

AGENCY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORGANIST-
CHOIRMASTERS: WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP?

by

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To my family, for your patience and encouragement

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

How do organist-choirmasters navigate their environment to achieve effectiveness? This research question ultimately has two components. First, how does one even define an effective organist-choirmaster? Only after answering the question of effectiveness and understanding the goals of organist-choirmasters can one consider the second component—the ways in which these individuals navigate their environments to achieve those goals. Many books and articles have been published over the years by organist-choirmasters and other church musicians, drawing from their own education and experience to discuss how one might best achieve X, Y, or Z, or deal with specific problems. These are certainly insightful texts and offer examples of how organist-choirmasters operate, providing ideas and tools for both the inexperienced and veteran church musician. To date, however, no study has systematically identified and analyzed the broader issues involved with the organist-choirmaster environment. This study—based on interviews with twenty-six organist-choirmasters of a variety of backgrounds—aims to do that.

While there are many ways to approach and analyze this type of data, I will be using a theoretical framework widely used in the social sciences and other fields that considers the contrast between and interaction of human agency and social structure. Human agency—from a sociological standpoint—is the ability of social actors (in our case, focused on individual persons) to make choices, respond to challenges, and initiate change. Social structure encompasses a few ideas, namely a) the relationship of entities or groups to each other; b) the patterns of behavior of people in relation to each other; or c) the institutionalized norms or cognitive frameworks that shape people's actions.

Social structure both constrains and enables agency. To consider a non-musical example, social structure both enables and constrains the action of baptism. Without the institutional authorized form (in this example, the form from the Christian tradition which utilizes the words

“baptize/is baptized” along with some version of the Trinitarian formula), one could not perform a baptism. If there were no enabling structure—no embedded norms nor specifically prescribed baptismal actions—no one would be able to conduct a baptism. At the same time, however, the structure also constrains. Even ordained clergy cannot (under normal circumstances) conduct a baptism with beer, as Pope Gregory IX reminded a Norwegian archbishop in 1241.¹

While social structure influences agency, agency also influences social structure over time.² To continue with the previous illustration, shifts in baptismal theology throughout history and in different church bodies (relating to, for example, immersion vs. sprinkling, or infant vs. believers’ baptism) are, to some degree, influenced by the actions of individuals.

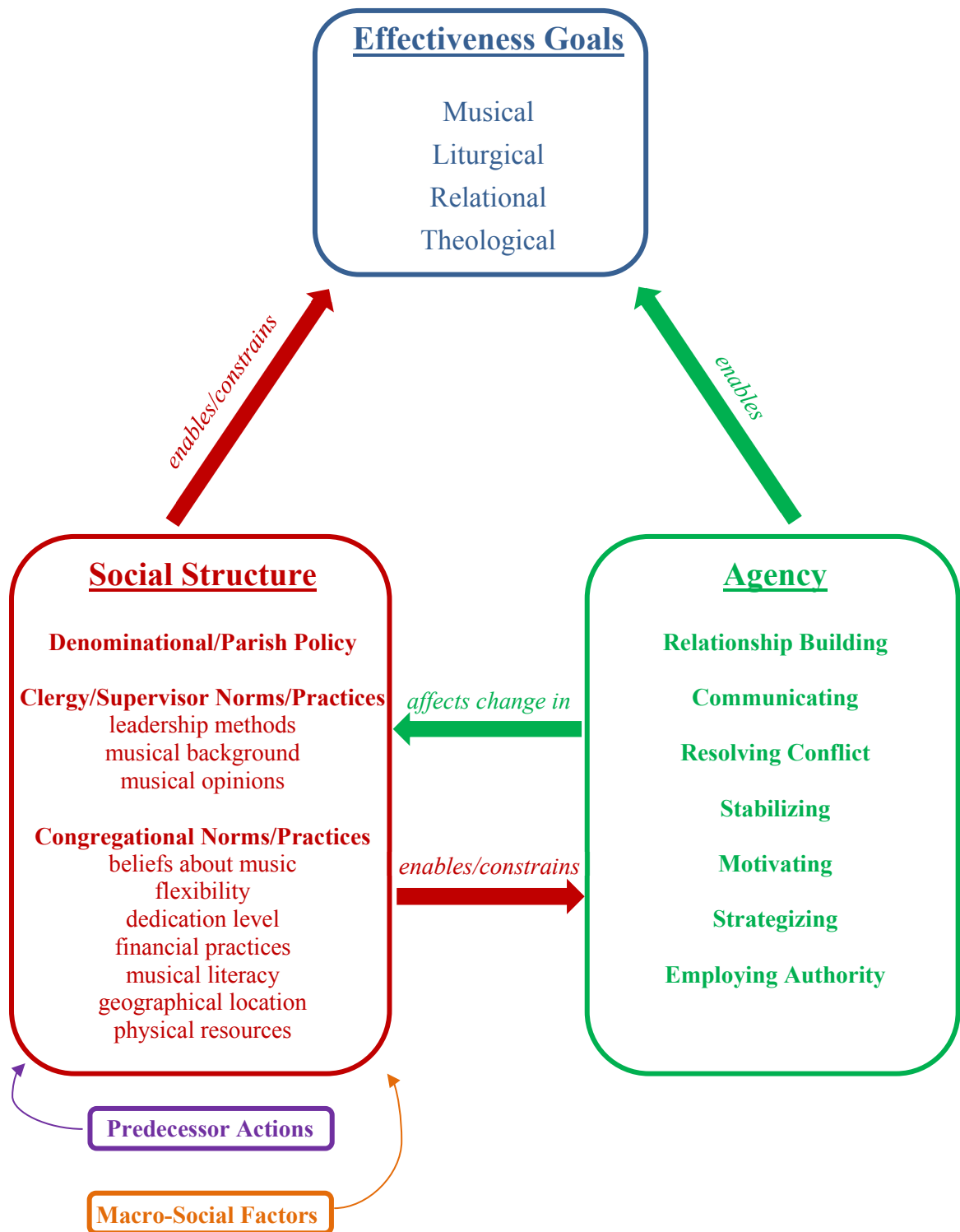
Like the example of baptism, organist-choirmasters’ efforts exist in an environment with both constraining and enabling social structure. At the same time, they still have the ability to take action—to make choices, respond to challenges, and initiate change. As will be shown in this analysis, their actions sometimes even influence and shift the structure itself.

What makes an organist-choirmaster effective is “a surprisingly perplexing question,” as one of my respondents described it. Interview participants gave many potential criteria in several different realms for what constitutes effectiveness in their work. I hope this study provides some insight into the issues surrounding organist-choirmasters achieving these varying goals within their equally as varied environments.

¹ W. Fanning, “Baptism” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm>

² Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

Figure 1: A Model of Effectiveness, Social Structure, and Agency of Organist-Choirmasters



Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

After receiving approval for the study from the Indiana University Institutional Review Board, I conducted twenty-six semi-structured interviews (from August 2016 to January 2019). These were done primarily through video-conferencing (Skype and Facetime) with several by phone and one in person. The interviews lasted between twenty and ninety minutes. I limited my interviews to people who served as both organist and choir director in their organization (hence using the term “organist-choirmaster”¹) in order to get an introductory understanding of music directors’ environments, without the extra dimension of additional significant music staff who would influence relationships, hierarchies, goal-setting, decision-making processes, etc. I also required that my participants had been in their current position (or in a few cases, their prior position on which they focused their responses) for at least three years so that they would have sufficient experience from which to draw. One respondent was a few months under this requirement.

I started my interviews with organist-choirmasters personally known to me as a fellow practitioner, and used those connections to reach additional people. The participants were 29 to 82 years old, and represented Roman Catholic, Presbyterian (Presbyterian Church (USA)), Lutheran (both Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), Episcopalian (The Episcopal Church) and Methodist (United Methodist Church) perspectives. They spoke of current or past positions throughout the United States² at churches of all levels of size and prestige in cities, towns, and suburbs. Almost all participants held a graduate degree in music.

¹ This is not meant to specifically refer to organist-choirmasters in Episcopal churches, where this particular term is most frequently employed.

² Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wisconsin

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Two medium-length interviews were taken and extensively analyzed to come up with a set of initial codes and some general categories relevant to my original research question, which was primarily concerned with documenting and explaining issues of the authority and legitimacy of organist-choirmasters within their organizations. All interviews were then entered into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis program, and analyzed using these initial codes and additional codes that were revealed in the data. After seeing a small amount of data regarding legitimacy/authority but much about effectiveness more broadly, I re-defined my research question to focus on effectiveness and the organist-choirmaster's need to navigate the social structures within which the job is embedded. Though some interview data pointed to beliefs about effectiveness, for clarification I emailed a follow-up question to all participants ("How would you define effectiveness as an organist-choirmaster?"), to which fourteen responded. I also asked several participants for clarifications of statements they had made in their interviews. Lastly, I looked at denominational publications and documents for official policies on staff reporting structures and hierarchies in the denominations represented by my interviewees.

Note: Names in quotes have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Chapter 3: EFFECTIVENESS

After redefining my research question to focus on effectiveness and how organist-choirmasters reach goals, I specifically asked the participants to define effectiveness in their work. The responses I received (along with comments from the original interviews) broke down into four categories: musical effectiveness, liturgical effectiveness, theological effectiveness, and relational effectiveness. In their answers, some respondents pointed to a single one of these categories and others to multiple.

MUSICAL EFFECTIVENESS

Musical effectiveness, summarized by one organist-choirmaster as “knowing your craft,” included meeting both personal musical goals as well as goals for ensembles and congregations. Personally, respondents commented on an effective organist-choirmaster being skilled and competent, actively working to maintain those skills, and performing to the best of their abilities. With ensembles and congregations, effectiveness was defined as the choir and congregation singing well, or—more broadly—cultivating excellence. Some respondents mentioned very specific goals for leadership of ensembles such as running efficient and purpose-filled rehearsals, seeing musical growth, clearly defining and achieving musical objectives within ensembles (regarding tuning, diction, blend, vocal tension, attendance, et al.), preparing the choir sufficiently so that its members exude confidence in worship, and—more amorphously—feeling “positive energy” during hymns and anthems.

Encompassing musical effectiveness in both personal performance and the ensembles/congregation, one respondent commented that he is successful when “I’ve produced music for worship that is of the highest caliber it can be.” During the interviews, some organist-choirmasters frequently brought up goals of doing “good music” (by which they meant sacred music from the classical tradition, sometimes with assistance from professional vocalists and/or

instrumentalists) or goals of presenting high-quality music in a variety of styles; others aimed to carry out the wishes of the parish clergy and congregation, “ascertaining [their] vision” or creating—to the best of their ability—“what it is they want me to create.”

