

Dear Uncle Max

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115.

As an organist-choirmaster for many years, I have seldom had an opportunity to conduct a choir with someone else accompanying. On the occasion when I have had that opportunity, it has always seemed so much easier than doing both the conducting and accompanying. However, salaries for organist-choirmaster positions very rarely pay as much as those of choirmaster only. I realize that, in some cases, churches that have the positions of organist and choirmaster separated (as opposed to

combined) are often large churches with the budget to pay bigger salaries, but this is not always the case. The skill and preparation needed to be both organist and choirmaster is greater than to be only choirmaster. Why is it that this salary discrepancy exists? Is the AGO doing anything to address this discrepancy?

W.E., Va.

Yes, I find it easier to conduct and have someone else accompany, though as one trained primarily as an organist, it took me a while to feel confident conducting. One usually has more control over ritards and other factors—and, of course, one has the freedom to step back into the church to listen to balances between organ and choir. As an organist-choirmaster, it may be possible to find

someone who is interested in coming just to accompany—a good student, a wife with young children who would like to keep her hand in, or get experience and a place to practice, yet leave you as the service player—the best of both worlds.

It is almost impossible to speak of salaries throughout the country in a firm way. I am surprised to find that where you are, organist-choirmaster positions rarely pay as much as choirmaster alone. My impression is that this is not true where I live and work; also it changes with denominational considerations. If the positions are divided, the choirmaster almost always earns more regardless of training or skill (and has half the music to learn and prepare). They are *seen* to be working like a conductor on stage before an orchestra. Everyone *knows* what they are doing. The organist-choirmaster is more like the conductor of opera or musical comedy, pretty invisible once the show starts (the opposite of little children, they are meant to be heard and not seen). This, depending on one's view of what worship should be and how it should be carried out, makes the organist-choirmaster invaluable in liturgical services. Rear gallery musicians have the most freedom of movement, being able to finish their coffee and doughnuts, regroup, and move about with discretion after the service has begun. It is rarely clear who is doing what. Pretty handy.

In answer to your "Is the AGO doing anything?" the answer is yes, as far as possible, though it is a little like using dry sand to build sand castles. Two publications that may be purchased directly from AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115, for \$3 each, are:

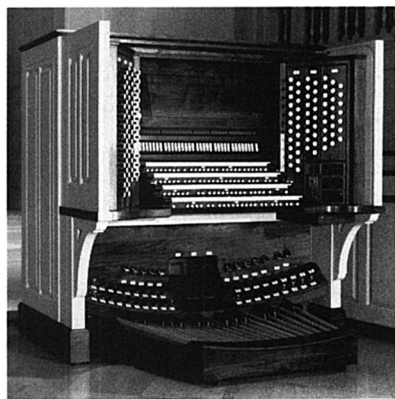
1. *The Work and Compensation of the Church Musician*, prepared by the Boston AGO Chapter.
 2. *Music in the Church: Work and Compensation*, prepared by the Seattle Chapter.
- (The AGO National Salary Guidelines are available free from National Headquarters and on the Web: <www.agohq.org>.)

As the scale of living costs varies so greatly, you would also be well advised to see if your chapter publishes some salary lists appropriate for where you live.

With the millennium upon us, wouldn't it be useful if someone would undertake a thorough study of salaries of church musicians from the mid-century to the year 2000. My impression is they have gone down in proportion to average salaries and the cost of living. Just a guess. The task is not my cup of tea.

MAX B. MILLER, FAGO

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