a controlled document archive with a formal process for people to access the archive and to contribute to it. It includes chapter records dating back to our very first organizational meeting in October 1920. It is convenient that the NYS Library is located within our chapter geographically in Albany, N.Y. Over the years we have added to the collection periodically. We are quite excited to celebrate our 100th anniversary next fall. We will be perusing the archive for interesting facts about the founding of our chapter and its history. We are so glad that our predecessors had the foresight to create a real document archive rather than have this material be forgotten in someone's basement."

*Thank you, David, Jane and Susan, for submitting  
such great best practices regarding archiving the history of their chapters!*

## Chapter Events

### **Successful Program Ideas That Go Beyond Traditional Organ Recitals James Humlong, dean, and Grant Holcomb, Lexington (Ky.) Chapter**

While the Lexington AGO operates on a fairly small budget in comparison to many of the larger chapters, we have found great success in offering social events and other programs that have had little to no cost to the chapter, mixed in throughout our program year, allowing us to have a program at least once a month. The Lexington Chapter covers nearly half the state in membership, which makes it difficult for many of our out-of-town members to regularly join us. However, we are still able to get anywhere from 15-30 of our members at these special events. Some of our best attended events have been purely social gatherings. These include:

**Twelfth Night Dinner**, hosted by a former dean at his home on the Saturday closest to Epiphany. We offer finger foods and drinks with no formal program, just a time for members to visit with each other and relax after a busy Advent and Christmas season. This has attracted quite a few members who typically do not attend workshop events, allowing them to meet some of the newer members in the chapter.

**Used Music Sale**, where members and chapter friends donated old music they no longer use. Most music is priced at \$5 or less. A potluck lunch occurs either before or after the music sale. Guests were invited and many non-members were able to browse the music and most importantly, become acquainted with the Lexington AGO. The money raised from the sale went towards producing the chapter's 2016 POE.

**Video Conferences with a Long-distance Member.** One of our most unique programs we had, was hosting a video conference with former Lexington organist and current organist/choirmaster at the Christ Church Transitional Cathedral in New Zealand. Through Skype, we got a tour of the church, choir program, and organ. We included a potluck dinner before the video conference. This fun event was able to reconnect chapter members with a good friend and dear colleague.

**Lunch and Learn.** We've had three chapter members give 30-minute discussions on topics in their field, including recording technology, emergency organ maintenance, and professional standards. A catered lunch followed each presentation. We also included an organ/choral reading session in the afternoon. This program not only allowed chapter members to share their unique skill sets, it was our best attended program of the 2018-2019 program year, with approximately 35 people in attendance, including several guests new to the AGO.

**Mardi Gras Dinner.** This event was designed as a gathering to welcome our new **January Jubilee** members who we received the previous month and to celebrate a job well done producing the Jubilee. It was catered by a local Cajun restaurant. This themed event attracted new members to attend the dinner, including one who later became the current treasurer.

*Thank you, James and Grant, for sharing what a small chapter can do to engage and grow their membership on a shoe-string budget. Has your chapter produced unique events that were low cost but delivered great benefits? Please email me so that these can be shared in future issues.*

## Creating a Chapter Organ Academy

### The Dayton (Ohio) Chapter Organ Academy Volunteer Teachers



Founded in 1983, the purpose of the Dayton Organ Academy is to encourage interest in the organ and church music in promising high-school-age students. Students are admitted to the Academy and awarded scholarships based on successful completion of an audition, and upon the recommendation of the Academy chair. The scholarship grants students one year of tuition-free study. The scholarship is renewable for an additional year, pending regular attendance and preparation at lessons, and successful performance at the May Academy recital.

The Academy is generally open to students in grades 9 through 12 (or home-school equivalent). The Academy may consider a younger student who demonstrates readiness of organ study, as determined by the audition requirements.

To apply, students must submit the online application form by April 1. Prospective students must prepare a piece by Bach (preferably a two-part invention, or other piece by Bach which demonstrates independence of hands), at least one movement of a sonata, and a four-part hymn. Applicants are also expected to sight-read.

Students receive lessons from one of the Academy teachers. The lessons run during the school year but may include summer lessons at the teacher's discretion. The Academy will also offer one or two studio classes during the school year. At these classes, the students will play for one another, including hymns and anthem accompaniments. Music history or theory topics related to the organ will be discussed.

The Academy teachers donate their time, the Dayton Chapter covers their annual AGO dues. Students are expected to provide their own shoes and music. There is a music library available to students and teachers, currently housed at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

In addition to the Dayton Organ Academy, the Dayton Chapter also provides a bi-annual *Pedals Pipes and Pizza*, college scholarships, and grant funding for adult lessons. The Dayton Chapter is dedicated to the educational mission of the AGO.

