



*American Guild of*  
**ORGANISTS**

# **EMPLOYING MUSICIANS IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS**

---

A Handbook for Committees and Candidates

*Prepared by*  
American Guild of Organists  
Committee on Career Development and Support  
October 2020

Employing Musicians in Religious Institutions:  
A Handbook for Committees and Candidates  
©2020 American Guild of Organists  
Second printing, March 2021

This Handbook was adapted from  
*Procedures for Employing Church Musicians*  
Sixth Printing, revised April 2010  
by The Association of Church Musicians  
(Madison Chapter, American Guild of Organists)

---

Additional copies of this publication are available from AGO National  
Headquarters. Email the AGO at: **info@agohq.org**.

Or write:

American Guild of Organists  
475 Riverside Drive, Ste. 1260  
New York, NY 10115  
Telephone: 212-870-2310  
Fax: 212-870-2163  
Email: [info@agohq.org](mailto:info@agohq.org)  
Website: [www.agohq.org](http://www.agohq.org)



**THE AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS** is a national professional association serving the organ and choral music fields. Chartered by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York in 1896, the AGO now serves approximately 12,000 members in 280 chapters throughout the United States and abroad.

The AGO is dedicated to standards of excellence in the field of sacred music and sponsors recitals, workshops, regional conventions, and national conventions.

The mission of the AGO is to foster a thriving community of musicians who share their knowledge and inspire passion for the organ.

The vision of the AGO is to engage, support, and uplift every organist.





# Contents

Preface .....	1
SEARCH	
Conducting a Search .....	3
The Search Committee .....	3
Job Description .....	3
RESPONSIBILITIES	
Typical Responsibilities of the Choir Director .....	5
Typical Responsibilities of the Organist .....	6
Hours of the Musician in a Religious Institution .....	7
APPLICATION & EVALUATION	
Application Procedures .....	9
Evaluation and Selection .....	10
Process .....	10
COMPENSATION	
Compensating Musicians in Religious Institutions .....	13
Determining Equitable Compensation .....	14
Components of Equitable Compensation for Musicians in Religious Institutions .....	15
Annual Review of Compensation .....	15
Compensation Considerations .....	16
Notes About Compensation .....	17
Typical Music Program Expenses .....	17
SPECIAL EVENTS	
Wedding Guidelines .....	19
Organist Fees for Weddings .....	19
Funeral/Memorial Service Guidelines .....	20
Organist Fees for Funerals/Memorial Services .....	20
SUBSTITUTES	
Substitute Organists .....	23
Fees for Substitute Organists .....	23
CERTIFICATION PROGRAM	
The AGO Certification Program .....	25
Code of Ethics .....	27
Code of Professional Standards .....	28
APPENDIX A	
Considerations for Calculating the Weekly Hours of an Organist and/or Director of Music at a Religious Institution .....	29
APPENDIX B	
Annual Employment Review Guidelines for Church/Synagogue Musicians .....	33







## PREFACE

THE AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF CHURCH MUSICIANS (MADISON CHAPTER, AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS) have cooperated in the development of this booklet, which is available to all interested religious institutions and musicians.

The two organizations share the view with religious leaders and their congregants that music is fundamental to the worship service and that qualified individuals can enrich the service through their special music talents.

The Guild and the Association of Church Musicians assume that leaders in religious institutions want to recruit, employ, and support qualified persons to provide strong leadership in sacred music.

Thus, these procedures have been developed to assist those who participate in the search and employment process. This booklet provides perspective for clergy and laypersons responsible for the process that will bring effective and talented musicians to religious institutions and their diverse memberships.

Guidelines will help religious leaders and congregations conduct an effective search and make appropriate choices of personnel. It is important that employers clearly define their needs and expectations regarding the available position(s). A religious institution's development of a compensation "package" must reflect the time requirements of the position and skill level of the candidate.

It is our hope that this booklet will be useful to religious institutions and musicians.

The Guild gratefully acknowledges the work of the following individuals in the development of this handbook:

David K. Lamb, DMUS, CAGO  
*Councillor for Membership*

Vicki J. Schaeffer, DM  
*Councillor for Membership*

Vincent A. Carr, MM, AAGO, CHM  
*Director, Committee on Career  
Development and Support*

Marlene C. Hallstrom, MM, CAGO  
*Director, Committee on Career  
Development and Support*

Paul B. Carmona, PHD, AAGO

Nicole Y. Cochran, MM

Doris J. Dabrowski, JD, SPC

Adam Detzner, MM

Jessica M. French, MM

Andrew Johnson, SPC

Carol Feather Martin, MM

Nathan Proctor

Anthony Rispo

Eric Birk, MM, FAGO  
*Executive Assistant*

James E. Thomashower, CAE  
*Executive Director*





Photo by Laura Seaman on Unsplash

“A search committee should consider the breadth of work in the hands of a music minister.”



---

# Conducting a Search

Personnel searches in business, industry, government, and religious institutions are governed by formal procedures that promote uniformity of applications. Well-grounded procedures will be beneficial both to religious institutions seeking personnel and to individuals seeking employment.

Following are some major elements of the search process.

## The Search Committee

A search committee initiates and implements procedures for hiring musicians. Search committees develop uniform criteria for evaluating applicants.

To represent the congregation, the search committee should be broad-based and include clergy, staff in the worship and music area, worship-liturgy-music committee members, and personnel committee members. The committee will benefit from engaging an outside consultant with experience or knowledge in the area of sacred music.

## Job Description

The first task of the search committee is to write a job description for the position. This should clearly define the duties and responsibilities for the position. A good job description will help the search committee evaluate candidates before face-to-face interviews. The committee should advertise the available position on targeted job sites, such as the job boards offered by the American Guild of Organists, as well as denominational music organizations and social media platforms.