LITURGICAL EFFECTIVENESS

The second category, liturgical effectiveness, comprised goals primarily for the congregation’s—and sometimes choir’s—participation in worship. A few organist-choirmasters mentioned being effective when congregation members sing well during services, sing better than they used to, or experience pleasure in their singing:

Effectiveness for me is listening and experiencing growth in the song of the church, not my song, not my postludes or preludes, but the assembly song as I partner with them.

Effectiveness means the assembly is singing.

Every Sunday when we worship and the congregation...sings like they sang yesterday [Sunday]. That’s my greatest joy and pat on the back and compliment. ...It’s leading worship. That gives me great validation and that’s what I work for. I could care less about applause at the end of the day. But when the singing was like it was yesterday with two hundred voices and I drop out of a hymn and they just go louder. It’s like we’re living and breathing as a community together and that’s what gives me the greatest pat on the back.

Two others defined effectiveness in this sphere as participation more wide-ranging than just singing:

I try always to gauge my effectiveness in terms of the assembly. My job as organist is to lead the song of the assembly (even if that’s away from the organ teaching rote songs during worship or during a mid-week committee meeting or whatever). Likewise, the job of the choirs I lead (instrumental or choral) is to help provide musical leadership during the liturgy, which properly belongs to the whole People of God. So in essence, I am effective when my leadership fosters the prayerful and robust participation of the assembly in worship. All the other activities I do as a pastoral musician both feed into and spring out of that.

Part of my philosophy as a church musician is if they can’t sing it, then I haven’t done my job. Let me restate that. That’s not right. If they can’t sing it because they’re not singers, but...I can find a way for them to participate from a musical standpoint, then I’ve done my job. If I am leaving people out because I’ve made something too difficult, because I haven’t given enough space for what needs to be learned, because I’ve used the instrument in a way that was not helpful for people (the organ, for instance), then I’m not doing my job.

One organist-choirmaster gave a more specific example of non-singing participation, suggesting a congregant who prayerfully listens to an anthem, thus “uniting heart and voice” with the choir.

RELATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Relational effectiveness has to do with having a positive relationship between the organist-choirmaster and congregation members, ensemble members/other volunteers, colleagues, and the clergy (or non-clergy supervisor, in rare cases). One participant summed it up as “loving your people.” Many commented on having a positive effect on the congregation, choir members, and clergy. (“I think it shows up in the effect that one has on others.”) This was often attested to with verbal validation and affirmation—“positive thoughts” and “positive opinions” offered about the music offerings and presentations:

Well, people love the music. They tell me weekly.

I feel like I get consistent feedback. It’s unsolicited. I get feedback from people who say, “The music program seems to be as strong as it’s ever been.”

Participants also spoke of clergy offering verbal validation:

Every week it’s almost invariably a different person who says, “I loved the music today.”

I would also get explicit praise from the rector, especially early on. It seemed like he actually went out of his way kind of on a weekly basis to tell me “Oh, Sunday was great. It was really good.” That felt validating.

All three of the priests that I work for have been very careful to give compliments where they’re warranted. They’ve all been aware of how hard we work for occasions like Christmas and Holy Week, and how exhausting it is for musicians to have to do that. And all three of them have mentioned me and the choir and the other musicians publicly on those occasions. And it’s been very rewarding to know that the congregation agrees and approves, and the minister approves too.

Others pointed to quantitative signs of relational effectiveness. Congregation or choir members always stay to listen to the postlude, turn out for concerts, or leave gifts of food on the organist-choirmaster’s desk. Perhaps most obviously, whether people chose to regularly and happily

participate in and support the music programs was mentioned as a sign that the organist-choirmaster was an effective leader and had developed good relationships:

I'm validated by the people in my ensembles who come back week after week and are eager to learn and eager to sing and make music. It says a lot when you have volunteers that come week after week and sit there for an hour and a half and just love making music.

I am always amazed at people's willingness to say "Yes" when I send them a request. It's usually, "Oh, I would love to play." "Oh, I would be happy to do this."... We had three Sundays in a row that we needed to feed people in the choir room... There was a church-wide outpouring of food... The congregation is just wonderful about supporting those things and helping in tangible ways.

Financial support was another quantitative sign—for some organist-choirmasters—of appreciation and relational effectiveness.

The sort of unsolicited financial gifts have been good, too. Those things are validating.

I wrote a letter that outlined plans and our goals [for a concert series], and people responded very kindly. They were very generous. That was a big, huge shot in the arm.

I feel validated when I'm told at Christmas time that I'm going to get a five-thousand dollar raise.

Other participants discussed specific aspects of leadership that make someone relationally effective as an organist-choirmaster, such as having gained the trust of the people; having "pastoral sensitivity;" "possessing empathy and an understanding of the people they work with;" having the respect of the clergy, choir, and congregation; being able to work with other staff; being able to recruit, organize, and lead volunteers; having good communication skills; and being able to "develop a program vision and get others on board."

Some saw relational effectiveness through the lens of spiritual ministry and growth, both in ministering to the people ("How do I bring the gospel to my neighbor? How can I show God and Christ to people through [music]?") and in encouraging their volunteers in their ministry to others. They aimed to take care of not only the "singing congregation [and] musical ensembles [but] the overall health of people's lives spiritually:"

You figure if you have a church full of people for a concert or a service, you can have six or seven hundred people applauding for what you just did, but I think it's the one person who comes to you and says, "You know what? What you did really moved me, and it stuck with me." And to me that means more than the room full of people.... That to me is how I think of my effectiveness,... when I get that because then I feel like the ministerial aspect of what I do is working.

For me, music is second and people are first. So, I'm there first to serve the people. That's usually done through music but not always. So I see music—even though it's my job, right, I'm the director of music—music is just a tool through which I do that job. I think all church workers pretty much have the same job, they just have different tools to do that job, and that job is to love the people they serve and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

THEOLOGICAL EFFECTIVENESS

Theological effectiveness was the least frequently discussed category of an organist-choirmasters' effectiveness. A few interview participants specifically mentioned drawing goals from denominational documents on liturgy and music and trying to ensure that what takes place during worship is theologically accurate or acceptable. Finally, two referenced actual theologically-based changes they made or attempted to make (regarding objects in the liturgical space and the translation of the Lord's Prayer, both examples discussed later in this study).

CONFLICTING GOALS

These four areas of effectiveness can easily conflict with each other. Relational effectiveness was particularly difficult for organist-choirmasters to navigate because congregation members, choir/ensemble members and other volunteers, and clergy (or, in rare instances, a non-clergy supervisor) all have their own ideas of what is effective and appropriate musically, liturgically, and theologically. As one organist-choirmaster put it, "You can't make everybody happy all the time, obviously, so you're going to disappoint people and have to deal with that." While good relationships can abet attempts to change or meet goals, some actions ultimately may have a negative effect on relationships, or could improve a relationship with one person or group while simultaneously harming a relationship with another.

Though every person interviewed had examples of dealing with conflict, two people in particular gave undeniably clear examples of this conundrum—how to balance maintaining relationships with meeting goals. They both wound up in situations where a staff member that reported to them ultimately chose to leave the church because of conflict with the organist-choirmaster. Recalling the experience, the first stated:

I do have to say things are better, but it was at the cost of her leaving, which I feel responsible for. Honestly, it's a mixed bag because it's almost like you win but you get a black eye.

In the other instance, the organist-choirmaster wound up with a surprising outcome to a problematic cantor who had a history of provoking him, the priest, and congregation members. Among other things, this cantor would send a weekly email critiquing the music on the previous Sunday. She was also “so authoritarian with the woman whose job it was to organize the Christmas decorating that the lady who was in charge of it actually resigned.” The organist-choirmaster dealt with this for ten months (“I just kind of took it in stride, but it nettled me.”) before the resolution presented itself:

And she emailed what she must of thought was a really great ultimatum threat. She said that since I didn't seem to be listening to her advice, or something to that effect, that “for the first time in years I'm considering taking my talents elsewhere.” And I guess she thought that I would react in horror and give her whatever she wanted. She certainly had no intention of carrying that out. But I went to my boss and I said, “I think we should just take her up on her offer.” And so my boss was like, “Okay. Sure. Life without her would be easier, no doubt.” So I emailed her back and said, “I think you're right. I think the direction I'm taking the church music here is different from the direction that you would like it to go. And thank you so much for all of your hard work. Starting as of next Sunday, your cantor slots will be filled by someone else.” And there was an enormous blow up over it. But within about two weeks it settled down, and life without her has been beautiful.

As a result of this “black eye” the respondent is able to better work towards his musical and liturgical goals; no doubt this person's departure affected other relationships throughout the church, though, both positively and negatively.

How else can goals for effectiveness be at odds with each other? Consider if one's ultimate goal is a congregation that sings—why not just stick with “Amazing Grace,” “On

Eagle’s Wings,” or “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” every single week? (My respondents did not indicate they do anything this extreme.) If one’s ultimate goal is to receive positive thoughts and opinions on the musical choices, why not survey the congregation for their favorites and do an analysis to determine which repertoire of songs will generate the most overall positive feedback? (A respondent who was part of a parish-wide survey including questions about the music said, “Never again.”) If one believes the 1988 ELLC (English Language Liturgical Consultation) translation of the Lord’s Prayer is more theologically accurate than the traditional translation, why not forge ahead despite heavy resistance from the congregation? (The respondent ultimately gave up on making this change, deciding there were other more important battles to fight.) What do you do when clergy are appointed or called to your church who dictate a different direction for the music program? (One respondent fought this through higher authorities; another changed direction as ordered.)

Overall, relational effectiveness was an important part of how many organist-choirmasters met their goals (“My job is 95% psychology and 5% music.”). For a number of participants, it was the end goal in and of itself. For many others, it was a tool that was often used to achieve musical, liturgical, and/or theological goals, and bypassed when necessary like in the follow example:

I’m just going to dig my heels in. [Having the choir sing from the loft] is actually a pastoral decision that allows more people to participate. [Some singers] can complain and whine all [they] want. Part of it is just developing a thick skin.

