

FAQ: Salary Tables and Unionization

Why can't the AGO publish salary, wages, and conditions?

In 2017, the AGO entered into a settlement agreement with the Federal Trade Commission which prevents our organization from issuing any kind of recommended compensation levels for musicians. A very clear explanation was published in the AGO Executive Director's column of *The American Organist*, in February, 2017 (<https://www.agohq.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/JET-Column-2017-Feb.pdf>).

Organists need a union; why can't the AGO become a union?

It would change our status as a nonprofit organization. This question was answered in the above-referenced column:

Unions are not permitted to accept tax deductible, charitable gifts from members, foundations, or government agencies like the NEA. This is a major source of income for the AGO and many chapters. Moreover, unions establish fee schedules for "labor" by negotiating with "management." Our members work for thousands of different employers. There is no central "management" representing all of the employers; i.e., there is no management representative with authority over the clergy with whom we could negotiate.

Without naming it, this answer refers to the "ministerial exception," whereby the courts have largely decided (*Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & School v. EEOC*, 2012, and *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 2020) that religious organizations have autonomy in deciding who is a minister. Therefore, persons who relay the faith being espoused by the organization through their work (such as providing religious music for public worship) can be considered ministers and are not able to sue their employers for breach of contract, discrimination, or other reasons that employees would normally be able to sue their employers in non-religious work situations.

Researching data for my own desired salary seems like too much work to get paid fairly. Why isn't there an easier way to get paid like a professional?

Who is the best person to fairly represent your skills, experience, education, and general professional capabilities? Remember, you are going to be compared to other candidates in a search process. What other musicians can or could do in the position will always be in the minds of those for whom you work. No table can be "one size fits all" for a compensation recommendation. You, and only you, can know the following about yourself:

- Based on employer's expectations, the time it will take you to do the work (see Appendix A of *Employing Musicians in Religious Institutions*, the worksheet for calculating hours), or put another way: the expectation in weekly work hours it will take to accomplish what the employer expects of you, and how much other work will you have to seek that won't interfere with the job in question in order for you to make a living
- The cost of living for you in the area where you have to live in order to do the job
- The education, certifications, continuing education, and job or life experience which prepare you to be effective in the position
- The value you bring to a religious institution, based on what you offer (musically, administratively, spiritually) and who you are as person with regard to ethics, values, and character
- The costs to you in order to do the work expected, which will need to be outweighed by compensation which makes it worthwhile for you.

What can chapters do to encourage employers to pay fair salaries to organists and choral directors?

- 1) Educate its members about the contents and availability of the "Employing Musicians..." handbook.
- 2) Provide links to places to look for regionally related sources of comparable salary information, such as the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor

Statistics. Not actual salary figures, but sources to look up what historical averages have been earned in specific employment situations.

3) Encourage both chapter members and employers to do the necessary calculations to arrive at what both believe to be fair compensation.