

**Dean's Report to the Annual Meeting of the  
Boston Chapter, American Guild of Organists**

June 4, 2018

*Robert Barney, Dean*

St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Milton, MA 6:00 pm

Four years ago I was asked to run for Sub-Dean of this illustrious Chapter of our national, professional organization. I reluctantly agreed, being coached that the Chapter pretty much ran itself. I am here today, four years later to tell you that indeed it does not "Run itself". There are many people, behind the scenes volunteering their time, on tasks large and small that make a difference in our professional lives as Guild members. Where there aren't people doing a job, it just doesn't get done, and things fall through the cracks. Yes, the Chapter goes on, but there is always room for improvement.

Every one of us is giving our time and bringing our personal skill set, both good and bad, to the tasks. The Guild exists because of the volunteering of your colleagues. It exists because many people believe in the Guild enough to work; putting on programs, keeping lists, and providing services. Some have done this for 20 or even 40 years, and some are just beginning, and finding their way. I encourage you to think about how you can get involved, or even more involved, to make the Chapter, and the Guild a better, and stronger organization. Contact your new Dean, Louise to offer your help!

When I came in to office as Sub-Dean, the Boston Chapter had just presented an absolutely amazing convention. Several dozen members of this chapter labored tirelessly to offer the national membership an incredible opportunity for growth and inspiration. Our Chapter membership was burned out, but work had to go on. Our Chapter's annual Yearbook had become an obsolete and costly production with no one willing to produce it. Our Operating Procedures were in need of revision, and our budget required significant adjustments. Our member numbers appeared to be dwindling, and burnout prevailed. Programs still had to be presented, budgets prepared, and meetings had to be held. Work went on.

Once becoming Dean I found out that the Federal Trade Commission had delivered a decision that the Guild had dramatically overstepped its original mission as an educational organization. As a result of this all Chapter materials had to be cleansed of nearly all references to employment, the Guild oath was revised, and our members had to be informed of these significant changes to the way we had been operating for most of our lives. The written changes are easy, but emotions and assumptions take much longer to inform and revise.

Thanks to more clearly focused minds than my own, in the last two years we have revised our Chapter's by-laws/operating procedures and officers, developed an on-line and downloadable membership directory, published a program book, created a communications committee which I hope will continue to make improvements in this area, launched a new web-site, and kept close to our budget, while Chapter Competitions, SPAC, YOI, Organ Library continued, and newsletters and notices came out with regularity. I especially want to thank Sub-Dean Louise Munding, Treasurer Daryl Bichel, Claire DeCusati, Joe Scolastico and others on the Executive Committee for their ability to get these projects completed, despite my anxieties. Thank you to all who serve our Chapter in all your tasks.

If I have accomplished nothing else as Dean, I have tried very hard to communicate that we need to be more supportive of each other as colleagues. As organists, we are often put in the position of defending our work, and our instrument. If we spend our time complaining about, and criticizing each other, not only are we not helping the cause, we are a big part of the problem. Ask any past Dean, and they will tell you that one of the most agonizingly time-consuming parts of the job is putting out fires, and dealing with unhappy people. When the greater community sees our infighting and petty arguments, they are further distanced from this peculiar instrument and career we have chosen to love. We must learn to be more positive, and constructive in our dealings with each other, and, even in our criticism of that which we do not approve or appreciate.

The Old Testament Lesson read in my church yesterday was the one where Samuel hears God's call to serve. I remember as a teenager hearing the call to the organ as an instrument, and to church music as a life path. We do not choose this line of work, it mostly chooses us. The Guild is our organization where we, lovers of this music, feed, nourish, and support each other in this path, and it is our responsibility to keep the Guild strong and vibrant. What can you offer to help move the Guild forward?

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