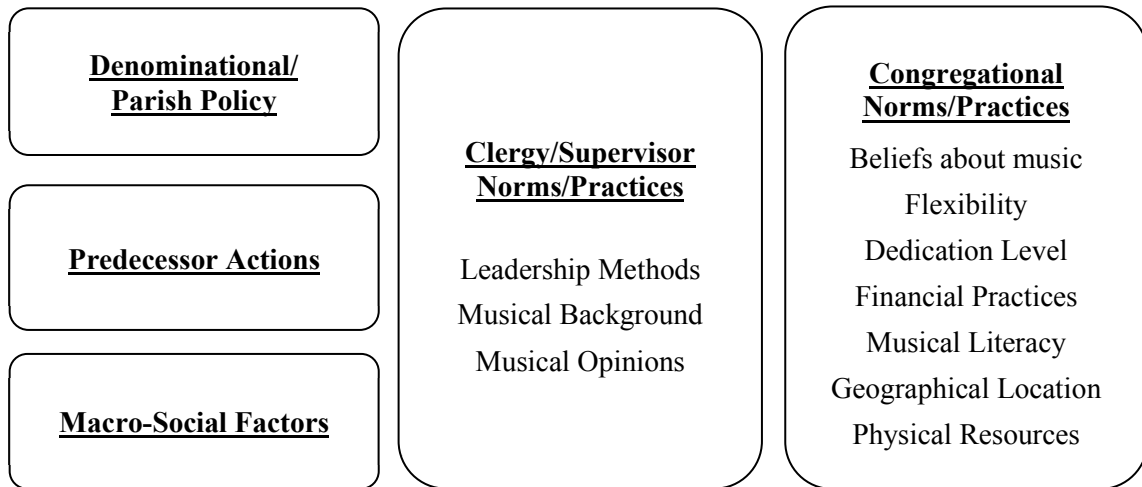
All these interpretations of and difficulties surrounding effectiveness make it even more important to investigate how organist-choirmasters navigate their environments—how they are both constrained and enabled by social structures, as well as their role as active agents in realizing change.

Chapter 4: SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Broadly speaking, this chapter considers the social structure that both constrains and enables organist-choirmasters as they attempt to reach their goals. Social structure encompasses the relationship of the organist-choirmaster to different groups and entities in their churches, patterns of behavior and beliefs within those groups and entities, as well as institutionalized norms that shape the environment.

Analysis of the interview data yielded influential structural factors at the denominational level, of individual churches and congregations, of other staff and church leaders, and even macro-societally. Denominational and parish policies set up chains of command that influenced organist-choirmasters' autonomy, and ultimately placed them under the authority of clergy, committees, or—in rare cases—a different individual. Because of this, the norms and practices of those clergy, committees, and individuals (specifically their leadership methods, musical background, and musical opinions) were critically important. In the participants' experiences, the norms and practices of congregation members and volunteers were also key to understanding the environment. The following factors were emphasized in the interview data about congregations and their members: their beliefs about music, flexibility/willingness to change, dedication level (including attendance), financial practices, musical literacy, geographical location, and physical resources. Additionally, various organist-choirmasters discussed their predecessors and how those predecessors' actions, policies, and beliefs influenced the environment to set the stage for later success or difficulties. Finally, a few participants also pointed to macro-social factors and larger cultural trends that influenced beliefs and behaviors of individuals in their churches.

Figure 2: Social Structure Themes



DENOMINATIONAL POLICY

Interview participants mentioned denominational policy—specifically in regard to autonomy and staff/committee hierarchy—as an important factor both constraining their ability to pursue goals but in other situations enabling them (such as providing tools to challenge opposition). Organist-choirmasters in this study represented six different church bodies, each of which have formalized policies for the structure of staff authority: the Roman Catholic Church, The Episcopal Church (TEC), the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), and the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA). In short, the Catholic Church and TEC concentrate almost all parish authority in the senior clergy. The ELCA and LCMS give parishes freedom to set up their own organizational structure (contingent on approval by the synod), which results in various combinations of clergy and laypeople/committees holding authority over various spheres, such as music staff and music decisions. The UMC and PCUSA both place authority over staff in the hands of committees (representing the congregation) and senior clergy, often in collaboration.

Catholic

The canons of the Catholic Church state that a parish is entrusted to the care of its pastor, who is himself “under the authority of the diocesan bishop.”¹ Churches are also required to have a finance council and may have a pastoral council, though the latter is consultative only.²

The pastor (*parochus*) is the proper pastor (*pastor*) of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law.³

Organist-choirmasters who work in Catholic churches summarized it thus:

Everyone is just directly answerable to the parish priest.

The priest was in charge of everything, basically. You know how it works in a Roman parish; you have to do whatever they say because they’re the final authority.

The parish council is solely advisory to the pastor who’s a delegate of the bishop. So, I don’t work for the parish council or a committee or anything. I report to the pastor.

I’m directly responsible to the pastor of the church.

There was never really a clear system of authority; it was just up to the priest. So, if anybody ever had a question, we would always say, “Yeah. Go ask the priest.”

In two instances, the Catholic organist-choirmaster reported directly to someone other than the priest. One was supervised by the parish’s “Director of Liturgy and Christian Education” until a new priest was appointed and staffing changed. The other worked at a cathedral and also took on a diocesan role, and thus reported both to the rector of the cathedral “and in some ways, the Director of the Office of Worship.” The latter situation was rife with problems because the rector

¹ *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition: New Translation* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998), canon 515 §1.

² *Ibid.*, canon 536 §2.

³ *Ibid.*, canon 519.

and director were appointed by different bishops and held inherently conflicting opinions. (This is discussed further in Chapter Five: Agency – Resolving Conflict.)

Because the priest in a Catholic church holds so much authority, organist-choirmasters' effectiveness is closely tied up with this single person. As one respondent summed up, "If your priest is good, then your life is set. And if he is bad, then you are done for." Problems with the priest could potentially be brought to the bishop (and/or archbishop, as was the case with one respondent; see Chapter Four: Social Structure – Clergy Norms/Practices).

Episcopal

In The Episcopal Church, the rector ("the priest in charge of a parish") is "the ecclesiastical authority of the parish."⁴

The rector has authority and responsibility for worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish, subject to the rubrics of the BCP [*Book of Common Prayer*], the constitution and canons of the church, and the pastoral direction of the bishop. The rector is responsible for selection of all assistant clergy, and they serve at the discretion of the rector. The church and parish buildings and furnishings are under the rector's control. The rector or a member of the vestry designated by the rector presides at all vestry meetings.⁵

The *Constitution and Canons* of The Episcopal Church is one of the few church documents that explicitly lays out the authority of clergy over music:

Canon II.5: Of the Music of the Church. It shall be the duty of every Member of the Clergy to see that music is used as an offering for the glory of God and as a help to the people in their worship in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer and as authorized by the rubrics or by the General Convention of this Church. To this end the Member of the Clergy shall have final authority in the administration of matters pertaining to music. In fulfilling this responsibility the Member of the Clergy shall seek assistance from persons skilled in music. Together they shall see that music is appropriate to the context in which it is used.⁶

⁴ "An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church," The Episcopal Church, accessed November 30, 2018, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/rector>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Archives of the Episcopal Church, ed., *Constitutions & Canons* (New York: The Episcopal Church, 2016), 64, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/2015_candc.pdf.

Episcopal organist-choirmasters generally corroborated the clergy's musical and staff authority, stating:

I reported to the rector. He was my boss.

Technically, the rector is in charge of all music that happens at The Episcopal Church. There's somewhere in the hymnal where he can actually point to and say the priest has the final word on church music.

You probably are aware, in The Episcopal Church, the rector is responsible for hiring staff. Ultimately, all of the staff reports to him. I mean, the rector had an advisory committee [for] whenever he was searching for a musician. I met with the search committee. But ultimately the decision was up to him. If someone is going to fire me, it's going to be him. My primary responsibility is that I report to the rector.

[In response to the question, "Do you technically report to the dean (the head cleric of cathedral)?"] Yes, I would say so. The Episcopal system leans a little more heavily on the authority of the rector or the leader in this case. I would say that's ahead of whatever authority the governing lay board would have. It may be a little bit different than you might get in other Protestant churches, although it's a little bit like politics. It would be hard for a rector in a large church not to have the support of the vestry unit. It didn't come down to a vote on a particular matter. You'd have to have that support anyway no matter what you do, but it's not technically a part of the employee relationships.

When the clergy have such authority, odd situations can arise such as the following:

The new rector, she decides she wants to have a concert. Last year, she decided she wanted to have [regional ensemble], which is you know, this fabulous baroque ensemble based in [city]. And wonderful. She somehow got the local radio station to help sponsor it. We wound up doing a little bit better than breaking even; filled the church. She really didn't involve me in it. It's like, "Oh, yeah, I'm not here every day. Would've been nice if you'd told me about it. I mean, I really enjoyed the concert." But it's just one of those weird things because she can really kind of do whatever she wants to.

Theoretically, issues with the rector could be brought to the local Episcopal bishop. One organist-choirmaster was in a situation where this occurred, though in this particular case the plea to the bishop was unsuccessful:

I reported directly to the rector. [When he shouted at me], I reported him to the church vestry on that occasion because he was totally out of line and they supported me, but they didn't do anything to him. They knew they couldn't. He was irrational. Not too long after my reporting a particular incident to them, the vestry got together several lawyers in the parish. They put together something like a forty page document citing different problems with this person who was clearly mentally unstable and the reasons they felt that this person should be

removed from the church. One of the...lawyers took this document into the bishop...The message to him was go home and pray about it because this irrational priest was of a wealthy family that contributed hugely to the Episcopal Diocese of this area.

Lutheran

Both Lutheran bodies represented in this study have an official constitution that dictates broad aspects of polity but allows individual congregations to craft their own structure, which is then approved by the synod. The denominations also provide model constitutions for congregations. In its model, the ELCA suggests (but does not require) the following paragraph indicating that a congregational council be in charge of staff:

The Congregation Council shall be responsible for the employment and supervision of the staff of this congregation. Nothing in this provision shall be deemed to affect the congregation's responsibility for the call, terms of call, or termination of call of any employees who are on a roster of this church.⁷

When interviewed, organist-choirmasters in ELCA churches discussed a variety of staff structures. Several indicated they reported to the clergy (who are themselves supervised by the council):

We have two pastors on staff, and I do report to the senior pastor, and if he's not available it'd definitely be the associate pastor is next in line. In terms of our governing body, we have the church council, and then pretty much any decision we make as a staff has to be approved by the church council formally.

