



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

Chapter Leadership News

November 2020

Col•lab•o•rate: To work together.

Dear Chapter Leaders,

In recent conversations that I've had with many of you, words such as "suspended" and "hiatus," have been referenced, giving the impression that your chapter is functioning in a state of limbo. None of us could have planned for what we are now facing, however it is critical that as chapter leaders, you *stay connected to your members*. I believe that many of you feel that if your chapter does not have the resources to plan a virtual recital, there is no reason to meet. I disagree! The AGO has created a library of vibrant online programming for chapters that includes workshops, organ crawls and chapter recitals: <https://www.agohq.org/online-programming-for-chapters/>. The New York City Chapter recently presented three virtual programs featuring the organs of St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Thomas Church and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The Sacramento Valley, Cumberland, Madison, Roanoke and Augusta chapters, just to name a few, have sent links to their virtual recitals, and also featured, are workshops led by Damin Spritzer and Adam Pajan. These recordings can be used for monthly watch parties, where your members could chat and comment throughout the presentation.

Why not reach out to other chapters to collaborate on virtual programming and piggyback on to what they are producing. As well, collaboration need not be with the *nearest* chapter. The San Diego chapter has told me they would be delighted to have other chapters participate in their virtual programs. If you choose *not* to produce any virtual recitals, host a monthly Zoom chat, coffee hour or happy hour, so that your members will have an opportunity to connect with each other and share how they are doing.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone for their lovely cards and caring wishes, as I recover from COVID-19.

This issue of **Chapter Leadership News** will cover:

- ✓ Chapter Leader Profile of the Month
- ✓ The New London County Chapter's Virtual Check-In
- ✓ November Leadership Programs
- ✓ Utah Valley's Upcoming "Christmas Informal"
- ✓ Providing a COVID-19 Waiver at In-Person Events
- ✓ Church Musicians and Publishers, Roberta Rowland-Raybold
- ✓ Leadership Spotlight: Dr. Stephen Cooksey



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Profile of the Month: Laura Ramsey Russell Dean, Central Hudson Valley Chapter

What's sitting on my desk right now: Several choral octavos, and a couple of hymnals for worship planning and for virtual choir recording. Piles of hand-written to-do lists for the various organizations with which I'm involved are scattered over most of the available surfaces.

What I do when I'm not at work: In the warmer months I garden – both vegetables and flowers. All year-round I walk, taking photos of the beautiful Hudson River Valley and its people. I also volunteer with local feeding programs and at our homeless shelter.

If I weren't doing this, I'd be: Walking or visiting children and grandchildren (in person pre-Covid – now via Zoom)

The best advice I ever got: To go to graduate school to study conducting, even though I was in my forties. It was one a fabulous experience and has completely changed my life!

What keeps me motivated serving as Dean: Trying to help our members stay connected, especially during Covid-19. Encouraging them to learn new skills, like creating Virtual Choirs, putting up their recordings on YouTube, or studying for Professional Certification or AGO Achievement Awards. Finding ways for our chapter to respond to important current events and discovering choral and organ music by underrepresented composers.



New London County Chapter's Virtual Check-In

Recently, I received a link to a recording made by the New London County Chapter. It featured each officer taking a couple of minutes to update everyone about how things were going in their personal and professional lives. Most importantly, it demonstrated the chapter's desire to stay connected to their members. Jake Troy, Sub-Dean, was in charge of the editing and shared the following with me.

*I came up with the idea to do a chapter update video in order to facilitate meaningful connections and to share ideas. As a high school choir teacher, church organist, free-lance pianist and more, I know how isolating and ineffective COVID restrictions can make a musician feel. Seeing familiar faces and getting updates on how each person is creatively bringing music to people during the pandemic seemed like the right thing to do to keep our chapter "together," while being largely without in-person concerts and gatherings. I began by sending everyone an instruction sheet of best practices. Once the videos were sent to me, I then "stitched" them together with music and subtitles using WeVideo, before uploading it to social media and sharing it with our members. This video was viewed during a social hour Zoom session. Members commented on how wonderful it was to see one another and hear that we truly are not alone during this unusual time. My goal was to promote three ideals for success during COVID: **be safe, make music, and bring joy**. If we do these things, we can make it through anything together.*

Jake shared these tips for making successful recordings:

1. Videos should be one minute or less.
2. Be creative! Film in front of your church or house of worship, at the organ, etc.
3. Have someone else record you if you can't manage to record yourself. (Remember: six feet apart and wear masks if in close proximity!)
4. Hold your phone landscape (sideways) - this will help all the videos look the same.
5. Things you can say: include your name, what church or place of worship you're with, any major projects that you've been working on during COVID, what you've been practicing and what music in worship looks like for you right now. Or, just let us know how you're doing!
6. Not sure what to say? Try writing it down first and practicing. We all know how to practice!
7. Submit your video via e-mail, or use a cloud storage service that's free, like Dropbox.

So, what to do if your chapter doesn't have a "Jake" who is comfortable with editing? Consider gathering your chapter leadership on Zoom and record your meeting. Each officer can take a minute to share some news. Post a link to your recording on your website, Facebook page and share it in your monthly newsletter. I encourage you and your officers to take a couple of minutes to view the New London County's video here: https://youtu.be/UOXD_hokdks. I want

to congratulate Jake and the chapter's leadership for creating this outstanding "feel good" video!