A search committee should consider the breadth of work in the hands of a music minister. Some of this work is public, in the presence of the congregation and local community. Other aspects of the job are semipublic, as in work with ensembles, committees, and other staff. Yet even more work is done privately, such as administrative tasks, planning and preparing music, as well as caring for the physical spaces of the music ministry.

Sample job descriptions for a choir director and for an organist follow. It should be noted that each of these jobs could constitute a full-time position. A music director can be organist, choir director, or both. When a candidate is expected to be both organist and choir director, the committee should take into consideration the feasibility of the role and which types of support might be given to assist the music director (i.e., administrative support and volunteer assistance).

“The vision of the AGO is to engage, support, and uplift every organist.”



Photo by David Beale on Unsplash



Photo by Highwaystarz-Photography

# Typical Responsibilities of the Choir Director

1. Recruiting, training, supervising, and directing choirs for regular and special services
2. Selecting music; learning or reviewing it; developing a musical interpretation
3. Examining new music of many publishers and selecting materials with suitable texts and appropriate music
4. Arranging or composing music for particular requirements of the choir or service
5. Conducting rehearsals; teaching of choir and congregation; providing theological interpretation of music that will enhance its effect
6. Rehearsing choirs before each service
7. Preparing, learning accompaniments, or working with rehearsal accompanist and appropriate instrumentalists
8. Coaching and training choir soloists
9. Ensuring that pastoral care for the music ministry is provided as needed
10. Supervision over sorting, stamping and filing music; maintaining choral library; keeping attendance records; maintaining choir vestments; preparing rehearsal room
11. Writing publicity materials
12. Listening to recordings and attending choral concerts to learn new music
13. Pursuing additional training, academic credit; private study of conducting, conducting techniques, vocal training, and related skills
14. Attending meetings, conferences, and conventions of professional organizations
15. Arranging for substitutes during times of absence



# Typical Responsibilities of the Organist

1. Playing the musical portions of the service and accompanying and/or conducting the choir(s)
2. Selecting music, learning, practicing, or reviewing it, determining organ registrations, setting them up at the organ console, and practicing them for effectiveness
3. Selecting, planning, and practicing hymn accompaniments and appropriate settings for sections of the service
4. Maintaining manual and pedal dexterity by regular practice on the organ and other instruments
5. Learning and adapting choir accompaniments for the organ
6. Attending and/or leading choral rehearsals, rehearsing with other musicians or soloists, and preparing for all such rehearsals
7. Selecting new organ compositions to meet the special and changing needs of the services
8. Supervising maintenance of the organ and other musical instruments by entrusting that work to qualified and trained professionals
9. Maintaining the music library
10. Consulting with families for weddings and funerals
11. Auditioning and engaging soloists and instrumentalists for weddings and funerals
12. Collaborating with the audio technician to establish proper balance of all sound sources to ensure helpful and effective musical leadership in worship
13. Writing publicity materials
14. Pursuing additional training, academic credit; private study of organ, piano, other instruments; composition studies
15. Attending meetings, conferences, and conventions of professional organizations
16. Arranging for substitutes during times of absence

# Hours of the Musician in a Religious Institution

For a detailed analysis of the number of weekly hours needed to fulfill the requirements of a particular position, please see Appendix A for a worksheet (“Considerations for Calculating the Weekly Hours of an Organist and/or Director of Music at a Religious Institution”).



Photo by cgrape from Pixabay





“ The submission method should be clear and reasonable for candidates and accessible for the committee to receive and review.”

Image by Mariusz Matuszewski from Pixabay



## Application Procedures

1. The search committee will issue an announcement of vacancy. The announcement should be as explicit as possible about requirements, compensation, and benefits. A job description will be provided to applicants upon request.
2. Candidates will be asked to submit an up-to-date, accurate resume and a cover letter of interest in the announced position to the search committee by the closing date. Basic information typically includes the following:
  - a. Name, address, telephone number
  - b. A record of formal education (i.e., schools and/or programs attended)
  - c. Training in music
  - d. An employment history, including employers and positions
  - e. Professional references (may be prior employers)
  - f. Ability to perform the requirements identified in the vacancy announcement or job description
3. Committees may wish to use digital media as part of the application materials. The committee may wish to see documentary evidence of candidates' capabilities by audio or video recordings. The submission method should be clear and reasonable for candidates and accessible for the committee to receive and review.

## Evaluation and Selection

A search committee that has a good grasp of the needs of the religious institution and of the criteria applicable to the position will get the job done in a reasonable amount of time. Committee members contribute to the forward motion of the committee by their preparation and contributions in evaluating a candidate. To enhance objectivity, interview structure is necessary.

### Process

#### *Prior to the Interview*

1. The candidate should be notified as to what is expected (e.g., sight-reading a hymn, playing a prepared organ work, etc.) during the organ audition. Practice time on the organ should be made available to the candidate prior to the audition.
2. An adequate number of singers should be asked to participate in the audition of a choir director, so that a candidate's conducting skill may be practically demonstrated. The interaction with a broad range of individuals allows for a more holistic assessment of the candidate.
3. Music chosen should be typical of what the choir sings for regular services. The candidate should be given the music in advance in order to prepare it for the audition.

#### *During the Interview*

1. Allow ample time to audition and interview candidates. Be realistic about time allotments: at the very least, an hour should be planned for each candidate. This will facilitate both the interview and the assessment of talent and skills.
2. The best interview technique will elicit comparable information from candidates. Thus, a standard set of questions should be developed based on the job description, with different committee members questioning the candidates. This procedure enables committee members to gather objective information from all candidates.
3. One segment of the interview should allow for the candidate to elaborate on personal interests and ability to respond to the requirements of the position.
4. The religious institution's policy for weddings and funerals should be discussed; specifically, whether the religious institution grants the organist the right of first refusal.
5. The search committee should be prepared to discuss the musical instruments, maintenance contracts, the building, and all its facilities. The choral and instrumental libraries and budget for acquisitions should be explained and discussed.
6. The committee should discuss the annual salary and benefits of the position in a candid manner.

