



Church music

When we examine the present church music situation, two main problems present themselves:

- a) There is a lack of a good norm and
- b) There is a lack of a good regulation that works out this norm.

Points of attention

A good norm

Old Testament: the command of David

When we speak about music in the worship service, we are not dealing with an indifferent matter to be left in the hands of the organist to do with as he/she sees fit. This becomes clear from the fact that the Bible hands us a good norm: *the command of David*. In the Old Testament we frequently encounter the expression *the command of David* (2 Chronicles 8:12-14; 23:18; 35:15; 1 Chronicles 29:25; Ezra 3:10, 11 and Nehemiah 12:24, 35). Whenever we come across this term, it concerns the (re-) organization of church music. After a period of neglect of the temple service, it is again re-established properly. This also meant that the Levitical musicians and choristers were once again called upon to take care of the music performed during the temple services. The motivation for this is always *the command of David*. We can read about this command in 1 Chronicles 16:4-9; 41, 42 and 25:1-7. From 2 Chronicles 8 and 29:25 it becomes clear where this command comes from: David has received it from God himself by means of the prophets Gad and Nathan.

New Testament: the command of David

David's regulations were in the first instance intended for the temple services of the Old Testament; his command, however, also has a clear message for the New-Testament congregation. God himself instituted church music and placed high demands on it for both its organization and quality (1 Chronicles 25:7-9 and Nehemiah 12:44-47; 13:10, 11). And precisely those matters remain relevant for the church of Jesus Christ (compare art. 25 B.C.). Church music, for us as well, is an institution of God. Therefore, we should take care that our church music is well regulated and not left to chance.

Also today the command of David is the norm for our church music. It is, therefore, self-evident that we concern ourselves with it. We should make sure that there is a good structure for the organization and quality of church music.

We should see to it that there are capable people who with their gifts and expertise can serve the congregation of God and who, in addition, have the possibility (and opportunity) to maintain and develop their abilities.

In the past it has often been said that for the New-Testament church — pilgrims on the way to the new Jerusalem — there is no room nor time for liturgy and church music. But this has never been the total vision of Christianity. People such as Luther and Calvin started from Creation. They saw music as a Creation gift and as such must be used for God and his service. Psalm 150 expresses what that means: *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord*, vocally and instrumentally.

Our situation

Just as with the other commandments of God, we can also say of *the command of David* that it is beneficial. The command does not lead to a deadly over-organization, but it provides the correct framework. In reading and re-reading 1 Chronicles 16 and 2 Chronicles 5:11-14, it appears again and again how rich, how intense, how balanced, how instructive and formative the praise of God can be. It is the same riches of which Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 speak and which we encounter in the heavenly liturgy of Revelation 4 and 5. Those are our examples and they provide us with the correct framework for our church music.

In our practice, however, it is unfortunately often the case that when the organist asks for attention to his function — so it is argued — this request is seen as asking attention for him/herself and, therefore, too much attention to church music places the organist in the centre. As if an unassuming organist ought to be a silent organist. An organist who voices his opinion will usually do so because he/she feels responsible for the task given to him/her. He does not ask attention for him/herself, but for the correct 'filling-in' of his/her task. And for that an organist can and may ask attention.

When organist, consistory, minister and congregation let themselves be guided by David's command, no one will ask attention for him/herself, but for the matter he or she is responsible for, that is to say, the 'working-out' of church music: for congregational singing and organ playing. God himself teaches us how He wants to be honoured in church music.

Historical background

That we, as Reformed people, often are satisfied with a minimum in church music partially can be explained from history. After Calvin the origin and function of church music did not get a permanent place in Reformed theology. As a result people simply became satisfied with the musical level that was (locally) available.

Because of these "lean" centuries we have become accustomed — as far as church music is concerned — to extreme frugality. We can always sing, also in farmers' barns and back rooms, even when we are accompanied by a harmonium or electronium. As long as the 'emotions' were satisfied, quality did not matter. The *command of David*, however, demands quality in every situation.

Youth

A plea for quality in church music is also necessary when we take the forming of opinions in the youth of the church into account. Their musical world is mostly determined by the perfection of recording studios, technologically advanced audio equipment and constant comparison in popularity ("the Top 40"). Understanding for an organist who year-in-year-out plays poorly or barely average in the worship — which already, as far as the musical climate is concerned, is often radically different for them — hardly exists. To put it even stronger: some young people grew up with the idea that the low quality of music in the church is just the way it is.

Some of the older people may be able to have patience and understanding for a poorly functioning organist, but that is certainly different for the youth of the church. "Why is the guy not replaced?" or "Why does the man not take lessons?" are for them — and really for every one — obvious questions. In most cases we could easily improve such situations, if we considered it worthwhile to do so.

Good regulations

We have already observed that in our present situation, good regulations as well as good norms are lacking. The first flows from the second. A lack of a sense of responsibility and a lack of appreciation for music in the church is usually the reason for a lack of good regulations. A policy statement of the consistory and a regulation for the organist will have to provide for a good church

musical framework in local congregations. In what follows, information necessary for drawing up such a policy statement and regulation will be given.