So I directly report to the Pastor, who functions as Head of Staff. And then, the Pastor and I have a Worship and Music Committee, which essentially serves as an advisory committee to us but also does make some decisions...In order to do anything official, that committee has to make a recommendation to council...In practical terms, I exercise a pretty good bit of autonomy. But I just get in trouble if I don't kind of keep the pastor and council in the loop.

I report to the pastor and he has final say of things. I'm lucky to work with a pastor that gives me a lot of latitude to make my own choices, and even my own mistakes. Although, he does advise me on things, and we've found collegiality in our areas. And we have, the last three years, we have found, again, okay, this is a collaboration and we have really worked together. So, those mistakes—you

⁷ *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2018), 236 (C12.08.), http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Constitutions_Bylaws_and_Continuing_Resolutions_of_the_ELCA.pdf.

know, me stepping into his area, his purview of things that he does, or his deciding for me—that doesn't happen anymore. So, I report to him. I do have a worship and music committee.... They're actually more of an advisory committee.

One participant reported directly to the council president:

Actually, at my Lutheran job, I was hired by the vestry [council]. I actually reported to the council president.

Another reported to the chair of the worship committee:

The person I report to is the chair of the worship committee, and so he is pretty much my boss.... He has been there since the nineties, and I think probably soon after that he became chair of the worship committee...

And finally, one ELCA interview participant was ordained and reported to the bishop, in addition to the church council:

We have co-pastors so I do in a way report to them, just kind of being in a different call. Then, of course, I report to my synod's bishop. That's really my boss.... For all of our rostered leaders, the [other] pastors including myself, our church council oversees us as well.

In the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), the voters' assembly (all voting congregation members) is the ultimate authority, and is empowered to create their own constitution and structures (which, must be approved by the synod, just as in the ELCA).

One LCMS organist-choirmaster understood her position as reporting to the pastor, but was not sure how (if at all) this was dictated by the church's constitution.

I am not sure. We're in the process of revising our constitution because it's so archaic no one can even make sense of half of what's in there. So that's actually this summer's project, is to redo the entire constitution. So we have one, but we don't refer to it very often because half of what's in there doesn't even apply because it's so dated.

An example guideline provided by the denomination suggests having "A board of elders, consisting of . . . , which shall assist the pastor in the spiritual life of the congregation" (ellipsis in original).⁸ In some churches, this board might oversee worship and thus music. The following

⁸ *Guidelines for Constitutions and Bylaws of Lutheran Congregations* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2012), 8, <https://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1372>.

LCMS organist-choirmaster began a position reporting to the senior pastor, but—enabled by the flexibility allowed by the denomination—initiated a major change in that structure that better fit the situation and ultimately resulted in him reporting to the aforementioned board.

Those six people form the administrative team of the congregation. We make the day-to-day decisions and report to our various boards monthly. So I don't report to the Senior Pastor. I report to the Board of Elders. That's a fairly unique situation, I think, as I talk to other people around. We made that change...to foster more team leadership, rather than leadership falling in one position and that's the Senior Pastor....That was my idea....I did that because we have some really gifted people on staff and the Senior Pastor is not gifted at leadership. So it was recognizing that and discussed it with the leadership and it just sort of happened.

Presbyterian

According to official documents from the Presbyterian Church (USA), congregations elect teaching elders (the clergy—often referred to as “ministers of Word and Sacrament”) and ruling elders (“chosen by the congregation to discern and guide in its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life”).⁹ Together, these people constitute the session, which “is responsible for all decisions regarding the program and policies of its congregation, except for the two powers reserved for the congregation: the election of officers, including the pastoral staff, and the buying, selling, and/or mortgaging of church property.” The clergy, with the concurrence of the session, is ultimately responsible for worship. The constitution officially states that:

Where there is a music leader or choir director, the minister of the Word and Sacrament will confer with that person on anthems and other musical offerings; the session will see that these conferences take place appropriately and on a regular basis.¹⁰

⁹ *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II: Book of Order 2017-2019* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly - Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2017), 13 (F-3.0202), http://oga.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/book-of-order2017-electronic_updated110117.pdf.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86 (W-2.0305).

The session is also responsible for the selection of hymnals, service books, and permanent worship resources “in consultation with church musicians”.¹¹

How exactly does this polity play out? In their responses, PCUSA organist-choirmasters generally indicated that they are hired by the congregation (via a personnel committee):

In the Presbyterian Church, the church is governed by the populous. It is hierarchical to a certain extent but it's actually extremely open and democratic. For example, I can't be fired by the minister which I quite like. I guess he could recommend to the session or the personnel committee that we need to get rid of this guy. But, actually, I'm directly hired by the congregation and by the personnel committee and there's a review process and so on and so forth. So, yes, he ultimately carries the canon for the church and I understand that and our collaboration together is that we've become very good friends. But I always know in the back of my mind that he's the boss.

The personnel committee...hired me and [fields] any questions or things like that....I actually haven't gotten one this year, but usually in my contract there's a line for the personnel chair to sign, the pastor, I think one other person, and then me. So I think it's done by committee, so it's not like the pastor is the one that is in charge of all the hiring. I think he has an input. But as far as I know, the personnel committee handles all that.

Likewise, the PCUSA participants also spoke of ultimately reporting to the pastor in their daily work:

I report to the pastor of the church, who's also the head of staff....Ultimately, you know, the buck is going to stop at the head of staff.

I report directly to the senior pastor....I think that would be pretty common throughout the denomination. The director of music's immediate supervisor is the senior pastor.

In the PCUSA, because the congregation and session ultimately retain some degree of control over the clergy, organist-choirmasters have recourse (such as with the personnel committee) if something goes terribly wrong or a serious conflict arises. One organist-choirmaster described a pastor who frequently gave her hand-written notes criticizing her hymn playing, and how she ultimately moved past the issue:

I kept the last one. It was so funny. Something about, "The hymn needs to go like this," or whatever....It was out of line and inappropriate. It made no sense. There

¹¹ Ibid., 85 (W-2.0305).

was just over the years a bunch of things like that with him. I always tried to be very transparent with what I was doing. But I also learned to just do my thing. I knew as long as I had communicated with appropriate people myself, I was covered.

Methodist

The United Methodist Church's official organizing document, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, indicates that the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) is in charge of the employment of non-appointed lay staff (i.e. non-clergy), though always in consultation with the senior pastor.

Committee (SPRC) is given broad oversight and responsibility in church staffing matters. The SPRC shall “recommend to the church council, after consultation with the pastor, the professional and other staff positions (whether employee or contract) needed to carry out the work of the church or charge.”^{12 13}

The SPRC is to “develop and approve written job descriptions and titles for associate pastors and other staff members in cooperation with the senior pastor.”^{14 15}

Furthermore, it states that until an official hiring and firing policy has been adopted by the church council, “the committee and the pastor shall have the authority to hire, contract, evaluate, promote, retire, and dismiss non-appointed personnel.”¹⁶

How exactly these policies play out day-to-day—and whether the senior clergy or the committee tends to exert more authority—no doubt varies. In the experience of the Methodist organist-choirmaster I interviewed, “Basically, I just understood the pastor's in charge...and of course what that actually means is that everything depends on the personality of each individual pastor.”

¹² The Center for Worship Resourcing, ed., *What Does The United Methodist Church's Book Of Discipline 2012 Say about the Employment of Non-Appointed Church Staff?* (Nashville: The United Methodist Discipleship Ministries), accessed November 30, 2018, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/employmentnonappointed-church-staff>.

¹³ Brian O. Sigmon, ed., *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 200 (paragraph 258.2.g.12), <https://www.cokesbury.com/forms/DynamicContent.aspx?id=87&pageid=920>.

¹⁴ The Center for Worship Resourcing.

¹⁵ Sigmon, 199 (paragraph 258.2.g.7).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200 (paragraph 258.2.g.12).

CLERGY NORMS/PRACTICES

Interview participants discussed how their clergy or other supervisors played key roles in enabling them to pursue goals (giving them autonomy and support or agreeing with their decisions) or, in some cases, restricting and controlling their actions. The data yielded three influential qualities of clergy/supervisors: their leadership methods, their musical background, and their musical opinions.

Leadership Methods

Regarding leadership methods, some clergy/supervisors were very supportive and empowering of organist-choirmasters; others authoritarian, unsupportive, or uncommunicative. A few respondents reported that—in their view—the clergy over-stepped their bounds or lied and attempted to undermine the organist-choirmaster.

Many organist-choirmasters spoke positively of their clergy (or, in one case, committee chair) giving them autonomy and empowering their decision-making, essentially granting them significant agency:

I pretty much have total freedom to choose the music that I would like to do, which is really nice, and I get a lot of support from the worship chair, who is pretty much my boss.

The good thing about the current rector—she pretty much lets me do what I need to do. I don't have to account for too much of anything. As long as I do what I'm supposed to do, there's really no argument. She's not called me on, you know, "Can we sing this hymn over that?"

Well, there's a huge positive aspect which is I pretty much can decide what I want to do from a liturgical stand point and from a hymn standpoint.

I'm lucky to work with a pastor that gives me a lot of latitude to make my own choices, and even my own mistakes.

In my almost five years here, my rector—I think he's maybe asked me to change two hymns. It's both good and bad. I have very little supervision. I mean, he essentially says, "I trust you to do your job."

Those that felt particularly supported by their clergy, such as in the following examples, likely have opportunities to make decisions that cause positive changes.

My boss is very supportive.

Overall, the positive is that I have the full support of the Pastor and the worship team.

[She gives] me basically a free hand to do artistically what I want to do, and to maintain, but also to build ministry, music ministry, and to give it a stronger base of support financially.

One organist-choirmaster told a story of a supportive pastor who shielded her from pushback by two congregation members regarding a liturgical/theological decision she had made (with his approval). This pastor saw his role as enabling and protecting his staff:

About a year into it, he called me into his office and said, “You need to know that this has been going on. I’ve basically...” He didn’t say it this [exact] way, but he said, “Basically, I’ve been trying to protect you because I think what you’re doing it right, and I’m willing to take the....” (ellipsis in original)

Some respondents gave specific examples of how their clergy trusted them with things musical and liturgical:

All three of the priests that I work for have come to me with questions of appropriate music or style of music, or style of liturgy.

When the pastor hired me he said "You know, I've hired you to be my musician, so I expect you to do your job, and if you ever need anything, let me know. So...it was kind of like, anything I wanted to do, he was behind me.