*Thank you, Rachel Spry Lammi, and the Dayton Chapter, for your tremendous commitment to nurturing young organists and helping to grow the AGO Young Organist (AGOYO) community. Does your chapter have a similar practice? If so, please let me know.*

## Membership Best Practices

Claire DeCusati, chapter administrator for the Boston (Mass.) Chapter, recently shared the processes her Membership Committee follows to ensure member engagement and retention.

- ✓ Send a welcome letter or packet to new members and make a phone call to get acquainted with them, learn the members' interests (concerts, workshops, etc.), and encourage them to participate.
- ✓ Track non-renewals and take actions to encourage renewals.
- ✓ Develop and administer a process for identifying and recruiting new members and ensuring that they are registered in a timely fashion.
- ✓ Analyze the demographics of the current membership and recommend and implement steps to maximize retention of those members.
- ✓ Administer a questionnaire or elicit information through a phone call to non-renewing members about the reasons for non-renewals and the ways in which the chapter did not meet their needs and expectations. This information should be presented annually to the executive committee.
- ✓ Serve as key contacts for members and support projects requiring information about membership categories, benefits, dues, etc.
- ✓ Help ensure that current members participate in the chapter's social, musical and professional development programs.
- ✓ Take an active role in ensuring that all chapter members are welcomed cordially at meetings and integrated seamlessly into the fabric of the chapter.
- ✓ Set the standards for hospitality and teach them to others.
- ✓ Ensure prospective members have information on how to join the chapter.
- ✓ Perform other duties incidental to the execution of this committee's work and tasks that the executive committee may direct.

*Thank you to Claire and her committee, for ensuring that Boston members feel welcomed and valued. I hope that many of you will adopt some, if not all, of these great best practices.*

## Chapter Ambassador Program

### *Delete Cliques and Insert a Chapter Ambassador Program*

One of the not-so-great best practices that I keep hearing about from other chapters is the prevalence of “cliques” at chapter events. I am sure you are thinking that this doesn’t occur at your chapter however, you may not be aware of it. It’s common that people tend to gravitate to people they know when attending any event. It’s a time to catch up with close friends and chat with colleagues. Think back to the first time you attended an AGO chapter program. Did someone greet you at the door? Did you receive a nametag? Did anyone make a point to introduce you to other members? When announcements were made at the beginning of the program, did the dean or speaker make a point of acknowledging new members and visitors?

If your chapter is not currently implementing any of these simple practices, I encourage you to start using them now. One easy way to support increased member care is to implement a **Chapter Ambassador Program**. Chapter ambassadors need not be comprised of board members, only. Invite *every* member to serve as an ambassador, to welcome and engage new members and develop future members. The role of an ambassador includes but is not limited to:

- ✓ Wearing a nametag that has his or her name and says “Ambassador”
- ✓ Standing by the entrance to the church or event space to greet everyone as they enter
- ✓ Being paired with a new member or future member to serve as an escort at a chapter event
- ✓ Making sure that the new or prospective member is introduced to as many other members as possible, throughout the program
- ✓ Serving as a “table host” at a luncheon, dinner or reception (no board members sitting together!)

In your next newsletter or email, invite members to serve as chapter ambassadors for future programs. Be sure to include a simple description of duties. List the upcoming dates of events and ask who is available to participate for each date. The great thing about having an ambassador program is that it does not have to be a long-time commitment for any volunteer. The results will be tangible, as it will strengthen peer-to-peer engagement, encourage more members to become active within a chapter and serve as a symbol of your chapter’s warm hospitality.

## Hosting a POE

**Your Chapter Can Help Grow the Next Generation of Organists!**  
**Leslie Wolf Robb, director, Committee on Pipe Organ Encounters**

Ninety-seven young people participated in the 2019 Pipe Organ Encounters (four traditional POEs, one POE-Advanced, and one Pipe Organ Encounter (Technical). Eight Pipe Organ Encounters have been approved for 2020, including three POE+ events for adults! What fantastic opportunities to introduce people of all ages to the King of Instruments!

### 2020 Pipe Organ Encounters

Long Beach, Cal. (POE)	June 28–July 3
Winston-Salem, N.C. (POE)	July 19–24
Manhattan, Kans. (POE)	June 22–27
Hartford, Conn. (POE)	Aug. 2–7
Ann Arbor, Mich. (POE Advanced)	June 28–July 3
Rockford, Ill. (POE+)	June 14–19
Richmond, Va. (POE+)	July 26–31
Allentown and Bethlehem, Pa. (POE+)	June 28–July 3

Your chapter can help grow the next generation of organists by:

- ✓ Encouraging pianists and organists of all ages in your area to register for one of the 2020 POEs. The AGO will begin accepting applications to 2020 POE events on November 1, 2019 [online](#). Scholarship assistance is available [online](#) for POE, POE-A, and POE-Tech.
- ✓ Making a chapter donation to one of the host chapters to help underwrite some of the costs of producing the POE.
- ✓ Welcoming new members (all POE, POE-A, and POE-Tech participants receive a one-year membership in the AGO) to your chapter and helping them get involved.
- ✓ Applying to host a POE in 2021—it is one of the greatest experiences your chapter will ever have!

