



## Organ Society of Queensland Inc. Background Paper on Payment of Church Musicians

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*“O sing unto the Lord a new song. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.”* (Psalm 98: 1,4)

Music has the power to engage human emotions, create enthusiasm, and impart a sense of unity to a congregation. Hence it plays an important role in worship. Music enriches worship. For instance, hymns gather people together, they help teach theology, and provide an avenue for emotional expression of faith.

Church musicians assist in the proclamation of the Word. The organist proclaims with the organ what the preacher proclaims with words resulting in a deeper appreciation and understanding of the liturgical celebration by the congregation <sup>(1)</sup>. Church organists use their instruments to craft a musical environment which supports and enhances worship <sup>(2)</sup>. As music is an integral part of Christian worship, Church musicians perform an essential role in the successful celebration of the liturgy and assist in the proclamation of the Word of God

*“Workers are worth of their pay.”* (1 Timothy 5: 18)

*“The worker deserves his wages.”* (Luke 10: 7)

Church organists are highly-skilled members of their churches’ worship team and play an important leadership role in the church. As such, it is appropriate that they be paid for their services. In church some contexts, church organists and directors of music are referred to as Ministers of Music, and as such are paid, just as Ministers of the Word are paid.

Organ playing is an art form involving a multitude of skills, both physical and mental. The physical skills including mastery in the use of manuals and pedals, both separately and in combination, along with facility in the use of stops and registration aids such as combination systems <sup>(3)</sup>. The mental skills involved include the ability to read three staves of music, interpret the dynamic markings on the music, and draw suitable stops according to the specification of the particular organ that he or she is playing.

Church organists have to be extremely versatile: they are expected to offer a wide range of musical skills, from accompanying congregational and choral singing to playing voluntaries and improvising <sup>(4)</sup>.

Monetary compensation for church musicians should take account of their relevant qualifications, skills, experience and professional standing. Qualifications include degrees, diplomas, certificates, etc. from recognised universities, colleges, and schools of music. Skills include accompanying congregational singing, choirs and soloists, performing appropriate voluntaries, improvising, and choral conducting, as well as providing music suitable for the liturgy and season. Experience refers mainly to years spent in church music positions, although experience should not be used overly in making appointments, as talented young novices deserve their chance to build up their levels of experience. Professional standing includes membership and leadership of relevant musical societies and organisations.

Monetary compensation for church musicians should reflect the time spent in attending to their duties, contributing to the regular weekly services and additional services on occasions during the year such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Anzac Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day, plus services involving community organisations.

Monetary compensation for church musicians should also reflect the time spent on other duties which typically include organ practice in preparation for worship, planning selecting music (hymns,

introductions, anthems, communion/mass settings, and organ voluntaries), and oversight of the condition of the church's instruments (organ, piano, etc). Pay rates for church musicians should also reflect the time involved with a choir where applicable (i.e. time spent conducting, accompanying rehearsals and performance in services, oversight of the choir library, and acquisition of new music, etc).

Monetary compensation for church musicians should recognise the time, effort and money spent on gaining qualifications, plus maintaining and upgrading their skills by taking further study and attending relevant conferences, summer schools, workshops and seminars at their own personal expense. Recognition should be given to the money spent on the purchase of sheet music, the purchase of organ shoes, and subscriptions to relevant music societies and magazines.

Recognition should be given to the reality that church musicians appointed to full-time positions should receive a "living wage", and that church musicians appointed to part-time positions need to find employment elsewhere in order to make a living.

### *The salary and wages environment*

The OSQ Salary Guide for the Payment of Church Musicians has been drawn up with reference to relevant documents including the Salary Guide of the Association of Anglican Musicians (AAM, 2016)<sup>(5)</sup>, the Salary Guide of the American Guild of Organists (AGO, 2012)<sup>(6)</sup>, and the Australian Live Performers Award<sup>(7)</sup>.

AAM (in 2016) recommended salary levels from \$62,000 (AUD) for a novice organist with no formal qualifications, to \$88,500 for a qualified organist with 10 years experience, and \$123,000 for a highly-qualified organist with 20 years experience.