Not everyone worked under such supportive and respectful supervisors, however.

Interview participants told stories of clergy who would impose decisions without any warning, were unpredictable and uncommunicative, or abused or overstepped their authority. This aspect of church structure—the relationship of the supervisor to the musician coupled with the former’s negative patterns of behavior—impeded working towards musical, liturgical, and theological goals.

The following pastor believed everything worship-related was ultimately his jurisdiction and changed the organist-choirmaster’s hymn choices, even after first instructing her to choose them; he gave her agency in one area only to later revoke it:

He would specifically tell me, “You select the hymn.” So I would go ahead and I would ask him if he had any sermon topics or themes and he never sent any to

me. So I was just like, “Okay, I’ll just plan.” And then one time he was like, “Okay, so I went ahead and planned all the hymns through Easter.” And I was like, “Then why did you tell me to do it? That was a complete waste of my time.” And he was like, “Well, I didn’t appreciate your—” because I sent him an email, “Oh, I wish you would have told me beforehand because I already spent all this time planning hymns and anthems.”...I just said like, “I would have appreciated knowing because then I wouldn’t have invested my time.” And he was like, “I didn’t appreciate that. I’m the pastor. I have full control. I can change—”

According to the next interview participant, her pastor had a behavior pattern that made it very difficult to prepare because he constantly changed his plans. She indicated that she does not think he was acting maliciously (“he wasn’t angry”), but that it was simply his *modus operandi*.

When [the pastor] first came, I had been picking the hymns in the two years of interims. I said, “I would enjoy still picking the hymns but is that something that you would rather do?” He paused and looked at me and said, “Well, why don’t you continue doing it.” So I did and the first Sunday I did, he changed every single one that I had chosen. This went on for three or four weeks. So I went into his office and I said, “You know, why don’t you just do the hymns.”...The thing that annoyed me endlessly was that he would give me information...And a day later, it was all changed. We would have a staff meeting and he would go through the liturgical needs of the coming weeks and give me all kinds of facts. I always had paper and pencil on hand and I always wrote the stuff down. But that’s never what happened. If it wasn’t changed the next day, it was changed in two days. So I stopped writing stuff down...

This organist-choirmaster chose to respond by accepting the behavior and giving up on planning:

It’s just that’s the way it was. I never had any angry comments with him at all. I never stomped out of his office because I was disturbed at something.

At the same time, this pastor ultimately had no patience when the organist-choirmaster herself wanted to make a change—in this case, incorporating a soloist in worship that was not planned significantly prior (but was verbally approved before the service):

There was one Sunday when...I had either unintentionally left a special piece of music out of the bulletin, let’s say flute soloist, or the flute soloist showed up from college on that weekend unexpectedly and I thought it would be nice if he could play. I don’t remember which one of those scenarios it was, but it was something like that. So I went to the pastor right before the service. I said, “Lee would like to play because he is home now. Could we put X piece in this slot?” He said, “Okay.” Then after the service, [the pastor] chewed me out for disrupting the service that he had set up and it caused him to make mistakes in the service.

In one PCUSA church, the senior pastor acted behind the backs of the other staff, initiating a major structural change to the music program—hiring a guitarist. In this situation, the organist-choirmaster also did her best to accommodate the change. Technically in the PCUSA—with the personnel committee in charge of hiring and firing—she had no recourse.

While [the assistant pastor and former choir director] and I were on vacation, [the senior pastor] drew up a job description [for a guitarist] and got Personnel to sign off on it. We came back to an e-mail that instructed us that this would be happening. That was a whole year of very uncomfortable meetings, and us trying our best to accommodate what had been forced on us.

As seen above, it is not only the organist-choirmaster who often has to make sense of things and deal with the fall-out of clergy leadership decisions and behavior. In another example, the interview participant indicated that all of the staff at his church had difficulties because of their clergy's behavior:

All the other staff people sort of felt the same, that we were generally unsupported in the work we were doing. So, that was the toughest thing....And that was one of the difficulties with the priest is that he was very unpredictable....We never quite knew what we were going to get liturgically because he was such a space cadet.

Some organist-choirmasters told of clergy who actively worked against them. In this first example, the pastor ultimately pushed out the organist-choirmaster in order to hire a friend (according to the respondent). She was unable to overcome his efforts to discredit her in the eyes of church members and ultimately resigned:

The last four years were a new rector. He and I never saw eye to eye. He was trying to discredit me. He did discredit me over a period of four years to the point where I finally resigned....[The rector was] telling people I wasn't fit to be in the church. I didn't know that until after I had resigned. I only found that out afterwards....[The rector] wanted [his friend] to be director of music in that church, so he had to find a way to get rid of me. In fact, when I resigned, I remember the day so well. It wasn't in anger. I told him I was going to leave. I left his office and closed the door. He picked up the receiver on the phone and called his friend and said, "She's gone. Can you come next Sunday?" I heard his voice. I am behind the door. I wasn't—I didn't stand there with my ear to the door. I was standing there because the church secretary was there, and she and I had started to chitchat and through the door I heard that conversation. It's hard to believe.

In the next story, the clergy wanted to change the direction of a Catholic church's music program and maneuvered behind the organist-choirmaster's back to do so. The organist-choirmaster ultimately appealed to denominational authorities and prevailed:

When I kind of held my ground on [musical style], [the rector] started to maneuver. At one time he had decided he was going to write a letter to the parish members announcing that he was going to change the direction of the music program but he didn't tell me about it. I found out about it on an airplane on the way home from a conference. He had told everybody on the staff he was doing that except for me and one other person and we found out about it on the way home....But, then there was another situation where he had told the parish council that he was going to take me in hand and reprimand me for this or something, for not changing course. So, he called a meeting at the chancery with the archbishop and the vicar general and all that. He swore the parish council to secrecy that they wouldn't tell me about it ahead of time so it was kind of an ambush. But one of the parish council members called me and said he's going to do this and I want you to know about it....

Finally, as mentioned in the section on denominational/congregational policies, one organist-choirmaster reported that his pastor frequently tried to overstep her authority. He was able to deal with this by relying on what he knew to be the true organizational hierarchy in his church:

I actually reported to the council president. Of course, the pastor wanted to be my boss. Although that wasn't in the bylaws so that was another source of conflict in that she was always trying to overstep her authority as pastor. She had a very confrontational leadership style.

Musical Background & Opinions

In addition to their leadership methods, the musical background and opinions of clergy and supervisors were another important aspect of social structure that impacted organist-choirmasters' environments and ability to be effective.

Some who worked under clergy with musical training found it to be beneficial, helping to give clergy better appreciation for the organist-choirmaster's work:

My pastor is sort of a really good amateur musician, and so I think he understands a lot of kind of the things that I need to do.

[The pastor] is a lover of music. He actually plays piano a little bit. His wife is a visual artist. He is highly supportive of music in church. He wants good music.

Interview participants noted the challenges when clergy do not have musical experience:

The challenges, I think in that particular situation: kind of not having a shared vocabulary with the senior clergy person; sort of having difficulty with really being able to talk about music on any kind of specific level. Eventually, the way that manifested itself was with a series of edicts like ‘You must do these things. You must check these boxes.’ So what that really felt like was a stifling of creativity. Ultimately, I was just working off of a checklist rather than kind of making liturgical music in any kind of creative way.

[I] was miserable because the pastor knew nothing about music and insisted on telling me how to do my job.

Regardless of musical experience, many clergy and supervisors had opinions on music that enabled, constrained, or outright clashed with the organist-choirmasters’ work. The pastor who hired a guitarist behind the back of the music staff “generally had the opinion that the guitar would save us—that we had to have a guitar for this congregation to thrive.” Strong musical opinions can work both ways, though. In another church, the organist-choirmaster appreciated that a particular former associate pastor “came in and put the kibosh on [contemporary music],” so that he did not have to deal with the issue himself. Additional interview participants also noted that their supervisors wanted the same type of music as they did, thus creating a supportive environment:

The bishop likes the type of music that I do and so he kind of made that clear to the Director of the Office of Worship and the new rector that he expected them to kind of empower what we’re doing.

A lot of the reason why I have been able to do good music is because [my boss, the worship and music committee chair] pushes good music there. He makes sure that you hire a good musician to do the music, and he kind of lets them do their job.

Some organist-choirmasters found their liturgical and musical goals thwarted by clergy who viewed music too exclusively through the lens of relational effectiveness, tending to just give people what they want. In the following example, the pastor had the final word and the organist-choirmaster ultimately went along with music she personally felt was inappropriate:

I guess the other things that I've dealt with like everybody else is those horrible funeral requests or the horrible wedding requests. Also with [the prior pastor], learning that it didn't matter what I said. He was going to let the family have whatever they wanted, and then just dealing with that. It's a little bit better now. I think that's a very common issue.

Clergy somehow feel that they need to let families have whatever they request in a service....We have two more funerals this coming week. I just looked at one of them. They want to play a whole bunch of songs through the CD, and through the sound system. As much as I love my dear pastor, she is still of that mindset.

Another respondent noted that his pastor tends towards using “music as kind of a consumable thing” and “political game,” creating problems for the organist-choirmaster:

Now since the new pastor has come three years ago the challenge has been that he’s somebody that kind of blows with the wind a little bit. He decides things based on whatever the last conversation is that he’s had with somebody. So, he might tell different people different things and then there’s always a lot of problems that result from that....I think there’s always been a pretty solid approach to liturgy here in the past but we’re definitely moving in a direction of using music as kind of a consumable thing and kind of a pastoral political game.

CONGREGATIONAL NORMS/PRACTICES

Interview participants pointed to norms and practices of congregations and their members—including participants in the music programs—as significant contributors to the ease in which they could meet their effectiveness goals. Beliefs about music, level of flexibility and willingness to try new things, dedication level of volunteers, musical literacy, financial practices, geographical location, physical resources, and idiosyncrasies of particular church members were the main topics that emerged from the interviews. In some instances these factors contributed to an auspicious environment for the organist-choirmaster; in other instances, they created difficulties. A few respondents identified macro-societal causes for certain congregational norms/practices, and others traced ways in which their predecessors had influenced congregational norms/practices and shaped attitudes about how organist-choirmasters should or do act.

