

AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

Considerations for Calculating the Weekly Hours of an Organist and/or Director of Music at a Religious Institution

APPROVED by AGO National Council September 5, 2017

The American Guild of Organists has prepared this document to assist churches in understanding the nature of the work of an organist or a director of music at a religious institution. It is our hope that by detailing the activities required of a professional musician, a church or synagogue will be better able to establish an appropriate compensation package for any musician it employs.

The following is a list of activities that typically occupy the time of a professional musician serving a religious institution. Employers and musicians are invited to use this outline, either separately or in tandem, to help calculate the amount of time required for a musician to complete the work that the employer expects to be performed in a competent and professional manner.

1. Time spent in worship services

Service lengths can vary from a half-hour to three hours, depending on the congregation. This time is often the only public "face time" that those who don't work with the musician throughout the week will often associate with the "work" of what an organist or director of music does for a congregation. In fact, this is merely the presentation of the musician's work. It reflects many hours of study, preparation, and life experience prior to every service at which the musician's work is heard.

While one cannot be remunerated for life experience or the life-long study that is required to become a competent musician, the hours of mental preparation, personal musical practice, meetings with staff, consultations with volunteers, rehearsal time, and preparation must all be considered as integral parts of the presentation in worship services. The work at those services, ironically, often involves making quick decisions to revise the plans and preparation that took place in the preceding weeks. An organist or director of music is often required to create on-the-spot, improvised solutions to unforeseen obstacles that require the musician to act responsibly for the benefit of the congregation.

It is sometimes tempting for worship leaders who are not musicians to argue that the time spent in worship service is as much a devotional activity for the hired musician as it is for members of the congregation and therefore should not be considered as work hours for which the organist or director of music must be paid. Such arguments have little merit. The stressful position of leadership in which a musician is placed demands that professional expertise be put to use at every moment of a service in order to support and lead the musical portions of worship.

Calculate the total time spent in worship during one complete representative week.

____hrs./wk.

2. Rehearsals with other musicians

Choirs, soloists, and instrumental ensembles need the skilled leadership of a prepared musician to be effective at providing music that not only enhances worship,

but also enables the leaders of the musical portions of a service to engage the whole congregation effectively in meaningful participation. To that end, musicians are expected to be prepared, knowledgeable, and competent in the execution of pitch, rhythmic, dynamic, and tempo markings indicated in the music. Musicians must also take into account the need to make adjustments for acoustics, congregation size, the effects of the weather on instruments, delayed maintenance or inadequacy of an organ's installation or design, and possible last minute changes over which a musician has no control. In sum, musicians must be prepared for any reality in a public, unrehearsed musical activity that depends entirely on their leadership to be successful.

Calculate the total time spent in activities relating to rehearsals with other musicians:

- a. Total hours spent in rehearsal, including on Sunday before worship _____hrs./wk.
- b. Total hours spent in rehearsal preparation; i.e., score study, keyboard and/or conducting practice, room set up, management of robes, and distribution and collection of music _____hrs./wk.

3. Organ practice

Organists and directors of music must practice in order to be fully prepared to lead a number of hymns or congregational songs at each worship service. They must also practice sufficiently to be able to play or conduct music that a religious community sings as part of its weekly (or daily) liturgy and provide organ solos or choral accompaniment from organ or piano. Additionally, whether playing or serving as the conductor for another musician, organists must set up the registration of the organ to provide the appropriate sounds from the instrument. An adequate amount of time must be set aside to take care of all these tasks outside of rehearsals and services.

Calculate the total time spent in organ practice preparing hymns, service music, preludes, postludes, choral accompaniments, and registration of the organ.

_____hrs./wk.

4. Selection of music

Music selection requires advance planning by all parties who expect the musician to follow their lead. Musicians need adequate communication with the service leader about service themes, scripture lessons, and sermon topics pursuant to the selection of the music to be sung by the congregation or choirs, or played on instruments. Research is necessary to find appropriate music according to: textual topic or source; skill level of the musician; the length of time available within the service, and the musical style(s) compatible with the expectations of the organization. The musician's ability to plan efficiently is dependent largely on the ability of clergy and others responsible for planning worship to provide context within which the musician is expected to select music. In addition to private study and research, weekly meetings with other staff may be required.