### *After the Interview*

1. After interviewing and auditioning candidates, the search committee meets to evaluate the candidates. Frank views are to be exchanged. In the case of the interviews, committee members may rank the candidates on a numerical scale. The audition evaluation may be more difficult for some members who do not have music backgrounds. A ranking system still may be used, or musically trained members may be specifically asked by the chairperson to share insights and nuances that might be overlooked by nonmusical committee members.
2. Making a sound decision is the goal of the committee from its first day of existence. Patience, care, and tolerance of divergent viewpoints must mark the final, critical deliberations of the committee. There should be a substantial majority or a strong consensus supporting the final recommendation.
3. A signed employment agreement or a written confirmation of an oral agreement is highly recommended. If there is no formal written employment contract, an informal letter should be prepared that confirms the parties' agreement about compensation, benefits, vacation, leave time, policies for weddings, funerals, and other special events, the scope of the musician's duties, and other significant employment conditions.
4. All candidates should be notified as to whether they have or have not been selected for the position.



“Several factors are taken into account when determining equitable compensation for a musician serving a religious institution.”



## Compensating Musicians in Religious Institutions

Candidates or employers may turn to a number of resources when negotiating salaries, such as: (1) what candidates currently earn, or what employers most recently paid, (2) what other similarly qualified individuals are understood to earn, whether they are organists in their community or other professionals such as musicians in symphony orchestras, or university professors, (3) published information from unions of similarly qualified professionals such as the American Federation of Musicians, and (4) data published regularly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

It may be particularly useful to document what the time commitments will be to plan, prepare, practice, and perform service music, and to carry out all other duties expected for the position. For additional information, please see these two helpful resources on the AGO website: “Considerations for Calculating the Weekly Hours of an Organist and/or Director of Music at a Religious Institution” (Appendix A of this document) and “Ideas for Organists Seeking Employment” (an article by Carol Feather Martin, published in the February 2018 issue of *The American Organist* magazine, vol. 52 / no. 2, page 7). A candidate’s or an employee’s academic study, years of training, and relevant experience should also be considered. What the AGO cannot do, however, is provide any actual salary data for negotiating compensation.

Recognizing that religious institutions need data on which to base salaries and benefits, the AGO proposes the following recommendations:

1. Pay an annual salary in line with that of professional teachers, musicians, and other professionals in the community whose education and experience are comparable to that of professional musicians in religious institutions.
2. Set salaries and benefits without reference to a spouse’s salary and benefits. Employment practice in business, industry, and government regard the economic status of the spouse as irrelevant or discriminatory in job decisions.

### Determining Equitable Compensation

Several factors are taken into account when determining equitable compensation for a musician serving a religious institution. College degrees do not always give a complete picture of the strengths of the candidate. For example, someone with a bachelor's degree and considerable education and experience may warrant a higher salary than an entry-level applicant with a master's degree. A committee should take all of the factors below into consideration when arriving at an equitable salary figure.

Since overall compensation is inclusive of benefits, a salary should be adjusted when there is a discrepancy in certain benefits. For example, a public school teacher with a very rich benefit package may not need as high a salary as a musician in a religious institution with a very modest benefit package. The committee must examine which benefits are not being provided and account for them in an equitable fashion. The musician's salary should never be lower than the amount it would cost to have a substitute take their place.

1. Education: college degrees or private instruction
2. Experience or years of service
3. Musical skills and competencies
4. Professional requirements:
  - a. Organ and/or choral training
  - b. Maintenance and improvement of the necessary musical skills
  - c. Leadership skills critical to initiate, develop, and maintain a quality music program
  - d. Communication and instructional skills to motivate and teach choir and congregation
  - e. Interpersonal skills to work with other staff members, congregation members, and other musicians
  - f. Availability on a year-round basis for Sunday/Sabbath service, religious holidays, and choir rehearsals
  - g. Availability for services such as weddings and funerals, with rehearsals as required



## Components of Equitable Compensation for Musicians in Religious Institutions

1. All employers must withhold income tax, pay social security tax, and maintain workers' compensation insurance for all their employees.
2. Adequate compensation package
3. Health insurance
4. Time off during the week to compensate for Saturday and Sunday duties
5. Paid vacation time
6. Paid sick leave
7. Retirement program
8. Funds for workshops, seminars, continuing education
9. Sabbatical leaves
10. Membership dues to professional organizations
11. Subscriptions to professional journals
12. In general, it is recommended that there be separate agreements for wedding, funeral, or any other ancillary income.

## Annual Review of Compensation

Most organizations consider annual performance and compensation plans in tandem. The employing religious institution should follow the same pattern on an annual basis for musicians. Some of the major factors to be evaluated in an annual review are the following:

1. Additional education/training
2. Cost of living factors (i.e., current inflation rate)
3. Changes in the job description
4. Merit/performance

The Guild offers a helpful guide to annual reviews entitled "Annual Employment Review for Church/Synagogue Musicians" (Appendix B in this handbook).

## Compensation Considerations

The information presented below reflects concern for objective salary considerations by religious institutions. Some find salaries for faculty in a local school district to provide a rational basis for setting salary of musician in a religious institution.

Compensation should reflect the organist's prior experience, education, and training. In addition to or in lieu of academic degrees, a committee should consider the broad diversity of certifications and qualifications that a candidate possesses. Though they are not degree equivalents, the certifications from the American Guild of Organists affirm an organist's ability to execute numerous important sacred music skills such as service playing, anthem accompaniment, transposition, sight-reading, and choral direction, to name a few. For more information on areas covered in AGO exams, please see "The AGO Certification Program" in this document.

The AGO certifications of a candidate should bolster the case for a more substantially equitable salary. The hierarchy of certifications in order of difficulty from the fundamental to the most complex is:

Service Playing

Colleague

Associate

Choirmaster

Fellowship

In addition to credentials and qualifications, compensation should also be based on the number of hours required to perform the job.