Beliefs about Music

Congregational beliefs about music were a key and often discussed component of organist-choirmasters’ environments, and varied significantly among participants’ churches. Not all organist-choirmasters worked in churches with congregations that mirrored their own musical opinions; this could be for a variety of reasons—the church members or church leadership shifted

over time; the organist-choirmaster was limited in job choice; the church did not reflect denominational practice or expectations; etc. Understandably, those who share musical beliefs with the majority of the congregation (and clergy, as discussed in the previous section) had the easiest environment in which to work. Those in congregations with different musical goals from themselves ran into problems they had to navigate in a variety of ways (see Chapter Five: Agency).

Many respondents worked in churches that already supported the same type of music the organist-choirmaster thought was best and most appropriate. For example, several organist-choirmasters spoke positively of how their church valued “good” music or denominationally “traditional” music. Respondents appreciated that they didn’t have to “work hard” to get members and volunteers on board with their stylistic goals, and that other options were “just not on the table.”

They support music. They want good music. There isn’t a push for contemporary worship bands or anything like that....They love their hymn *concertatos*. They like singing quality church music. So I enjoy being in that environment where [contemporary music is] just not on the table.

We are squarely sort of traditional in our liturgical outlook. There is not any desire to explore contemporary music. As I am saying these things out loud, it reminds me that I am in a pretty good spot. I shouldn't complain.

I mean, they’re Episcopalians so obviously the congregation appreciates good music.

Everybody is pretty supportive and enthusiastic about cathedral music.

[The choir] is just appreciative of doing really good music, and so I would say they are a pretty motivated group of people and fairly ambitious. And so that is really nice to work with that kind of energy and that kind of desire to do really good music....Generally, in terms of choosing the music, I kind of thankfully have not had to work hard to say, “Let us do like...” you know, again, massive air quotes, “good music.”

In environments like this, the structure of “appreciating ‘good’ music” is mutually reinforcing. A musical tradition (especially if typical of a denomination like in The Episcopal Church, but also simply in particular parishes) attracts people who share that preference,

influences them while they are members or participants, and also contributes to attrition of those who do not fit the norm. Likewise, an environment that favors a different type of music than the organist-choirmaster hopes to achieve can be mutually undermining.

One organist-choirmaster noted that he worked in an environment that valued stylistic diversity, a goal he shared:

So when I got there, I encountered that and still every Sunday, it's not unusual for us to do...as far as congregational singing: traditional hymnody, praise songs, Gregorian Chant, African songs, African-American songs, and gospel. So like all in a single liturgy. It's kind of been a course for us, which I really like because my personal music goal—kind of not just tastes but comfort levels—are in a lot of styles. So I like that a lot.

Not all respondents worked in congregations with entirely similar musical goals to themselves. The following organist-choirmaster struggled with this type of situation, and ultimately stopped working at the church:

The cranberry [*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*] hymnal was not terribly old in 2011...They had gotten it and they didn't know how to use it, basically. They didn't know half the hymns in it so my huge issue there was pushing to use these resources. Not my favorite hymnal of this newer generation but it certainly has things that could be used. And that was a huge problem there—was just pushing, can we please just use the hymnal we bought and the organ that we bought that we just finished restoring and adding to, instead of using this Marty Haugen music that I. We'd have to buy, and B. I'd have to play on the electric keyboard. It was a huge bone of contention there...I had no allies who really wanted good music.

Occasionally, the organist-choirmaster had to deal with a portion of the congregation (instead of the whole) that wanted a musical change. In the next example, the interview participant had congregation members who wanted “more contemporary music.” She tried to satisfy the congregation by providing musical variety.

We have the same issues as I think anybody else in this day and age. “Contemporary music, we want more contemporary music.” There's always that balancing act, but so far we can use the hymnal....I know that there are those rumblings out there. But it seems that now I've been here long enough, the people who want contemporary music and “We've dreamed of having a praise band,”—they seem to have settled down. They know I'm not going anywhere. I think that they see the attempt to accommodate a lot of musical variety for the worship.

One organist-choirmaster struggled with achieving his musical goals because the congregation had such little exposure to his target music to begin with:

I don't want to sound like an elitist, but it becomes difficult to continually try to raise the bar for music when you're dealing with a working-class community that really has no regular interaction with art music other than that one hour on Sunday morning. So, it's really difficult to get anywhere, meaning to grow in appreciation for good music, when you're dealing with a population that has such a limited exposure to art music. I think that might be a better way to say that. That was challenging. I think that I did it, and I think I was relatively successful for some people. But it was kind of a struggle.

As he came to understand it, the congregation also did not “feel like they deserved really good music:”

....People would use the phrase, especially when I said that I was going to take another job—people consistently said two things. One was, “You have to be sure that you get somebody good to replace you.” And they used the phrase, “You've spoiled us.” And I thought that was really interesting because so many people phrased it that way. And I sort of came to the conclusion that this congregation in particular sort of had a low self-esteem. I think because they had been through a lot. And it's almost like they didn't feel like they deserved really good music.

Over a period of years he was able to somewhat change these norms by creating additional opportunities for congregants to be exposed to art music (see also Chapter Five: Agency – Motivating):

At the same time that I started there as the director of music, I also started a concert series. And it was sort of unintentional at the beginning. I gave an organ recital at Lent....And there were a fair number of people who turned out for it....So, then I decided to keep doing that, not necessarily just organ, but I did some piano stuff. I had a singer come down from [regional city] and give a concert. Then when I started teaching at [college], they brought a choir out to sing. Then a couple years after that, the [local semiprofessional chorus] came and did the Duruflé Requiem....So, it sort of got bigger on its own....The stated sort of mission of this thing that I've put on the website or whatever was to provide high-quality classical music for free. So, we never charged admission of course—for free to the parish, but also the community. And I think the expectations for the quality of the music rose the more I did that. Even at the mass as well, I think.

Interestingly, one interview participant did not see his role as determining the overarching musical goals for their congregation. For him, differences of personal opinion were less relevant. He discussed working to fulfill the desires of the parish and archdiocese, which

were “traditional.” As he noted, the congregation determined those musical and liturgical goals, to a certain extent:

Well there seems to be a fairly clear idea of the style of liturgical music that is desired in that parish....They favor traditional liturgy and chant and polyphony and all the classical Catholic music....I also need to say that none of this is my plan or my idea. At this church I’m carrying out the wishes of the parish and the archdiocese.

For organist-choirmasters who did see themselves as arbiters of musical style and content, they sometimes had to work against an environment in which people were accustomed to getting whatever they wanted musically. One respondent attributes this to the belief that music “functions on a consumer-oriented model,” one of several macro-social influences that were discussed in interviews and one that he challenged head-on:

I’ve been trying to tell people here for three years that you wouldn’t dare to ask the pastor to preach on a particular subject, just because you happen to like it....People have an inclination to expect that music functions on a consumer-oriented model. You know, we need certain hymns, they need to be there, because it’s a hymn that we want and those are the things that we know. Same thing with the ensembles and how the music was chosen. There was no real connection to the lessons, or maybe there was, but there was a lot of pandering, I guess, and people got what they want. And I came in here and I said, “No, we’re going to align our readings and our sermons and music to serve the worship situation, the worship space.”

He noted that while it has been challenging, the norm in his church is changing:

So, that has been a challenge and it continues to be a challenge. But, I think people are realizing that, “Oh, no, there’s a better way to do things.”

Flexibility

Flexibility of congregations—both generally-speaking and specifically regarding musical or liturgical changes—was an important characteristic discussed by interview participants.

People’s willingness to try new things, willingness to change, and/or appreciation of musical innovation heavily impacted the ease of which organist-choirmasters could make changes or experiment to meet effectiveness goals.

Interview participants appreciated congregations that were adaptable and open to change. Some saw it as important for the church’s future growth:

And I really like that they have been so willing to embrace change at a fast pace because I have worked with other congregations that needed to change in order to survive and grow, and just didn't have willingness to do it. But this church seemed to make a very conscious decision that we are going to change a lot of stuff to enable us to move into the future. That's good...It's been really tremendous, quite unlike anywhere else I've ever served.

Other organist-choirmasters were appreciative of flexibility simply because it gave them the ability to be creative and try different ways of being musically or liturgically effective:

They're very open to new stuff, to new music, to different things, and I try to give them the space to not do it perfectly. And it's still okay. It's not about perfection. When I'm working with our young people, we talk about that a lot. It's okay if you missed notes in your bell piece. It's okay if your solo wasn't perfect. One huge, great thing about this congregation is that they are very—in this aspect at least—they're flexible with that new stuff.

...I did a lot of innovative stuff, but that seemed to be very popular. A lot of that is with the youth choir where I had them—I would position them in the four corners of the church and then have them move around and then have them go down the aisle together and then have them face the congregation in certain places. I even had the adult choir do a little bit of that. I had them do a handbell processional unaccompanied which was very, very effective. I did a lot of that. I would merge two pieces and join them with something that I created. I always—I think I have been honest—always got complements from the pastor....So innovative things that I did were generally very, very well liked.

At one congregation's "traditional" service with organ and choir, even *avant garde* repertoire was well received:

...they were really open to anything. I mean, we introduce new service music, a lot of new hymns. There's a wonderful anthem by Larry King called *The Transfiguration* that has organ and electronic tape. I introduced that. People thought it was kind of wild and cool. So I would really push the envelope there. I mean, we would do some *avant garde* stuff. We would sing with the choir in different places. All of that seemed to be received really positively.

Another respondent also spoke of the choir members being flexible and willing to try whatever was asked of them:

They were all fairly willing to do whatever I asked, like even if it—I'm thinking specifically of the choir. They were willing to try things even if they weren't real sure about it. So, if I gave them a new piece of music or whatever, they would give it a go; whereas, some groups would just say no. But these people, they would try just about anything, whether they liked it or not. So, that was fun. I really could give them anything, and they would do it. They wouldn't do it well, but they would do it....

In the following example at an Episcopal church, even though not all choir members were excited about a new Evensong initiative, they “still came and did a good job.” This allowed the organist-choirmaster to give the congregation and choir a new musical and liturgical experience with which they were not particularly familiar:

I think [the three choirs event] was exciting for everybody to be involved. I mean, the response from the choir was pretty mixed. I mean, they were happy to go along with everything and they were committed. They were committed to everything we did. So I think it kind of spanned the gamut like it did in the congregation. There were people who were really excited that we were doing Evensong. There were other people who were kind of indifferent within the choir, but that said, they all still came and did a good job.