Applications to host POE events in 2021 are now being accepted. Chapters interested in sponsoring a POE, POE (Advanced), POE+, or POE (Technical) in 2021 are encouraged to consult the POE Handbook (as revised and updated through 2019) containing application materials. This resource is available [online](#) or it may be obtained from AGO Headquarters upon request. **The application deadline is February 15, 2020.**

For further information: 858-735-4338 or [lesliewolfrobb@mac.com](mailto:lesliewolfrobb@mac.com).

## IRS Compliancy

Over the past few months, the AGO has become aware of several chapters whose tax-exempt status has been auto-revoked. Are you filing annually with the IRS and state tax authorities? Below are key documents that you should keep a permanent record of:

- ✓ Chapter charter documents (formation petition letters, confirmation letters from regional councillor or AGO HQ about your charter by AGO National Council, and/or charter certificate provided by AGO HQ)
- ✓ Chapter Operating Procedures
- ✓ EIN letter when IRS approves application for one
- ✓ Tax-exempt packet provided by AGO HQ once a chapter has an EIN
- ✓ State registrations (state income tax exemption certificates, sales tax exemption certificates, charities bureau registration)
- ✓ All filings with IRS and state tax authorities

Many chapters use a July 1–June 30 fiscal year, which means that an IRS filing deadline is fast approaching for them. **Any chapter with June 30 as the end of its fiscal year must file the 990N/e-postcard** (or the equivalent if revenue is normally over \$50,000 per year) **by November 15**. This step is the most important in keeping your chapter tax-exempt.

Be sure the person in your chapter responsible for this goes to this webpage to file the 990N/e-postcard: [here](#). There are services that charge a fee to do this for you, and they often contact our chapters in a way that leads them to believe the IRS is prompting them to file. If you want to use a service for this, you may, but it is easily done for free. Filing consists of the opportunity to update the chapter's profile or contact information and to answer these two questions:

1. Has the organization gone out of business?
2. Is your revenue normally \$50,000 or less?

If you are new to this responsibility for your chapter, please go to this [online user guide](#). If you need assistance with your login or any part of the process, call the IRS at 877-829-5500.

## Chapter Programming

### Ideas for chapter meetings, concerts, festivals, recitals, services and workshops

Thank you, Dirk Linder, sub-dean, Omaha (Neb.) Chapter, for compiling a valuable list and resource of programs and events submitted by chapter leaders. This list includes recommendations for church and children's choirs, improvisation and hymn programs, suggestions for part-time organists, workshops, recitals and organ literature, just to name just a few. This document can now be found [online](#) in the **Programming Toolkit** within the Chapter Leadership Toolkits on the AGO website.



## San Diego Chapter Organ Crawl



The San Diego (Calif.) Chapter kicked off the 2019–2020 season with an organ crawl on Coronado Island in San Diego, home of the iconic Hotel Del Coronado. Members of the Theatre Organ Society of San Diego, the Spreckels Organ Society, and members of the four Coronado churches on the crawl joined AGO members for this event. Everyone gathered at Resurrection Lutheran Church for light German-style breakfast snacks, an explanation of organ action types, and a demonstration by Dale Sorenson of the newly installed 2/12 Bosch tracker organ, which was relocated from another San Diego church.

The second stop was Sacred Heart Catholic Church, where Gabriel Arregui improvised beautifully on the 1976 2/24 Ruffati (with terrific Trompette en Chamade!). Graham

Memorial Presbyterian Church, built in 1890 with funds supplied by the wife of the builder of the Hotel Del Coronado as a memorial to her parents, Susan and John Graham was the third stop on the crawl. The Allen organ was originally dedicated by Carlo Curley, and George Butterfield spoke about the development of digital organs and the relationship of that technology to the race to the moon.

The final stop was Christ Episcopal Church, where Geoffrey Graham gave a beautiful performance of lesser-known works by contemporary composers Andreas Willscher and Ad Wammes. Throughout the crawl, everyone had opportunities to play each of the organs we visited. The crawl concluded with a sumptuous lunch in Christ Episcopal period parish hall.

### Question of the Month:

**If you could change one thing to strengthen your chapter, what would it be?**

Please reply to [elizabeth.george@agohq.org](mailto:elizabeth.george@agohq.org).