## Notes about Compensation

1. Working time: Determining the average number of hours the particular job demands by discussing the subject with the musician. Review the duties and responsibilities of the position, considering all requisite public, semi-public, and private work hours.
2. Education: Determine the level of training of the musician, recognizing that there may be equivalents of a music degree through other forms of study.
3. Base salary determination: The intersection of the level of training and the time required affects the salary negotiations. Those persons with little experience would be considered at a lower salary range. The salary should be adjusted upward to reflect years of experience.
4. For individuals with little or no formal music training, a base salary (including preparation time) is recommended, to be adjusted upward to the abilities and experience of the musician.

## Typical Music Program Expenses

Religious institutions should make provision in their annual budgets for the following expenses attributable to the music program:

1. Organ, piano, handbell, and other instrument maintenance
2. Purchase of music
3. Choir director/organist substitutes for vacation and sick leave
4. Special programs expense
5. Mailing expenses
6. Books, recordings, music periodicals
7. Office space, supplies, and equipment



“The mission of the AGO is to foster a thriving community of musicians who share their knowledge and inspire passion for the organ.”



## Wedding Guidelines

Some religious institutions require that their musicians provide music for weddings. Others allow couples to hire musicians not currently serving on the staff of the religious institution. The institution's arrangements with staff musicians or requirements to use them should be clearly documented and shared in advance with all parties involved with the planning of wedding services.

Any additional musicians chosen should be able to competently perform the music chosen for the wedding service.

Consultation between the organist and the couple is a necessity so that all parties will be in agreement with the music chosen.

If additional musicians are engaged, they should be able to competently perform the music chosen for the ceremony. Additional fees for the organist may apply if additional rehearsal time is needed. Cooperation between the other musicians and the organist is essential to the effectiveness of the music during the wedding ceremony. Music selections should be chosen well in advance of the wedding date to allow ample practice time for musician(s).

It is recommended that religious institutions develop policies regarding appropriate music for weddings. Certain instrumental works and texts of vocal music may require review by staff, clergy, and musicians.

## Organist Fees for Weddings

Some religious institutions may choose to include compensation for weddings and rehearsals in their letter of agreement with their organist. If not, then such compensation should be negotiated separately. Some have found that it is easiest for the couple to pay the institution, which in turn pays the musician(s). This generally ensures prompt, accurate payment.

In setting fees, religious institutions are advised to consider time requirements for the following:

1. Advising the wedding participants on music selections
2. Rehearsals of selected pieces
3. The need to work with other musicians
4. Extra rehearsals with any soloists
5. Attendance at the wedding rehearsal
6. The wedding service itself

# Funeral/Memorial Service Guidelines

Some religious institutions require that their musicians provide music for funerals or memorial services. Others allow families to hire musicians not currently serving on the staff of the religious institution. The religious institution's arrangements with staff musicians or requirements to use them should be clearly documented and shared in advance with all parties involved with the planning of funerals and memorial services.

Any additional musicians chosen should be able to competently perform the music chosen for the funeral or memorial service.

## Organist Fees for Funerals/Memorial Services:

Playing for funerals often involves rearranging of schedules. Fees should take into account that the organist must be available to play on short notice and/or with a soloist or other musicians.

From the beginning of all arrangements for funerals and memorial services, it should be clearly communicated to all parties who is responsible for paying the organist, and what is the amount to be paid.

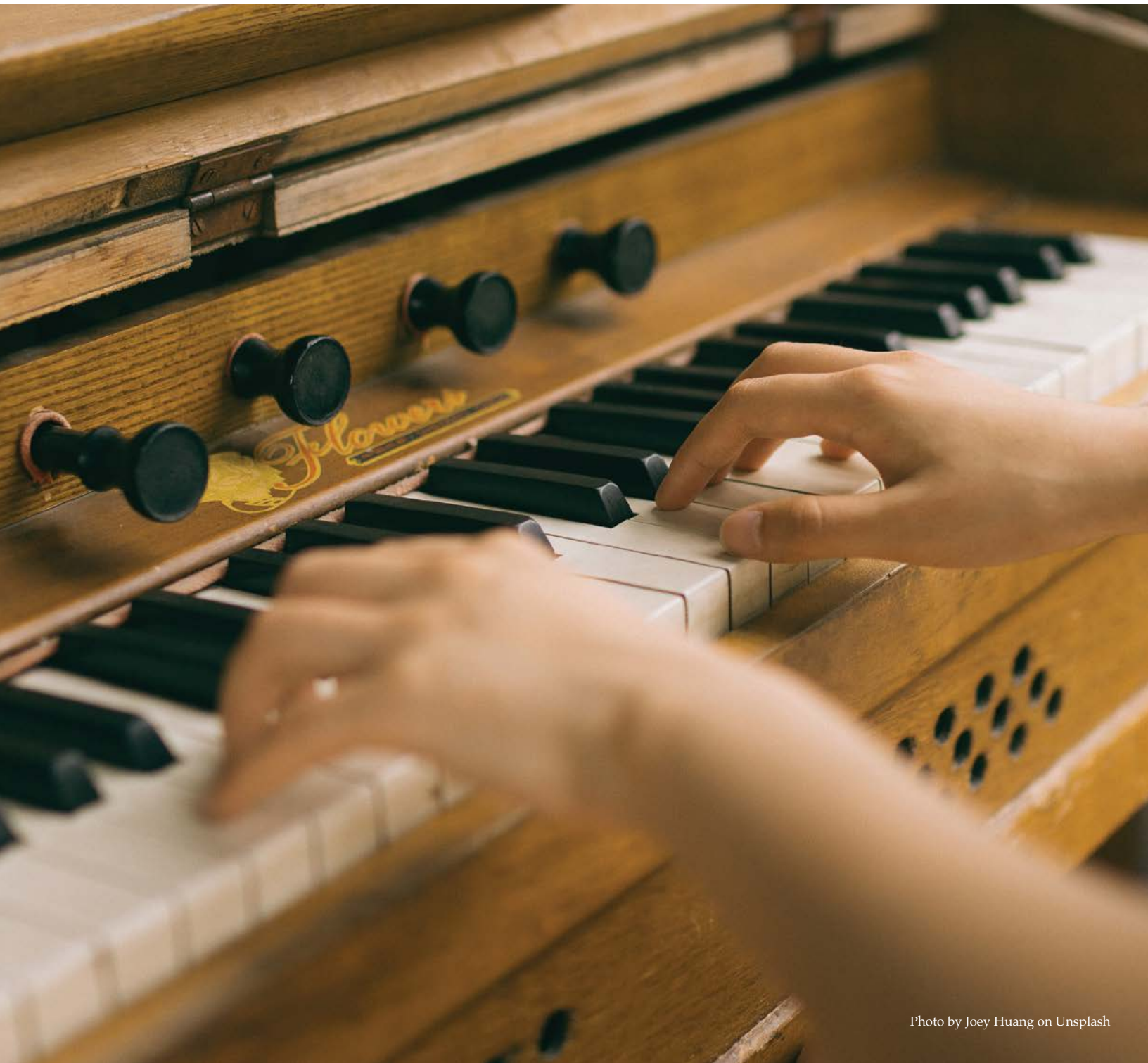
Some have found that it is easiest for the family to pay the religious institution or funeral home, which in turn pays the musician(s). This generally ensures prompt, accurate payment.