Others interview participants discovered that their congregations (or their governing boards) were not always flexible, hindering musical, liturgical, and theological goals. In this first example, the organist-choirmaster was told by senior clergy that the change he wanted to make was unlikely to be accepted, and ultimately he abandoned the idea as they suggested.

[The head pastor] expressed his enthusiasm and he understood why I wanted to [make this structural change in the music program], but he said to me “I can’t make a governing board decision and I can’t guarantee after that whole, long process that we would come out with that change. These kinds of traditions are longstanding and venerable institutions that don’t like to give up those kinds of associations or those kinds of aspects to their charters.” And so, he was not exactly skeptical, but he was being realistic in just saying, “I don’t know that we can really follow through on this. I still appreciate your wanting to do this.” The clergy there were fantastic and very supportive and they saw what I was hoping to do. So, that was just an example of it, and you’re right—there’s no way after a few years of politicking and committee meetings and all that that you would come out with what you truly wanted in that kind of a scenario.

The following interview participant also abandoned an attempted change that was far from readily accepted:

Using the modern day translation of the Lord’s Prayer and not the King James “Our Father Who Art.” I actually gave up on that fight because that is something that is endeared to this congregation, is that archaic version of the Lord’s Prayer. So, again, I just think it’s a generational thing. It might not ever change here because that change did not go over well at all.... We did it seasonally once—like for the season of Advent—and every week heard horrible complaints.... We just decided there were bigger fish to fry.

Finally, this next organist-choirmaster noted that the general milieu of the geographical region was not one to accept change. He worked to counter this by making changes very slowly, a method discussed more in Chapter Five: Agency – Stabilizing.

[This state] is kind of—if something has been done, they don't like to change. So anything new or different is frowned on at first. So that's the biggest challenge. That's kind of a cultural thing, though.... Even this last week, we moved our choir fundraiser for the year from February to October. It had been February for two years and I ran into somebody who was not happy with the change in the tradition already. It was only two years.... I suppose a lot of places are like that. In my experience, [this state] is a little more recalcitrant than most places I have been.

Dedication

When considering influential patterns of behavior in churches, interview participants often discussed the dedication level of volunteers. They worked in churches with levels of commitment and attendance across the spectrum.

Having dedicated and supportive volunteers was an important characteristic of some congregations that enabled their organist-choirmasters to better achieve goals. For example, volunteers lent auxiliary support to music programs:

Well, they are very giving. I have people that are very committed, and they have always lent a hand.... There are people who take pride in a healthy sense in putting their best foot forward. So when I have concerts, there's always a potluck reception...

...but we do always have really good receptions at the concerts. And, there are a group of people that really work hard on the social hour, working at things between services on Sundays.... Right now we don't have a youth director. We have a small group of parents that are really, really committed to overseeing and the structuring of the Sunday school. And, it has been, it's really been remarkable to see how much passion there is, how much energy there is from the parents and the volunteers, besides...

In another instance, volunteers generally saw that details of the music program were not overlooked, making “a big difference to the program and therefore to the church.” Having such attentive volunteers makes it possible for the organist-choirmaster to accomplish more in their programming like events, initiatives, fundraising, etc.:

Well, the volunteers—they get the job done. They often come to me and say “Oh, do you need this doing?” Which is great because I’ve got a multifaceted big music program and it doesn’t necessarily just rely on me remembering absolutely everything. So, the volunteers definitely have just kind of bought into the process which is nice. That’s not always the case...They’re generally very enthusiastic. They all see the job done and they know that they’re doing a job that nobody else is going to do. They know it’s of value and they know that it’s going to make a big difference to the program and therefore to the church and the music life.

Additionally, several respondents commented on how hard-working their ensemble members were:

...The choir members are fantastic really. They’re very appreciative and very hard-working. When you’re working especially with volunteers, knowing that they’re going to keep coming back; that just really says a great deal about their commitment and about their appreciation.

I think overall, the volunteers in my choir are tremendously dedicated and really quite capable.

[The choir is] legitimately proud of what they do and they take it very seriously to produce the best results they can possibly do.

While the above examples dramatically improve the ability of organist-choirmasters to accomplish goals—particularly musically—not all congregations have this level of dedication. In the following example, a respondent felt that his church had an unusually strong opposite tendency (though he was still able to accomplish many goals because the congregation made up for the lack-of-participation with financial support):

Well the biggest one to me is just that there doesn’t seem to be a lot of participation from the parish in musical groups. And it’s true across the parish; it’s not only in the music department. There is a general lack of volunteerism in this whole place, and they figured if they have enough money in the budget, then it gets taken care of somehow, and they don’t have to do it. It’s not that they don’t notice or don’t appreciate the music when something is lacking or something’s not there. Everyone notices right away and they want it, but they don’t ever imagine themselves as being the ones who supply it.

The organist-choirmaster speculated that it might be a bigger societal Catholic vs. Protestant issue:

And for me, having been raised as a Protestant, that’s a little bit perplexing, I’ve never encountered this kind of—I wouldn’t really call it apathy, because it isn’t they have a bad attitude—it’s just that there is a disconnect between the outcome

that they expect when they drive to church, and how they think that actually gets produced....

In another church, there was very little dedication to attending services generally, unless someone had a specifically assigned task that day:

One of the unique challenges at [my church]—and I’ve never seen this at another parish and it’s not so much the choir—but I see it with, you know, folks that are assigned to read, somebody who is assigned to be an usher or whatever. If those folks haven’t been given something to do, they don’t come.... It goes back to what I told you earlier about not knowing who’s going to show up on Sunday. Like you know, if you’re the usher and, “Well, I feel like sleeping in this morning, which is what I’m going to do,” and you don’t find anybody to fill in for you. Or two Sundays ago, acolyte broke his arm so he couldn’t be a crucifer so he didn’t show up. Lay reader didn’t show up. So this unpaid pastoral assistant had to step in and do both. I mean, this is just this systemic problem that that parish faces.

The participant wondered if this was really a macro-societal problem:

But the most frustrating thing is—and I think it’s also a larger cultural thing—because [for] some of these families, especially where kids are involved, Sunday morning is soccer. Sunday morning is this. Or you know, “We’ve got this engagement we’ve got to do. We’re just not going to be there.”

A number of organist-choirmasters also spoke of a lack of consistent attendance among their ensemble members, which has implications for musical consistency, quality, and growth:

Sometimes I wish that the volunteers were a little more motivated. Or, willing to be more of—what’s the word—steadily committed. I mean, they mostly show up most of the time. I wish they would show up more often than that.

Traveling for work or pleasure were frequent explanations for the attendance problems::

So, I think the hardest thing is that... For instance in my choir, I would see the median age in the group is sort of shy of retirement. So everyone is working. And so I think trying to get consistent attendance in choir is probably one of my biggest challenges, and you know I just have to work with that because they are always traveling for their work.... So trying to have some consistency in the music, you know with my rather inconsistent attendance, is sort of a challenge.

Other challenges for me are parents who say they want their kids to be in the music program and they don’t show up or blow it off. I’ve got one family who are well off and they’re not fully invested in the program. They’re the sorts of people that—we’ll have a really big service or something which I’ve been planning on a long time—they’ll say, “Oh sorry, we’re skiing in Vail this week.” It’s just like, “Oh well, thanks a lot.” I find that annoying.

It seems that once people are into their retirement, then they're traveling constantly or very often. I have several like that in the choir. I can't rely on them. I know they're going to be gone from week to week, sometimes with very little notice.

Without consistent attendance, some organist-choirmasters relied on simpler musical selections than their desired goals, because singers were often unexpectedly absent and would otherwise leave them “up a creek:”

The biggest single issue is attendance and especially during the winter when there's a dusting of snow. I have people who live out in the country and they don't want to go up their driveway or they're sick. And of course, with a choir of eight, missing just one or two people can destroy the anthem I'm planning to do on a given Sunday. That's the biggest stress in terms of dealing with my choir members—is just attendance. I mean, I have to plan very carefully in the winter. I do a lot of two-part anthems just because I can't count on them showing up.

Another interview participant, discussing the attendance problem, also noted that it seriously limits her musical choices. Similar to others, she opined that this is the result of a larger, cultural shift:

Society has changed since I started this job. The idea of a volunteer being there on a regular basis has changed. The idea that a regular churchgoer is there every Sunday or three out of every four Sundays has changed. Regular now means once or twice a month. I'm in a very small church. I've never served such a small church before. The idea of a critical mass comes into play....All it takes is two people saying, “Sorry, I'm sick today.” “Sorry, I had to go babysit a grandchild.” “Sorry, I had to go do this between Wednesday and Sunday,” and I can be really out. So, I have to think so critically about what music can work for whoever shows up. So, that's a big negative, I have to say.

The following organist-choirmaster noted that the choir members likely to miss rehearsal (in his case the younger ones, relatively speaking) were actually those that needed the most practice. The oldest generation of choir members was not only most consistent in attendance but also the most musically literate:

People don't show up anymore. People don't commit, and they don't show up. And it's just so hard to get people together. I mean, you got like thirty people on the list in the choir, and then every single week you have all the eighty year-olds like the fifty year-olds got busy that week. Couldn't come. First of all, they're probably the ones that need the help with the music because the eighty-year olds, it was a different time period. They all knew about it, and they probably still sing pretty well. But the people who are fifty can't read music. You got to help them. So that was really a challenge, just getting people to come.

These problems with attendance can create downward spirals of reinforcement. As noted, poor or inconsistent attendance can drive musical choices to be simpler or rehearsals to be more repetitive and tedious. This may, for example, deter more skilled singers from participating, which diminishes the capabilities of the choir, lessens the musical leadership within the choir, and impacts potential, participation, and enjoyment at all levels. Some organist-choirmasters solved this issue by hiring staff singers, so as to guarantee having a skilled and reliable core in attendance at rehearsals and performances (See Chapter Five: Agency – Stabilizing).

Financial Practices

Congregational financial practices—of both boards/committees and individual members—are also a structural factor that shape organist-choirmasters’ environments. Having financial support was an important tool that participants used to reach goals.

Some churches had a significant amount of funding available for music, built up through skillful past planning:

It’s a very well-resourced parish. The music department benefits from some long-range financial planning on the part of my predecessor....He managed to raise enough money through four endowment funds that we then basically received [\$X] off of those endowments every year in addition to the money from the offering budget.

This organist-choirmaster above noted that having the established funding allowed for significant future planning:

That allows us to plan without any worries or fears. We can look ahead several years and know that we’re going to be doing this and that work with the [regional orchestra] for instance and not worry about whether we’ll sell tickets or not. It just gives us an extra-comfortable position to do some really fun long-term projects, or project planning I guess I should say.