AGO Leadership Webinars

During the month of October, the AGO presented two leadership webinars. The first, presented by the Committee on Membership Development and Chapter Development (COMDACS), **Keeping Chapters Healthy during the Time of COVID-19**, focused on communication, how to best use the Member-at-Large officer position and lastly, referenced how *building a leadership pipeline* will provide a roadmap to prepare future leaders to deter the re-cycling of leadership that leads to officer burnout.

The second, **The Benefits and Challenges of Serving as Chapter Dean**, was presented by Karl Bruhn (former Great Lakes Regional Councillor), Sue Mitchell-Wallace, Southeast Regional Councillor and Skye Hart, West Regional Councillor. Motivating others, setting goals, the delicate balance between leading and managing, as well as the importance of collaboration especially thinking beyond the walls of your chapter, were just a few of the key issues discussed. Sue Mitchell-Wallace created a wonderful list of resources with links to supporting documents concerning member engagement, officer apathy, ideas for creative programs and solutions for small chapter leadership challenges.

Links to both webinar recordings and handouts can be found in the drop-down menu under the **Education** tab: **Past AGO Webinars and Supporting Documents**, under **Chapter Leadership Development**: <https://www.agohq.org/ago-webinars-and-supporting-documents/>. If you missed either webinar, I encourage you to take some time to view both, as the information shared can and will make an impact on how effectively you and your board are functioning.

Save the Date: November 20th, 4:00 pm EDT, Zoom Webinar Google, Skype and Zoom – Oh My!

Presented by the **AGO Technology Committee** lead by Harold Stuart, Chair, this webinar will assist those who need additional skills in using technology. It will also include "train the trainer" resources for those who *are* tech savvy, to help others who are resistant to using technology, be able to participate in virtual chapter programs. Register in advance for this webinar [here](#).

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. As with all AGO webinars, this presentation will be recorded.

Utah Valley Chapter's Virtual "Christmas Informal"

I was delighted to read the Utah Valley Chapter's November newsletter about preparations underway for a virtual sharing of Christmas pieces to be performed by their members, at a watch party on December 10th. They referred to Mark Marty's **Tips about Recording on Mobile Devices**, that was presented at a past AGO webinar earlier this spring. You will find the handout in the drop-down menu, **Past Webinars and Supporting Documents** under the **Education tab** on AGO's home page. It is listed under **Technology**: <https://www.agohq.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mobile-Recording-Guide-Mark-Marty.pdf>. A link to the recital will be available on the online programming for chapters page, shortly. <https://www.agohq.org/online-programming-for-chapters/>.

The Importance of Including a COVID-19 Waiver at Every In-Person Meeting

If your chapter is now producing in-person events, I strongly urge you to require every attendee to sign a COVID-19 waiver. In addition to the standard practices of wearing face masks, social distancing and using hand sanitizer, signing a waiver should be mandatory. It holds your chapter harmless and also provides a contact tracking resource, should you later learn that an attendee has contracted COVID-19. A sample waiver can be found in the **Programming Toolkit** in the [Chapter Leadership Toolkits](#).

Church Musicians and Publishers

Roberta Rowland-Raybold, Dean, AGO Grand Strand Chapter

I was invited by the AGO Wilmington, Grand Strand and Binghamton Chapters to share some thoughts with their members at a joint October Zoom meeting, regarding composing and publishing. We titled the seminar "Covid Composition and Pandemic Publishing."

Thinking of the future of our music publishing companies; we must be concerned for the church music of our future. Many churches are closed, now live-streaming their services and others like mine, are meeting out-of-doors. We have simplified our music and our budgets have been cut. Music directors, not knowing the future of their choirs, are not ordering new music as they once were. This has a direct bearing on publishing companies.

Think of the early composers who have given us our great organ and choral literature. Buxtehude and Bach for example, did not have the capability to publish as we do today. They had to rely on their own hard work to market their compositions. In researching publishers for my seminar, I found they were all interested in music of high quality, well written, with sensitivity to the market need. Their continued success depends on us. During this difficult time, I would suggest that each of us order a piece or two of new music, stretching our learning curves, and when this pandemic is behind us, we will have some wonderful new literature to share with our congregations. Let's count our blessings by supporting the publishers that furnish wonderful music to us during this critical time.



**Saluting Dr. Stephen Cooksey
AGO Winchester Chapter**



Dr. Steven Cooksey has been a strong influence in Sacred Music and Organ appreciation in the Winchester, Virginia area since 1974. He came to Winchester to accept the position of Professor of Church Music and Organ Performance at Shenandoah University. Although he has retired, he remains connected with the university and is a most important bridge between the school and the community regarding sacred music. He is a gentle person whose thoughtfulness is his hallmark. But, that is complimented by his unwavering expectation of excellence in music.

He established a thriving (until the pandemic) concert series at a large Lutheran retirement center in Winchester. For 10 months each year, WAGO members and friends provide a diverse set of programs for the residents and the surrounding community. This has been ongoing for several years and WAGO members serve as the primary group of artists who perform at this series. This special programming is in addition to our regular meetings and monthly programs.

Dr Cooksey has held the position of Dean of the chapter and retains his influence by chairing the Program Committee. His gifts to the chapter are countless. For over 45 years he has been the constant strength that makes our small chapter thrive.

Do you have a chapter leader you would like to recognize? Please send me a photo and brief description of how she/he has enriched and positively impacted your chapter. elizabeth.george@agohq.org .