Calculate the total time required for Lectionary and scripture study and consultations with clergy to select appropriate music.

_____hrs./wk.

5. Preparation for special services

Throughout the year, important observances such as Christmas and Easter in Christian churches and High Holy Days in Jewish synagogues usually demand preparation of more music, or music of greater length and complexity than that which

is expected for weekly worship. Score study, rehearsal of musicians, and personal practice must be accomplished over multiple weeks throughout the year to provide adequate preparation for all involved.

Calculate the total time required for preparation of music for special services and the additional time that is required to work with ensembles, soloists, and special musical arrangements.

___hrs./wk.

6. Maintenance of music library

Music scores which are purchased by a religious institution must be kept in order and organized so that they can be ready whenever needed. Volunteers may be engaged to assist with this work, but they or paid staff must be supervised by the musical director or organist so that best practices are consistently followed. The musical director or organist ensures that the music library's contents meet expectations and are in usable condition. Weekly filing of selections not in current use by singers and instrumentalists is vital to maintaining the library's readiness.

Calculate the total time required to maintain the music library including sorting and filing the music in the collection, and ordering new music.

___hrs./wk.

7. Administration

Organists and music directors are often expected to handle administrative duties and communicate regularly with other musicians, staff, clergy, and volunteer leaders throughout the year. In meeting their administrative responsibilities, musicians may be required to maintain and publicize the schedule of music selections; plan and coordinate rehearsals in light of any competing space needs in the institution; submit payroll information for any other paid staff the music director supervises; track budgetary spending and calculate future budgetary needs based on expectations of the organization; submit music titles for publication in weekly service leaflets; audition and recruit volunteers and professional musicians such as section leaders of a choir; hire extra musicians as required; arrange for maintenance and tuning of the organ and other instruments; and rent instruments when needed.

Calculate the total time required for administrative responsibilities such as seasonal planning, budgeting, submission of payroll information, service leaflet preparation, auditions and recruitment, contracting musicians and tuners, and renting instruments.

___hrs./wk.

8. Meetings

Religious institutions benefit from the involvement of all paid staff who lead programs within the organization. Full participation may entail weekly, biweekly, monthly, or quarterly attendance at staff, committee, congregational or other meetings so that others may benefit from the professional expertise for which the individual was hired. Organists and music directors are no exception and may be the only people in the organization with expert knowledge in the area of music in general and sacred music in particular.

Calculate the total time spent in clergy consultations, staff, committee, and/or Council/Vestry meetings per week (other than service planning).

___ hrs./wk.

9. Educational Opportunities

Religious institutions that educate their leaders and their congregations about sacred music are more likely to benefit from the musical content of worship services. Worship leaders and congregants will also have a fuller understanding of texts to which music is set and the sacred words which inspire the music presented. Organists and music directors in religious institutions may be expected to write articles, make presentations, and introduce parts of the service to inform and educate congregants and worship leaders about the music being presented in worship.

Calculate the total time required to write articles for bulletins and newsletters; teach and participate in religious education; and deliver presentations on songs, hymns, and the pipe organ.

___ hrs./wk.

10. Other

Many religious institutions provide a wide array of educational and worship opportunities for their communities outside of a weekly service. These events may require special planning for the music selected for performance. The time needed to prepare music for additional services, concerts, or educational programs should be considered.

Calculate the total time required to plan and perform concerts, concert series, educational programs, and additional services such as Evensong, Vespers, prayer services, etc.

___ hrs./wk.

Basic hours per week

___ **Total**

Additional consideration should be given to continuing education opportunities for the organist or director of music, including:

- hours required to maintain keyboard proficiency and work on new repertoire.
- personal and professional musical growth and development through ongoing study, research, reading periodicals and other professional literature, and attendance at conventions, concerts, workshops, etc.