Relationship consistory — organist

When the consistory appoints an organist, an agreement should be signed by both the consistory and the organist. When there is no such agreement neither consistory nor organist know for what they are responsible and accountable. A good regulation can in practice precisely prevent many problems. It also makes for a good relationship between consistory and organist. The consistory is responsible for the proceedings in the worship service and, therefore, also for the music in the worship service. This means that they must appoint a skillful and knowledgeable organist, who must take care of the 'working-out' of church music and who, therefore, is responsible for it.

Consistory and organist must know and recognize each other's responsibilities. When it concerns the musical aspects of organ playing and congregational singing, the organist and not the consistory is the proper address. The consistory should also let itself be advised in these matters by the organist. That given ought to be included in the policy statement as well as in the regulation for the organist.

It should be pointed out that the advice of a qualified organist, as a rule, should be valued more than that of an organist who is not. It is not self-evident that a member of the congregation who can play the organ fairly well, is also an expert on liturgy, hymnology, organ building and congregational singing.

Qualifications

When is an organist qualified and when is someone good enough to become an organist? The policy statement must include that the organist has sufficient musical skills. How that is worked out depends on local circumstances. A small country church with a harmonium (electronium) has other requirements than a city church with a three manual organ. As a minimum the following skills are considered to be necessary:

1. An organist must be able to accompany the psalms and hymns in four-part harmony with the necessary variation. A well developed sense of metre and rhythm and reading of notes are also indispensable for this.
2. The preludes / intonations ought to be of such quality that the congregation clearly knows what the chorale melody, its tempo and pitch is. Also the moment on which the congregation should begin to sing must be clear.
3. In the independent organ playing an organist must play a styleful and varied church musical repertoire. In order to do so, it is necessary that the organist is well acquainted with the organ literature and repertoire and also has good knowledge of the history of church music.
4. The organist must know the sound possibilities of his organ (disposition) and know how to make good use of these (registration).
5. An organist must have an elementary knowledge of the liturgy. He must know what the function of a song is at a certain place in the liturgy. This is necessary, for example, to be able to judge whether to play a long(er) prelude or merely an intonation.

Again, these requirements are minimal. Anything less is detrimental to the praise and prayer of the congregation. Where ever possible higher requirements can and should be set. Skills, such as these, can be objectively observed and easily judged.

Too few capable organists

What must a consistory do when there are too few candidates who possess the above mentioned requirements in one's own congregation? All too often the best of the worst is appointed and for years fulfills the function. This to the annoyance of the congregation who by now knows the monotone ditties of the organist by heart. This situation can be prevented when, at the time of the appointment, the qualifications of the candidate(s) are tested by means of a comparative exam.

Here, too, it holds that prevention is better than the cure. When it appears that none of the candidates has the necessary skills, the consistory must have the courage not to appoint. In such a case it is wiser to search for candidates in neighboring congregations who possess the required skills. The accompaniment of the congregation with (an) other instrument(s) or the appointment of a precentor (voorzanger) can also be taken into consideration.

Training

From the foregoing it appears that the organist must have some expertise. Without training, he/she will most likely not acquire it. That is why the consistory requires that the organist continues to develop the skills and knowledge that are necessary for the proper execution of his/her Sunday task. Standing still means going backward. It goes without saying that the consistory ought to finance such a training.

Consultation

Good consultation between the consistory and organist, between minister and organist and between organists is necessary. The minister and the organist, besides the congregation, are the most important persons who determine the 'filling-in' of the worship service. The minister, qua theological training, is the person responsible for thinking about liturgy and church music. It is important that both minister and organist are aware — both from their own responsibility — that they are busy with giving the service as much as possible a dignified form. In doing so they can help each other. The minister, who possibly has received little or no musical training, should consider himself blessed to have a capable and knowledgeable organist. When it concerns congregational singing both minister and organist — each from their own expertise — have their own, complementary input. Both should consult with each other frequently.

When there are more organists, they must bring their playing in line with each other. Not to achieve a gray uniformity, but to agree on essential matters (tempo, notation, repertoire choice, etc.), so that the congregation knows where she is at. Such consultation should at least take place once a year (see Agreement)

Rusted-shut situations

A problem concerning the position of the organist is often the "seemingly endless" period of his appointment. Many organists are organists for life. In our ecclesiastical practices, where it often is a question of unqualified organists with limited skills, this situation is for many reason undesirable:

- The repertoire of psalms and hymns in our Book of Praise is limited. It can be no other wise than that at a certain moment in time the organist is 'played out' and begins to repeat him/herself endlessly.
- The more capable organist does not get a chance to make his/her contribution.
- Consistories who want to mobilize musical talents in the congregation appoint as many organists as possible to overcome the situation. However, congregational singing is best served by no more than two organists who have agreed on a common approach to the worship service.

The organist as coach

'Sitting' organists must be aware of their replacement in the long run. It would be good when a consistory that values its organist with good honorarium/remuneration and clear appointment, in return requires the organist to be on the look-out for new talents in the congregation. Let it be the task of the main organist to stimulate and help the church musical development of (young) members of the congregation.

