



Church Music Help Sheets

“Rev” Series – for Clergy
Improving your Organist's Skills

Rev1

This sheet is intended to assist clergy to develop the skills of organists who have had little or no tuition in organ playing, but who are prepared to use such piano skills as they have, whether limited or advanced, to play an organ (pipe or electronic) for Christian worship.

Problem 1: The organist makes a general mess of the hymns, especially by playing wrong notes. This may arise from either general lack of ability or lack of opportunity to practise the hymns beforehand. Make sure your organist has a key to the church or other easy access for practice purposes. If you are the person responsible for choosing the hymns each week, notify the organist of your selection well in advance - some clergy find it suits them to choose the hymns for a month at a time, sometimes two - and also advise him/her of any unusual requirements, such as a blessing during Baptism or a time of reflection with background music.

Problem 2: The organist plays accurately but too slowly. This may also reflect lack of skill or lack of opportunity to practise sufficiently to get the hymns up to speed (see problem 1 above) or it may stem from upbringing in a church in which all hymns were sung in a slow and solemn manner. Discuss with the organist. If the organist has difficulty reading all the notes in a chord at the same time, it may help to suggest playing the melody only, preferably in octaves, perhaps with the appropriate chord at the end.

Whatever you do, do not try to speed up the tempo with your own voice; this flusters the organist and confuses the congregation.

Problem 3: Some hymns are quite well played; others are awful. Get the organist to make a list for you of the hymns he/she feels confident to play. Undertake to use these as often as you can, provided the organist works on other hymns to extend the list. Discuss together which ones these might be.

Problem 4: Your organist suffers from low self-esteem as a musician. Most untrained organists do and it gets in the way of the standard of their performance. You can help by remembering to thank or compliment whenever thanks or compliments are warranted. Don't wait for perfection; improvement also needs to be recognised. But no humbug please! You must be sincere or you will hurt.

Problem 5: Your organist plays voluntaries which are inappropriate to the season or to the liturgy. Discuss and sensitise. The organist may not have thought of this dimension before.

RSCM Australia (ACT Branch) wants to help the relatively untrained organist and can send a sympathetic adviser to spend an hour or two with him/her at the organ in your church. Encourage the organist to contact the Secretary of the Branch to make arrangements:

Katharine Walker, 12 Renwick Street, Chifley, ACT 2606

Phone/Fax: 62816666; E-mail: act.sec@rscmaustralia.org.au

Copies of any of these Help Sheets may be obtained from the Secretary of RSCM Australia, ACT Branch:
Katharine Walker, 12 Renwick Street, Chifley, ACT 2606
Phone/Fax 6281 6666; E-mail: act.sec@rscmaustralia.org.au

The ACT Branch has no objection to further copies of this Help Sheet being made for distribution to people who might be helped by them, provided they are made without amendment.