In setting fees, religious institutions are advised to consider time requirements for the following:

1. Advising the funeral participants on music selections
2. Rehearsals of selected pieces that are special requests or require other musicians
3. The need to work with other musicians
4. Extra rehearsals with any soloists or ensembles
5. Attendance at the funeral rehearsal
6. The funeral service itself



“Consultation between the organist and the couple is a necessity...”





“ The institution’s arrangements with staff musicians or requirements to use them should be clearly documented.”

# Substitute Organists

The religious institution's music budget should include money for payment of a substitute during the musician's vacation, approved leaves of absence, study leave, and sick leave. On those occasions this fee will be paid by the religious institution. For time away beyond that stipulated in the employment agreement, the substitute will be paid by the musician.

1. Contact substitute musicians as far in advance as possible.
2. Clarify fees:
  - a. Amount for service
  - b. Additional payment for rehearsal, if applicable
3. Provide name and telephone number of person responsible for payment.
4. Indicate when payment can be expected.
5. Tax liability is the substitute musician's since he/she is a nonemployee on a fee-for-service basis.

## Fees for Substitute Organists

The fee for substitute organists may vary depending on the expectations for different types of services. Expectations may differ widely with respect to the amount of music required, which affects the amount of planning, preparation, and rehearsal time needed with other musicians. Cost of travel should be factored into compensation. Below are two descriptive examples. The second would most likely justify a higher fee than the first:

One Service, Organist Only  
(includes organ practice, conference with clergy, and the service)

One Service, Organist, and Music Director  
(additional, duplicate service; additional choir rehearsal)





Photo by Sydney Rae on Unsplash

The AGO certification program tests individuals on a range of competencies important to the practice of sacred music.

# The AGO Certification Program

Members of the American Guild of Organists may participate in a certification program, which tests individuals on a range of competencies important to the practice of sacred music. The AGO provides resource materials to assist members in preparing for the examinations. Members of the national AGO Committee on Professional Certification evaluate the completed examinations. Upon passing an exam the candidate is awarded a certificate appropriate to the achievement.

While the AGO certification program is not necessarily parallel to academic music degrees at all American colleges and universities, a candidate earns a certificate after rigorous study and development of musical skills comparable to those expected of professionals with college or university diplomas in music. Each examination is designed to test the candidate on a range of competencies that can be generalized as follows:

The Service Playing Test evaluates a candidate's ability at organ performance, hymn playing, psalm accompaniment, and anthem accompaniment. The candidate also must demonstrate skill at transposition and sight-reading.

The Colleague of the American Guild of Organists certificate (CAGO) is awarded to candidates who demonstrate ability to perform organ repertoire of moderate difficulty, accompany choral anthems and a vocal solo, and play a hymn in a style suitable to leading a congregation. The candidate also must demonstrate a range of keyboard skills including sight-reading, transposition, harmonization of a simple melody, and improvisation of a brief passage of music.

The Choir Master Certificate (ChM) is based upon an exam focused on choral conducting skills. For the exam, the candidate rehearses a choir, demonstrates basic keyboard abilities and aural skills (dictation and error identification), analyzes a piece of music, and answers questions on music history and theory as well as choir training and choral repertoire.

The certificate for an Associate of the American Guild of Organists (AAGO) is awarded after the candidate demonstrates abilities to perform organ repertoire at an advanced level, transpose and harmonize, sight-read from open score, accompany from figured bass, and improvise a brief piece. Candidates also must answer questions on general music theory and history topics as well as questions on the organ.

*continued next page*

---

## CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

*continued from previous page*

The certificate for a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists (FAGO) is awarded after the candidate demonstrates exceptional abilities in organ performance and in keyboard skills such as sight-reading, transposition, adaptation of a piano score to the organ, and improvisation. In addition, the candidate must show extensive knowledge and competence in counterpoint and fugue, orchestration, and composition.

For additional information on current examination requirements, please contact:

American Guild of Organists  
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1260  
New York, NY 10115  
Telephone: 212-870-2310  
Fax: 212-870-2163  
Email: [info@agohq.org](mailto:info@agohq.org)  
Website: [www.agohq.org](http://www.agohq.org)

# AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

## CODE OF ETHICS

*Approved by the AGO National Council January 27, 2017*

On January 27, 2017, the AGO National Council adopted revisions to this document to reflect its settlement with the Federal Trade Commission.

