

Building on Your Chapter's Best Practices as You Seek, Encourage, and Respect – One Person at a Time!

Is your focus on programs or people?

We all get caught up in chapter programming:

- ❖ Headliner recitalist – check!
- ❖ Workshop on live-streaming services – check!
- ❖ Seminar on improvisation – check!
- ❖ Organ crawl to see the two organs in town – check!
- ❖ Hymn festival – check!
- ❖ Installation dinner – check!

It's easy to assume that making people feel welcomed, encouraged, and respected will happen automatically at all of these events, but that's not true. Think about some of the ways churches make those things happen:

- ❖ Greeters welcome people as they enter
- ❖ Ushers hand each person a bulletin and give directions as needed
- ❖ There are planned times in the service for people to greet and welcome one another
- ❖ Nametags help visitors learn people's names
- ❖ Small group ministries and activities help people get to know each other
- ❖ There are many opportunities to serve and share one's gifts

Is everyone invited?

Is your chapter's approach "build it and they will come," or do you reach out into the community and invite non-members to participate and become part of the Guild? Consider using tools like the new AGO Achievement Awards <https://www.agohq.org/ago-achievement-awards/> to attract novice organists who want to improve their skills. Invite that new organist in town to meet you for coffee. Offer scholarships to both organists and to pianists interested in learning to play the organ. Partner with other music organizations to put on programs that appeal to members in both groups and increase awareness of the organ and the AGO. Encourage your executive committee and your members to regularly reach out to non-members, organ students, and people in the community to get to know them and tell them about what the Guild has to offer.

Does everyone feel welcome and included?

In Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships, Daniel Goleman says:

"Social rejection—or fearing it—is one of the most common causes of anxiety. Feelings of inclusion depend not so much on having frequent social contacts or numerous relationships as on how accepted we feel, even in just a few key relationships. Small wonder that we have a

hardwired system that is alert to the threat of abandonment, separation, or rejection: these were once actual threats to life itself, though they are only symbolically so today. Still, when we hope to be a You, being treated like an It, as though we do not matter, carries a particularly harsh sting."

I've been an AGO member since my college days. My first church job was in a small congregation with a Conn 721 2-manual electronic organ. I found that others looked down on the instrument – and me for playing it – and learned quickly that when asked “what kind of organ does your church have?” the best response was “it’s a small two-manual” followed by a change of subject. It always made me uncomfortable.

I'm thankful that the Guild is more inclusive and welcoming now – but we still have work to do in the areas of respect, connection, and inclusion.

It's easy at Guild events to focus on catching up with friends we haven't seen in a while - after all, we're typically alone when we're practicing! At a recent chapter event, I was talking with a friend I hadn't seen in quite some time. After a few moments, he said: “Oh - let's include our colleague in our conversation” and invited one of our newer members to join us. The key here? He was observant, **noticed** that she wasn't part of one of the conversational groups, and **invited** her to join us.

What can your chapter do to make a difference in these areas?

- ❖ Be aware! Notice people standing alone and introduce yourself. Invite new people into conversations at events, rather than staying in groups with your friends.
- ❖ Foster an atmosphere of purposeful inclusion, where **everyone** is safe, valued, and cared for, and everyone is given the opportunity to form meaningful connections with one another.
- ❖ Respect and welcome **everyone**, regardless of what kind of organ they play, their church's denomination, how large their music program is, whether their position is paid or volunteer, or what music degree they have (if any).
- ❖ Learn what each person is interested in, working on, or struggling with, and what they have to share.
- ❖ Use chapter newsletters and chapter social media to showcase member performances and celebrate life events and achievements.
- ❖ Plan your newsletter content so that it includes items that appeal to young, mid-career, and retired organists, to the novice as well as the expert.
- ❖ Invite members to submit newsletter articles on a variety of subjects. A young student might write about her POE experience, a university professor could provide tips on Baroque performance practice, and a choir director could share ideas on recruitment. Everyone has something to share!

- ❖ Make your programming varied and inclusive. Don't meet at the same few churches each season or have the same members present workshops each season. A variety of programs and experiences helps everyone grow.

What worked in the past – and what works now:

We can learn from both the past and the present, and make our chapters more welcoming, encouraging, and inclusive. In the past, members had far fewer ways of connecting (remember the days of no email, no FaceBook, no Instagram, no texting, no tweets?!) and gathering together for a chapter meeting was an important opportunity to spend time with friends and colleagues. Today we connect all the time – and not only with people we know well. Thanks to social media and technology, we can connect with people we've never met and may never see in person.

