



# American Guild of Organists

## Chapter Leadership News

April 2020

### **The Importance of Staying Connected**

Dear Chapter Leaders,

The April newsletter will differ from past issues, as it will focus solely on the importance of why we should stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, James Thomashower and I had the opportunity to connect via Zoom with chapter leaders in all of our seven regions. These face-to-face meetings provided a much needed opportunity for peer-to-peer information sharing. Chapter deans spoke about how they have been virtually working with their churches and choirs and what they are doing to stay connected to their boards and members.

### **Connecting Members to Members through the AGO Member Care Initiative**

Throughout the month of April to help combat the feelings of isolation that many of us are experiencing, every single member of the AGO should look forward to receiving a *member care* phone call. This initiative will be accomplished through the collaborative efforts of AGO staff and volunteer leadership.

- ✓ National Council leadership will be calling Regional Councillors.
- ✓ Regional Councillors will be calling District Conveners and Regional Coordinators.
- ✓ Chapter officers will be calling their members.
- ✓ AGO staff will be reaching out to every committee and task force and will additionally be making hundreds of member care calls.

Our unified message is quite simple, yet truly heartfelt: *How are you doing? We care about you! Are you safe and well? We want you to know that we are here for you.*

## Technology Resources to Stay Connected

While several chapters are using Zoom for board meetings, there are those who have not readily adopted technology as a means to conduct meetings and/or present virtual programming. Many churches and synagogues are unsure about when they will reopen. Universities and conservatory classes are now being conducted online. It is extremely important that every chapter have the ability to utilize technology to stay connected. To help chapters who may be struggling with where to begin, on April 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:30 pm ET, Eric Birk, AGO Executive Assistant and I will be presenting a Zoom webinar: **Identifying Meeting Tools for Your Chapter**. This presentation will be recorded and will be uploaded to the Chapter Leadership Toolkits on the AGO website.

Kudos to the Los Angeles Chapter for their quick thinking in presenting a live stream of a chapter program that had been scheduled on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Due to the order from the Los Angeles County regarding sheltering-in-place, the monthly dinner had to be cancelled, however chapter officers were unwilling to cancel the performance. They were thrilled to learn that Organist Aaron David Miller would agree to broadcast the recital. Nelson Dodge, chapter Dean, shared that within a space of 24 hours they went from never having thought about how to live stream a chapter program to successfully presenting one. The church had no Wi-Fi, however they were able to use member's iPhone that had unlimited data. Another chapter volunteer handled the camera.

Here is the link to the recording:

<https://www.facebook.com/262400873791162/videos/502189950687921/>

## Staying Connected through the AGO Website

As a response to our members who are without work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AGO has created a new page on our website; **Resources: Responding to Covid-19** <https://www.agohq.org/responding-to-covid-19/>. **AGO Resources** provide links that connect you to information regarding unemployment, recovering from job termination, online educational resources, our career hotline and a COVID-19 survey that I encourage you to take. We have

also provided additional **Resources for Artists** with links to several relief funds, an unemployment benefits eligibility website, instructions for utilizing Flipgrid for classroom teachers and a guide for using Zoom for live-streamed lessons. Additionally, we have added links to some helpful articles and blogs that address what to do regarding cancellation of gigs and choral concerts. I want to thank Vincent Carr, Chair, of the AGO Career Development & Support Committee and Doris Dabrowski, Esq., committee member, for compiling these resources, and to Eric Birk for his assistance in uploading this most valuable content to our website. As new information and resources become available, this page will continue to be updated.

### **Staying Connected through Chapter Newsletters**

I recently learned that a chapter decided to suspend their monthly newsletter. They shared that because their programs had been cancelled they felt that they had nothing to report. I beg to differ! Now, more than ever, your newsletter can serve as an extremely important conduit to stay connected to your members. Share the results of all of your member care calls and what members said when asked how they were doing. Include a link to the AGO webpage **Responding to COVID-19**, and articulate the resources that are available to everyone.

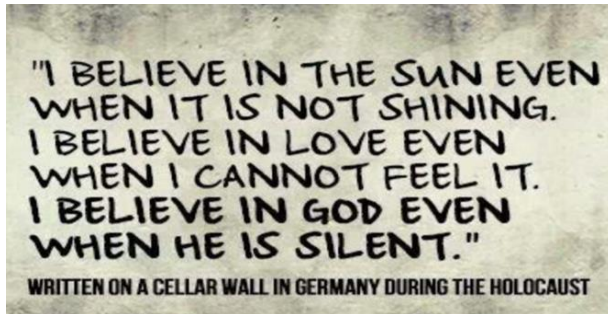
Here are some wonderful excerpts from newsletters that I recently received.

From the **Tulsa Tracker**:

*The April Issue of the Tracker is attached. Instead of the usual calendar of events, I have included a list of the many virtual opportunities that are available. The information is accurate of March 28, 2020. But as you know, our lives change very quickly these days. Check out everything that is going on thanks to the wonderful world of technology!*

From **Reverberations**, the Northern NJ newsletter:

*With COVID-19, life as we know it has been disrupted. The indispensable jobs we do as musicians have been entirely halted. How can we as a group of musicians be in touch with one another? How can we offer support and listening and feedback that might help someone that we don't know, but who is part of our community? How are your churches, temples, houses of worship moving forward to bring support to their parishioners?*



WAGO/Winchester newsletter

In closing, I wanted to share the following post from a blog that addresses how important it is for membership organizations to stay connected.

*Stay in touch & embrace improvisation. We may be keeping a safe physical distance (please!), but we need each other, perhaps more than ever. Membership organizations have a special role to play in helping make sure their members and customers have the support, resources, and advocacy that will help them weather these trying times. Actively listening, anticipating the needs of members and customers, and being flexible are key. Look, none of us have done this before. We're bringing our whole selves to work as never before—our worries and fears, but also our ideas, strengths, creativity, compassion, and oh, yeah—our kids and pets! Improvisation can feel weird, but remember it's how we get jazz. When we improvise together, beautiful things can happen.*

I want to thank all of you for making time to call your members. Please email me how they went and what you learned, so that I can share your stories in our next newsletter.

Dear friends, stay safe, stay well and stay connected!

Elizabeth



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