---

### **Preamble/Preface.**

The American Guild of Organists encourages its members to embrace and practice the following values as core ideals that Guild members aspire to cultivate in their ethical and professional conduct.

- **Value 1. Responsible Conduct toward Those Whom We Serve** (including but not limited to clergy, supervisors, congregants, choir members, students, children, et al.). Members shall:
  - Treat those whom they serve in a professional manner, with dignity, compassion, civility, and respect.
  - Show respect to those whom they serve, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, socio-economic status, disability, or medical condition.
  - Avoid any sort of abusive behavior, whether verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or other.
  - Refrain from disclosing confidential or sensitive information about others obtained in the course of professional service, unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law.
- **Value 2. Respect for Our Professional Colleagues.** Members shall:
  - Maintain a professional attitude and act with integrity in relationships with colleagues, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, socio-economic status, disability, or medical condition.
  - Respect the reputation and diversity of colleagues.
- **Value 3. Integrity in Our Professional Work.** Members shall:
  - Honor and abide by the conditions and requirements of the job descriptions and work agreements to which they have knowingly agreed, so long as those provisions are in accord with all applicable federal, state and local laws.
  - Follow, as applicable, the principles of professional conduct that are expressed in the AGO Code of Professional Standards.
  - For the benefit of future generations of musicians and to preserve the instruments of our profession, use care to ensure that when playing an instrument, the institution's expected practices and requirements for the care of the instrument and its venue are met.



# AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

## CODE OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

*Approved by the AGO National Council January 27, 2017*

On January 27, 2017, the AGO National Council adopted revisions to this document to reflect its settlement with the Federal Trade Commission.

---

Members of the American Guild of Organists are bound by the Code of Ethics and guided by the Code of Professional Standards. Members of the American Guild of Organists dedicate themselves to the highest standard of professionalism, integrity and competence. The following principles are guidelines for the conduct of members in fulfilling their obligations as professional musicians.

### Skills

- i. Members develop and maintain skills in performance, improvisation, service playing, conducting, arranging, and composing commensurate with their duties.
- ii. Members stay abreast of current developments in liturgy, hymnody, performance practice, and musicology through continuing education.
- iii. Members become knowledgeable in the liturgy and worship traditions of the institutions they serve.
- iv. Members acquire business, administrative and interpersonal skills to perform their duties.

### Employment Matters

- i. Members agree to employment only after reaching a clear understanding of the position, the employer's expectations, and the lines of accountability.
- ii. Members request written contracts that protect employee and employer.
- iii. Members maintain courteous and respectful relationships with other staff members and members of their congregations, making an effort to resolve potential conflicts as soon as they become evident.
- iv. Members address differences with employing institutions through appropriate channels, including, but not limited to, their contract and the institution's personnel policies manual.

### Respect for Colleagues

- i. Members supervise other musicians in a professional and courteous manner.
- ii. Members respect the intellectual property rights of composers, authors and publishers by complying with the Copyright Law and licensing requirements regarding reproduction, recording, distribution, broadcasting and performing rights.
- iii. Members address differences with other members of the American Guild of Organists by following the procedures outlined in the Discipline.
- iv. Members do not discriminate against others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, socio-economic status, disability, or medical condition.
- v. Members do not use AGO affiliation or membership information publicly (except for biographical purposes) to endorse, for commercial advantage, the financial and business goals or the products and services of others or to further any political goals.

**AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS**

Considerations for Calculating the Weekly Hours of an Organist  
and/or Director of Music at a Religious Institution

*Approved by AGO National Council September 5, 2017*

The American Guild of Organists has prepared this document to assist churches in understanding the nature of the work of an organist or a director of music at a religious institution. It is our hope that by detailing the activities required of a professional musician, a church or synagogue will be better able to establish an appropriate compensation package for any musician it employs.

The following is a list of activities that typically occupy the time of a professional musician serving a religious institution. Employers and musicians are invited to use this outline, either separately or in tandem, to help calculate the amount of time required for a musician to complete the work that the employer expects to be performed in a competent and professional manner.

**1. Time spent in worship services**

Service lengths can vary from a half-hour to three hours, depending on the congregation. This time is often the only public “face time” that those who don’t work with the musician throughout the week will often associate with the “work” of what an organist or director of music does for a congregation. In fact, this is merely the presentation of the musician’s work. It reflects many hours of study, preparation, and life experience prior to every service at which the musician’s work is heard.

While one cannot be remunerated for life experience or the life-long study that is required to become a competent musician, the hours of mental preparation, personal musical practice, meetings with staff, consultations with volunteers, rehearsal time, and preparation must all be considered as integral parts of the presentation in worship services. The work at those services, ironically, often involves making quick decisions to revise the plans and preparation that took place in the preceding weeks. An organist or director of music is often required to create on-the-spot, improvised solutions to unforeseen obstacles that require the musician to act responsibly for the benefit of the congregation.

It is sometimes tempting for worship leaders who are not musicians to argue that the time spent in worship service is as much a devotional activity for the hired musician as it is for members of the congregation and therefore should not be considered as work hours for which the organist or director of music must be paid. Such arguments have little merit. The stressful position of leadership in which a musician is placed demands that professional expertise be put to use at every moment of a service in order to support and lead the musical portions of worship.

*Calculate the total time spent in worship during one complete representative week.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 2. Rehearsals with other musicians

Choirs, soloists, and instrumental ensembles need the skilled leadership of a prepared musician to be effective at providing music that not only enhances worship, but also enables the leaders of the musical portions of a service to engage the whole congregation effectively in meaningful participation. To that end, musicians are expected to be prepared, knowledgeable, and competent in the execution of pitch, rhythmic, dynamic, and tempo markings indicated in the music. Musicians must also take into account the need to make adjustments for acoustics, congregation size, the effects of the weather on instruments, delayed maintenance or inadequacy of an organ's installation or design, and possible last minute changes over which a musician has no control. In sum, musicians must be prepared for any reality in a public, unrehearsed musical activity that depends entirely on their leadership to be successful.