For an in-person chapter event, some will come because of the event itself, but part of the motivation for almost everyone is to spend time with friends. Think about your most memorable moments at AGO events. Some of them are about outstanding performances and amazing new organs, but almost certainly an equal or greater number are about the people and the conversations – those times with friends and colleagues that have encouraged you, inspired you, and made you feel valued, affirmed, and respected.

Our chapter programs should be events that offer not only opportunities for beautiful music and professional growth, but that provide opportunities for people to mingle, talk, and get to know one another better. A variety of events and program times (not just Sunday afternoon concerts with a dinner afterwards!) will help us reach as many people as possible. Using diverse presenters is vital – this lets your chapter members know that you respect, value, and welcome **all** people. Involve your chapter members (not just the program committee) in building your program year. Listen and learn about what people are interested in and what they'd like to learn, do, and share.

Be creative in the ways you gather people together!

- ❖ Host a videoconference meeting (Zoom, WebEx, etc.) to discuss a relevant topic, such as coping with the coronavirus pandemic both personally and professionally or incorporating more diverse music in worship. Those who struggle with social anxiety or who are unable to make the long drive to get to an in-person meeting are often delighted to attend and participate in virtual events. A moderator can ensure that **everyone** has a chance to share and be heard.
- ❖ Schedule a coffee time or happy hour where the goals are fellowship and getting to know one another. In the age of COVID-19, these can be virtual, too.
- ❖ Carpool (or charter a bus) to attend an event in another city – riding together for several hours provides a great opportunity to build relationships.

- ❖ Encourage your board – and your members – to reach out regularly to check in with others in the chapter and community. Phone calls, texts, emails, and notes all let people know that you care about them. This has happened at all levels of the Guild during the pandemic, and people have been truly moved that someone in the AGO cared enough to check in with them. Don't let this kind of outreach be a one-time thing! As Theodore Roosevelt said, *“No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

Identify what works – and what could be better:

Identifying what is working in a chapter - and what could be better - means talking with ALL chapter members (not just the board, the program committee, or those who regularly attend chapter events!) and getting to know them. To give people the opportunity to talk about what kinds of programs and activities they'd like to participate in, chapters have used focus groups, small social gatherings, and one-on-one get-togethers for coffee or lunch with organists who aren't yet members as well as members who have not been active.

A unique suggestion from a recent focus group was a request for a means of sharing “pieces in progress.” Several in the group were interested in sharing and discussing their work in progress on a piece, rather than waiting until it was perfected and performing it on a recital. They felt that this would be encouraging and motivating and would show that **everyone** has to work to prepare new pieces. Other conversations sparked the idea of making upcoming chapter events both live and virtual in order to enable wider participation. As Jane Silber, former CEO of Canonical Ltd., said: *“The difference between diversity and inclusion is the difference between being invited to a house and being able to rearrange the furniture.”* The participants in these focus groups and conversations felt welcomed, knew their ideas were heard, and have helped put them into practice. They were given the freedom to *“rearrange the furniture.”*

Comedian Bill Crawford said *“Diversity, or the state of being different, isn't the same as inclusion. One is a description of what is, while the other describes a style of interaction essential to effective teams and organizations.”*

Chapter leaders must model a welcoming and inclusive attitude:

Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin defines leadership this way: *“Leadership is the ability to use talent, skills, and emotional intelligence to mobilize people for a common purpose. And hopefully, if you are the kind of leader that we want people to be, that common purpose is to make a positive difference in people's lives.”*

“The goal of many leaders is to get people to think more highly of the leader. The goal of a great leader is to help people to think more highly of themselves.”

—J. Carla Nortcutt

“Serving people means growing their capacity and implies that everyone can contribute.”

— Juana Bordas

As chapter leaders, the example of welcome, inclusion, and encouragement that we set has a ripple effect throughout our chapters – and the Guild as a whole. Mahatma Gandhi said it well: *“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”*

What are other chapter members learning from what they see you do? Are you setting an example of respect, welcome, and inclusion and helping to make your chapter more effective? To quote Bill Crawford again: *“Leaders should interact with everyone in their organization as if the interaction was being recorded and used as a training film on how to treat colleagues, coworkers, and customers.”*

We **all** share the responsibility for making the AGO a place where everyone is invited, welcomed, encouraged and respected!

AGO Task Force on Member Inclusivity

Leslie Wolf Robb

lesliewolfrobb@mac.com

David Lamb, Councillor for Membership

lambd61@sbcglobal.net

Committee on Membership Development and Chapter Support (CoMDaCS)

Wayne Peterson, Director

waynehpeterson@yahoo.com