AGO (in 2012) recommended salary levels from \$47,000 (AUD) for a novice organist with minimum qualifications, to \$78,000 for a qualified organist with 10 years experience, and \$101,000 for a highly-qualified organist with 20 years experience. Benefits, such as medical insurance, are additional to the salary levels.

The Live Performers Award (2017), shows that musicians (accompanying artists) should be paid at rates varying from \$50.85 to \$56.74 per hour (plus 80% loading for Sundays), with conductors paid \$61.56 per hour (also, plus 80% loading for Sundays). These rates over a 38-hour week equate to between \$1932 and \$2156 per week for performing musicians and \$2340 for conductors. These figures convert to between \$100,480 and \$112,000 p.a. for performing musicians, and \$121,640 p.a. for conductors.

The OSQ Salary Guide has been drawn up with reference also to the income levels of ministers and pastors in Australia. Ministers of the Word in some denominations currently receive approximately \$60,000 p.a. plus house, car and study allowances, taking their salary and benefits to approximately \$100,000 p.a.<sup>(8)</sup>. Open Universities Australia quote an average salary of \$60,000 p.a. (plus allowances) for ministers of religion, and a salary of \$120,000 p.a. for senior pastors<sup>(9)</sup>. PayScale Human Capital quotes an average salary for ministers of \$77,000 p.a.<sup>(10)</sup>.

The income levels in Australia are such that full-time adult Australian average weekly earnings are \$1608 (from May 2017), which equates to \$83,600 per annum<sup>(11)</sup>. The average annual income for "tradies" in Australian in 2016 was \$85,000 for electricians, \$82,000 for bricklayers and \$81,000 for tilers<sup>(12)</sup>.

The OSQ Salary Guide (2017) recommends annual salary levels from \$64,000 for a novice musician with no formal qualifications, to \$80,000 for a qualified musician with 10 years experience, and

\$96,000 for a highly-qualified musician with 20 years experience. Part-time salaries have been calculated on a pro-rata basis according to levels of qualifications and experience.

Award agreements in Australia are updated regularly to take account of rises in the cost of living i.e. the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Similarly, payments paid to church musicians should be updated regularly to take account of rises in the CPI.

#### *Additional comments*

It would be expected that organists maintain their organ playing skills, so the church's instrument should be accessible for practice by the organist at mutually convenient times for no charge. Further, it can be expected that organists pass on their knowledge and skills to others, especially the younger generation, so the church's instrument should be made accessible for lessons given to students by the organist at mutually convenient times for no charge. The church's instrument should also be made accessible to the organist's assistants and students for practice at no charge. This is seen an encouragement of these players and as the church's investment in the future.

It is important that a professional attitude to the payment of church musicians be taken by churches in all locations to encourage and support high standards of music which inspire congregations in their worship. Further, if talented music students are going to take up the organ as their primary instrument of study, there needs to be the prospect of the availability of organ-playing positions which pay a living wage, in order to keep them motivated and inspired to reach their goals. The talents and efforts of such young organists will greatly benefit the whole church today and in the future.

It is recognised in the Roman Catholic Church that "... the pipe organ adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things" <sup>(13)</sup>.

Long may we hear "the playing of the merry organ, (and) sweet singing in the choir" <sup>(14)</sup>.

#### **Notes**

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2. Thad Reynolds (2017). *The American Organist*. June. 2017, p. 40.
3. C.H. Trevor (1971). *The Oxford Organ Method*, Oxford University Press.
4. Royal School of Church Music (2010). *The Complete Church Organist* RSCM.
5. Association of Anglican Musicians (2016). *Salary Guide for Church Musicians*  
<http://anglicanmusicians.org/publications/>
6. American Guild of Organists (2012). *Salary Guide for Musicians Employed by Religious Institutions*. AGO, New York.
7. Live Performers Award (2017)  
<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/.../live-performance-award-ma000081-pay-guide.pdf>
8. Uniting Church in Australia, South Australia Synod (2017).  
<http://sa.uca.org.au/documents/human-resources/congregational-resources/Ministry-of-Pastor-and-Pastoral-Support-Worker-Salary-and-Allowances-Guidelines-July-2017.pdf>
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14. *The holly and the ivy*. Traditional English Christmas Carol.