*Calculate the total time spent in activities relating to rehearsals with other musicians:*

a. *Total hours spent in rehearsal, including on Sunday before worship* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

b. *Total hours spent in rehearsal preparation; i.e., score study, keyboard and/or conducting, practice, room set up, management of robes, and distribution and collection of music* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 3. Organ practice

Organists and directors of music must practice in order to be fully prepared to lead a number of hymns or congregational songs at each worship service. They must also practice sufficiently to be able to play or conduct music that a religious community sings as part of its weekly (or daily) liturgy and provide organ solos or choral accompaniment from organ or piano. Additionally, whether playing or serving as the conductor for another musician, organists must set up the registration of the organ to provide the appropriate sounds from the instrument. An adequate amount of time must be set aside to take care of all these tasks outside of rehearsals and services.

*Calculate the total time spent in organ practice preparing hymns, service music, preludes, postludes, choral accompaniments, and registration of the organ.*

\_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 4. Selection of music

Music selection requires advance planning by all parties who expect the musician to follow their lead. Musicians need adequate communication with the service leader about service themes, scripture lessons, and sermon topics pursuant to the selection of the music to be sung by the congregation or choirs, or played on instruments. Research is necessary to find appropriate music according to: textual topic or source; skill level of the musician; the length of time available within the service, and the musical style(s) compatible with the expectations of the organization. The musician's ability to plan efficiently is dependent largely on the ability of clergy and others responsible for planning worship to provide context within which the musician is expected to select music. In addition to private study and research, weekly meetings with other staff may be required.

*Calculate the total time required for Lectionary and scripture study and consultations with clergy to select appropriate music.*

\_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 5. Preparation for special services

Throughout the year, important observances such as Christmas and Easter in Christian churches and High Holy Days in Jewish synagogues usually demand preparation of more music, or music of greater length and complexity than that which is expected for weekly worship. Score study, rehearsal of musicians, and personal practice must be accomplished over multiple weeks throughout the year to provide adequate preparation for all involved.

*Calculate the total time required for preparation of music for special services and the additional time that is required to work with ensembles, soloists, and special musical arrangements.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 6. Maintenance of music library

Music scores that are purchased by a religious institution must be kept in order and organized so that they can be ready whenever needed. Volunteers may be engaged to assist with this work, but they or paid staff must be supervised by the musical director or organist so that best practices are consistently followed. The musical director or organist ensures that the music library's contents meet expectations and are in usable condition. Weekly filing of selections not in current use by singers and instrumentalists is vital to maintaining the library's readiness.

*Calculate the total time required to maintain the music library including sorting and filing the music in the collection, and ordering new music.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 7. Administration

Organists and music directors are often expected to handle administrative duties and communicate regularly with other musicians, staff, clergy, and volunteer leaders throughout the year. In meeting their administrative responsibilities, musicians may be required to maintain and publicize the schedule of music selections; plan and coordinate rehearsals in light of any competing space needs in the institution; submit payroll information for any other paid staff the music director supervises; track budgetary spending and calculate future budgetary needs based on expectations of the organization; submit music titles for publication in weekly service leaflets; audition and recruit volunteers and professional musicians such as section leaders of a choir; hire extra musicians as required; arrange for maintenance and tuning of the organ and other instruments; and rent instruments when needed.

*Calculate the total time required for administrative responsibilities such as seasonal planning, budgeting, submission of payroll information, service leaflet preparation, auditions and recruitment, contracting musicians and tuners, and renting instruments.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

## 8. Meetings

Religious institutions benefit from the involvement of all paid staff who lead programs within the organization. Full participation may entail weekly, biweekly, monthly, or quarterly attendance at staff, committee, congregational or other meetings so that others may benefit from the professional expertise for which the individual was hired. Organists and music directors are no exception and may be



the only people in the organization with expert knowledge in the area of music in general and sacred music in particular.

*Calculate the total time spent in clergy consultations, staff, committee, and/or Council/Vestry meetings per week (other than service planning).* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

### 9. Educational Opportunities

Religious institutions that educate their leaders and their congregations about sacred music are more likely to benefit from the musical content of worship services. Worship leaders and congregants will also have a fuller understanding of texts to which music is set and the sacred words that inspire the music presented. Organists and music directors in religious institutions may be expected to write articles, make presentations, and introduce parts of the service to inform and educate congregants and worship leaders about the music being presented in worship.

*Calculate the total time required to write articles for bulletins and newsletters; teach and participate in religious education; and deliver presentations on songs, hymns, and the pipe organ.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

### 10. Other

Many religious institutions provide a wide array of educational and worship opportunities for their communities outside of a weekly service. These events may require special planning for the music selected for performance. The time needed to prepare music for additional services, concerts, or educational programs should be considered.

*Calculate the total time required to plan and perform concerts, concert series, educational programs, and additional services such as Evensong, Vespers, prayer services, etc.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

**Basic hours per week \_\_\_\_\_ Total**

### Additional consideration should be given to continuing education opportunities for the organist or director of music, including:

*Hours required to maintain keyboard proficiency and work on new repertoire* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

*Hours for personal and professional musical growth and development through ongoing study, research, reading periodicals and other professional literature, and attendance at conventions, concerts, workshops, etc.* \_\_\_\_\_ hrs./wk.

**Additional hours per week \_\_\_\_\_ Total**

---

**Total (Basic and Additional) hours per week \_\_\_\_\_ Total**

## AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

### Annual Employment Review for Church/Synagogue Musicians

These guidelines for an annual employment review for musicians are intended to serve as a starting point for developing a review format that fits the local congregation. Individual practices in church/synagogue government and personnel supervision will determine elements of the review, as will denominational guidelines, if available. An annual review will be only one of a year's worth of informal and formal evaluations, staff and committee meetings. Feedback is most useful when there are no surprises at the employment review. Ideally, the review time is predominantly positive. All evaluations should be in writing and signed by the musician and reviewer, with copies for the institution and the musician.