Policy statement and regulation

In this section the previous information is translated into a policy statement of the consistory and a regulation for the organist. In the policy statement the consistory establishes for itself, the organist

and the congregation, the policy concerning the church musical matters. The regulations for the organist deal with the concrete agreements between the consistory and *one* organist. The regulation, as it were, flows from the policy statement and is unthinkable without it.

I. Policy statement of the consistory

1. Consistory

- 1.1 The consistory is responsible for the proceedings in the worship services. The organists are, therefore, only accountable to the consistory. Any instructions concerning the performance of their task they will receive from the consistory only.
- 1.2 The consistory takes care that the number of set organists' positions is filled. The number of organists is set at _____ organists.
- 1.3 The consistory encourages the organists (to continue) to develop their skills and knowledge mentioned under 2.2.
- 1.4 At least once a year the consistory (the minister among them) will meet with the organists to discuss matters concerning the tasks of the organists.
- 1.5 In decisions involving church musical matters the consistory will consult with its organists.

2. Requirements for organists

- 2.1 The organists ought to be members of one of the Canadian Reformed Churches, preferably of the local congregation.
- 2.2 For a responsible working-out of the musical part of the worship service, it is necessary that the organist has sufficient know-how and skills to accompany the singing of the congregation properly and provide styleful organ playing before and after the worship service and during the offertory, in keeping with the character of the Reformed liturgy. The organist must also be well informed, among others, about liturgical matters, the song of the church (hymnology) and the modes.

3. Appointment and dismissal

- 3.1 The organists are appointed and dismissed by the consistory. The organists are appointed for a period of five years and can be re-appointed.
- 3.2 The appointment of organists is ratified by the signing of a 'regulation for organists' that describes the rights and duties of the consistory and organists.
- 3.3 In case of a vacancy the consistory calls for candidates to fill the position.
- 3.4 Candidates who are in possession of a certificate (diploma or degree) are preferred over those who do not.
- 3.5 Candidates, who have not been appointed previously (see 3.1) or who are not in possession of a certificate (diploma or degree), must demonstrate their skills (see 2.2.) by submitting to a (comparative) exam.
- 3.6 When there are more than one candidate a comparative examination will take place as well.

4. The organ and its use

- 4.1 Organists appointed by the consistory have access to the organ for their own study and for giving lessons to students.
- 4.2 The co-ordination for the use of the organ by organists who are not appointed by the consistory rests with the organists.
- 4.3 In matters concerning the organ, such as the purchase of a new instrument, restoration and maintenance, the organists are the primary advisers.

5. Budget item for church music

On the yearly budget of the church there will be an item for church music. This item will cover the costs of, for example, remuneration, purchase of organ music and books, and taking lessons, etc.

6. Establishment policy statement

This policy statement has been established by the consistory on its meeting of _____.

II. Regulations for the organist

These regulations are an agreement between the Canadian Reformed Church at _____ and the organist (Mr./Mrs./Miss) _____, concerning the duties that the organist performs for the consistory.

1. Appointment

The organist begins his/her duties on _____ for a period of five years.

2. Description of duties

The organist has as task:

- a) To accompany the congregational singing responsibly during the meetings.
- b) To take care of the independent organ music before and after the service and during the offertory in keeping with the particular service and with the character of the Reformed liturgy.
- c) To advise the consistory on all matters concerning congregational singing, the appointment of organists, as well as in matters such as the purchase of a new organ, the restoration and maintenance of the existing instrument.
- d) (If qualified) to guide and counsel prospective organists.
- e) To be busy with the (continuous) development of the skills that are necessary for performance of his/her regular duties. Also to keep him/herself well informed about musical, hymnological and liturgical matters.

3. Consultation with the other organists

The organist, in consultation with the other appointed organists, draws up a playing roster and comes to proper agreements involving the uniformity in the accompaniment of congregational singing (tempo, style, accidentals, rests, etc.).

4. Reporting of defects

The organist immediately reports the defects of the organ he/she has noticed, as well as the conditions and circumstances that could affect the proper functioning of the instrument, to the Committee of Administration, c.q. the consistory.

5. Regular consultation with the consistory

At least once a year consistory and organist meet to discuss church musical matters.

6. Access to the organ

The organist has access to the organ for his/her own study and for teaching his/her students.

7. Honorarium/remuneration

The consistory pays the organist for his work or as remuneration for costs incurred and expenses the sum of _____ a year.

8. Policy statement

At the time of his or her appointment the organist receives a copy of the policy statement of the consistory. This statement describes the number of organists positions, appointment procedure, etc.

9. Termination of the appointment

This agreement ends:

- a) After the period mentioned in art. 1 has expired.
- b) After the organist has left the local congregation for another.
- c) After a written notice, stating the reasons, by the organist.
- d) After a written notice, stating the reasons, by the consistory.

If the reasons involve church musical matters the consistory, before proceeding to termination, seeks the advice of a qualified, objective third party.

Place _____

Date _____

For the consistory,

The organist,

(signature)

(signature)

Printed and translated with permission from *Orgeldienst*, 18-5 (July, 1991), pp. 108-111.