We cannot overstate the importance of the annual employment review. In fact, it provides essential information for the budgeting process. These guidelines cover the facts of the process and present sample questions in major categories of the musician's work:

- people skills and working relationships
- music and worship skills
- business and administrative skills

These are followed by a sample form that may be adapted for individual use.

#### Introduction

The AGO recommends an annual review:

- to foster good relationships among musicians, clergy and congregations
- as a communication tool
- as an opportunity to review goals and accomplishments
- to aid in short-term and long-term planning
- as a time to take stock, not only of people, but also of facilities

#### The Review Process

Reviews:

- assume the existence of a contract and job description.
- include a review of the job description to make sure it matches current responsibilities.
- recognize that music is an integral part of the overall ministry of the institution.
- assume a level of trust between the parties so both can be open and honest.
- are "two-way" with input from the person reviewing and the person being reviewed.
- address the areas that comprise the musician's job: people skills/working relationship; music/worship skills; business/administrative skills.
- allow the person being reviewed the opportunity to share what s/he considers to be significant accomplishments of the past year.
- are timed to coincide with the end of the program year to allow for development of next year's program.

*Look at the previous year's review. Have you met the goals you set last year?*

## Sample Questions in Major Categories of the Musician's Work

### People Skills/Working Relationships

*Which areas do you feel are your strengths and which areas need improvement?*

- Relationships with clergy and other staff; considering the size of the staff, separate questions may be required for each.
- Relationships with and supervision of other music staff, paid and volunteer.
- Planning for worship and other activities: How frequently do you meet with others involved with planning? Is it enough? Do you need more?
- Relationships with choirs: Level of satisfaction, support? Recruitment and response? Ministry, including awareness of and response to personal situations affecting individuals in choirs?
- Relationships with congregation: Level of satisfaction, support? Providing opportunities for education and outreach? How do you see your "musical fit" with the congregation?

*What were your accomplishments in these areas during the past year?*

*What specific goals do you have for the coming year?*

### Music/Worship Skills

*Which areas do you feel are your strengths and which areas need improvement?*

- Your level of preparation and practice for rehearsals and services?
- The variety of music experiences that you provide?
- Your ability to adjust to the changing character of the staff or congregation?
- Your development of musical resources in the church?
- Your professional development? Are you given enough time and monetary support to do your job properly?

### Music/Worship Skills (continued)

- The leadership that you give in vocal and choral training?
- Your knowledge of hymnody and your ability to lead the congregation in hymn-singing?
- Your knowledge of the liturgy and worship traditions of this faith?

*What were your accomplishments in these areas during the past year?*

*What specific goals do you have for the coming year?*

### Business/Administrative Skills

*Which areas do you feel are your strengths and which areas need improvement?*

- Your ability to plan, defend and work within a budget?
- Meeting deadlines for newsletters, worship bulletins, etc.?
- Your stewardship of the church's music and maintenance of the music library?
- Care and maintenance of instruments?
- Meeting contractual and licensing obligations?
- Hiring other musicians such as substitutes and instrumentalists?
- Planning concerts and other special programs with the attendant publicity?
- Necessary custodial work?

*What were your accomplishments in these areas during the past year?*

*What specific goals do you have for the coming year?*

## MODEL ANNUAL EMPLOYMENT REVIEW FOR CHURCH/SYNAGOGUE MUSICIANS

*The following form provides guidelines only. Users are encouraged to adapt and re-format this form to serve their own needs.*

Name and Position/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date hired: \_\_\_\_\_

Review period: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of last review: \_\_\_\_\_

### **The following items are to be completed by the musician:**

1. Does your current job description/ contract adequately match the work that you are required to do? If not, how should the job description be changed?
2. What have been your accomplishments and successes in the past year?
3. Are there any particular aspects of your work that you especially enjoy or find rewarding? If so, what are they?
4. Are there any particular aspects of your work that you do not especially like? If so, what are they? What changes would you like to see with regard to these concerns?
5. Is there any way in which the clergy-person/ (appropriate supervisor) could be of better help to you in your work? If so, please describe.
6. Is there any way in which your fellow staff members and lay leadership could be of better help to you in your work? If so, please describe.
7. What goals would you like to set for yourself for the next year?
8. In general, how would you evaluate your performance over the past year? To what extent were last year's goals met?
9. Is there anything in particular that you would like to discuss with the clergy-person/ reviewer? If so, please describe.

MUSICIAN: \_\_\_\_\_

*continued next page*



**The following questions are to be completed by the clergy-person/reviewer:**

1. Does the current job description/contract adequately describe the work expected of the musician? If not, how should the job description be changed?

2. In general, what is your evaluation of the musician's performance over the past year? To what extent were last year's goals met?

3. Has the work been done in a manner that facilitates good relationships on the part of co-workers? If not, what improvements should be made?

4. What goal(s) do you set for the musician for the next year?

5. Evaluate how well the musician interacts with choir members and members of the congregation.

6. If applicable, evaluate how well the musician supervises the work of other persons.

7. How could you be of better help to the musician?

8. Is there anything in particular that you would like to discuss with the musician? If so, please describe.

CLERGY-PERSON/REVIEWER: \_\_\_\_\_

**The musician and the clergy-person/reviewer are to meet and discuss the comments on the previous pages. After the conversation, each should respond to the following questions:**

What goals have been set for the musician for the next year?

Has this evaluation process been beneficial to you? If not, how could it be improved?

MUSICIAN'S RESPONSE:

REVIEWER'S RESPONSE:

MUSICIAN'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



© 2020 American Guild of Organists

Designed by DoubleBondStudio.com