Other congregations were particularly willing to support musical initiatives as needs arose. In the following example, the interview participant told a story of easily receiving financial support to hire additional music staff. It turned out that the congregation hired him with the expectation that he would need funding to build the program, and was more than willing to provide it:

But then I go to a meeting where I'm like, "Okay. Let's add this to the budget so that we can do this for next year." And everyone's like, "That sounds like a great idea. Let's do it." And it has been like that every four years. I had a really good meeting with our stewardship board last week where I'm really asking for another leap in which to bring another part-time person on staff, to do music in a more substantial way. More than just doing handbells on afternoons, but a part-time salaried position. And the congregation treasurer looked at me and she goes, "We knew when we brought you here, you were going to build things. So we expect to have to do this every year." I'm like, "If you would've told me that before I came in, I would've come in with a bigger list because I've got more ideas!" So in some places, I would guess that they would say you're always asking for more. But here, they're like, "What can we do to support you so that the program can do more?" And I think that's pretty amazing.

At another church, current parishioners were eager to donate to the music program. The organist-choirmaster was able to purchase a rehearsal piano and also hire musicians in order to "create [musically] what it is that they want to create." He was initially surprised at how willing they were to donate:

When I hadn't been there very long, I noticed that we really needed to have a new rehearsal piano....I didn't ask for the piano yet, but I was asking for volunteers for the choir and I spoke at the end of mass, right before the dismissal, and I said, "Here's who I am and we need more volunteers for all of these groups, and please help if you can." And then I said "If you don't have time to help, or you're unable to, we'll always accept a check." And everybody kind of laughed when I said that, but right after mass was over, people walked up and started writing checks, and I didn't quite know what to do about that, but I got \$800 worth of checks just in that one pass. So I took them to the secretary, and we opened an account, and that eventually bought the rehearsal piano that we needed to have. So they're immediately responsive....And even when the parishioners can't supply [musical talent] for themselves, they're willing to come up with a healthy budget so that I can go and find the people that I need to help me create what it is that they want to create.

While congregations like those above were willing and able to provide financial support, others have fewer resources or different priorities, so gaining financial support was a slower process for the organist-choirmaster. This respondent noted the challenges of not having enough funding to hire additional musicians to the degree he would like:

I would say the main challenge is that we have a small music budget....So trying to do really good music, like with orchestra or hiring musicians, I am able to do that, but it is—again, I guess my biggest challenge is just trying to work within the financial constraints that I have....

He noted that the church has other priorities, like the physical plant. Growth of funding for music has been a very slow, gradual process, tackled with patience (See Chapter Five: Agency - Stabilizing).

[When asking for money,] well, basically I write to [council] and then I usually go in one of their meetings and I say, "Hey, we need new choir chairs, you know, for this reason." And I would say, I guess, a fair amount of the things that I have asked for have been passed, but it's—but not everything. So it is all very gradual. Like, I have been working on this paid singer thing for like years, and each year from council I have kind of heard no because—you know, you got to fix the roof first before we do things like that. So I would say it has been a very slow, gradual process.

Finally, one interview participant who worked at a large parish in an affluent area noted that despite the wealth, the culture does not prioritize donations to the arts—a broader, societal issue:

The culture out here is one of the most affluent counties in the United States for one, but it's a lot of new money. So, it's pre-philanthropic really. So, the arts are not really a high priority for people's entertainment dollars.

Musical Literacy

Musical literacy—whether of the congregation or ensembles—was another frequently discussed component of organist-choirmasters' environments with considerable influence on musical effectiveness. Having a knowledgeable congregation meant certain repertoire was more readily accepted or valued:

[I] have a pretty musically literate congregation. I don't know whether that holds for some of the new people coming in because I don't know as much about them. But if I go back to the core, and those folks that I would've gotten to know within, say, the first five years I worked with—those were the folks that would come in on Sunday morning and go, "Did you go to the symphony last night? Wasn't that wonderful?" And they're all sitting there yakking about this stuff, you know. That tells you a lot then about what you can have as your expectations.

The following interview participants commented on the literacy capabilities of their choir members. Having an ensemble that can read well allows for learning music more easily, so the organist-choirmaster can increase the quantity of repertoire and/or the difficulty level.

So just the general facility and general talent we have got here is good. So we make good music. I guess that's the positive.

I have great people in my program...A lot of people in my groups can read music which is kind of different than anything I've experienced working in churches. So that's kind of nice.

The positives are I work with wonderful singers. The choir is terrific...I think overall, the volunteers in my choir are tremendously dedicated and really quite capable.

Similarly to attendance patterns, musical literacy can have an upward or downward spiral effect.

Having skilled choir members and the ability to do complex repertoire can attract additional skilled singers, whereas if literacy is at a significantly low level (without a “quorum” of musical leaders, so to speak), it can further discourage participation. Several organist-choirmasters solved this issue by hiring staff singers, thus guaranteeing not only a core group that consistently attends rehearsal but that also is musically reliable (See Chapter Five: Agency – Stabilizing).

Location

Location was an aspect of social structure that various interview participants pointed to as a constraint on their work. For one, the area demographics meant limited resources from which to pull:

Probably with [city name] it's mostly demographics. It's a town of about 15,000 in [region] and it's post-industrial. I mean there are no jobs basically. Anyone with a college education moves away. So what I'm left with is retirees which is most of the congregation, of course. And then young people, and the education system is so poor that I don't have anything in terms of like even high schoolers who can read music basically. My resources are very limited in that sense...The demographics of the town make it really difficult to do as much as I'd like to do. And of course, it's a small church in a small town but now they're getting smaller because people keep moving away. Especially the sort of educated people who would make up the bulk of the parish.

Another noted that the region's culture shapes his approach to recruitment. Because it is so secular, he had to market programs for their musical aspect as much as for their church aspect.

I can't think of any negatives except that maybe the West Coast is extremely secular, but so is the Northeast. We have to sell what we do as much on the basis of the music and the quality of the music as on the connection to the church. That has some impact in working with families and with kids in trying to “sell” our product. So, you can't take church and culture for granted out here...

The following participant noted that the lack of an arts culture in his city hampered publicity efforts:

There is not a lot of art and culture [in this city]. So just trying to get the word out about concerts and music at the cathedral is not particularly easy.

Unsurprisingly, Floridian organist-choirmasters faced attendance difficulties with “snowbirds:”

One of the biggest challenges—and this is really a challenge in Florida—is the seasonal nature of our congregation. In the summertime I have ten in the choir and I have twenty-five right now. . . . I’ve tried to like, convince two of my good singers—they’re here November to March—and I’m like, “Stay one extra day for Easter. Come on. What’s one day?” That’s a big thing in Florida. It’s a big challenge.

Finally, this organist-choirmaster observed that the disposition and behavior of people in her region required her to put in a lot of effort in order to build relationships:

I will put it out there and just say that is one of my biggest frustrations is there are personalities who are both in choir and in bells—but even if it were only just choir—that I really have to use every skill that I’ve ever learned in how to work with volunteers in order to make rehearsal successful, as successful as possible. Because the personalities—this is a very interesting place to live. It’s very small town, outside of [city]. But [region] is very—it’s not the Midwest. It’s kind of like what I grew up with in [other region]. People can be very harsh. People can be very closed off. They can be very to themselves, and there isn’t a lot of give and take. So, I sort of have to make that happen. I have to make the relationships happen.

Predecessors

In the course of the interviews, many participants brought up characteristics and actions of their predecessors. As one might expect, these played a major role in influencing congregational norms and practices (a number of which have already been discussed). Sometimes the predecessor left valuable tools or created a beneficial environment for the new organist-choirmaster; other times they established an unfavorable environment or inadvertently created deeply-held expectations for church members.

Two organist-choirmasters mentioned how their predecessors raised funding to establish endowments (one very substantial, one much smaller), an obvious boon to the future music program and its staff. Two other interview participants noted that the personalities of their

predecessors—unfriendly or rude—made it very easy for them to come across as personable and build relationships with congregation members. The contrast was so drastic between the participant and predecessor that it did not take too much effort to become well-liked—a few friendly words in one instance; a relaxed attitude about the organ and choir loft in another:

The previous musician who was here for about twenty-five years on a part-time basis was not a people person at all. I really don't understand how that succeeded. But several folks have said to me, "Oh, you're very friendly and you're very open." I'm like, "Well, yeah." Then they said, "The previous..." I mean, the previous musician was apparently—I don't want to say he was mean—but he was not a friendly human being. He was more business-like. I think just having a personality that's willing to have a conversation about real life as opposed to always talking about music has helped tremendously.

...One of my predecessors, the organist, was a complete diva. He would stop in the middle of a postlude and shout at people to shut up so they could listen to the postlude. He would play for the children's choir and he would just tell them how awful they sounded. He's a real piece of work. No one could go near the organ. They wouldn't let people clean up in the choir loft because that's where the organ was. I let the kids come up and play the organ and parents were like, "Oh my God. What's going to happen?" I was like, "They can't hurt it. I'm right here." But he was just a real jerk to a lot of people. So that was really helpful to just not be a jerk.

In other cases, a mere contrast of personalities caused difficulty. One organist-choirmaster stated that his predecessor was particularly authoritarian, which set up expectations by choir members for that type of musical leadership. Compared to this, the respondent's more relaxed approach was initially perceived as unserious:

I was sort of very different from the previous music director. The last guy was very—he had the personality, I think, to pull off the rather authoritarian kind of leadership. And that is just really not me. And so when they did not see that from me from the first few months, they were kind of like, "Well, can we take this guy seriously at all?"

The new organist-choirmaster worked hard to build relationships and trust, discourage negative remarks, and show his own appreciation for the choir members, and over several years the environment changed from "a dictatorship" to "very team-oriented."

Other interview participants also found that following organist-choirmasters with long-established positions and programs caused difficulties for successors who initiated change:

The previous music director was here for fifty years before I got here. So everything had been done a certain way for a long time....Probably the whole first year I was here, it was ugly. It was very ugly. But you know all of these people had actually grown up with this previous conductor. He had coached them. He was the director of the high school and the cathedral school. The people here literally sung with this guy since they were eight years old and now they were like fifties....He had done things his own way and kind of stuck with it for decades. So I could understand where they were coming from. Pretty much everything I did when I first got here, they balked at.

The aforementioned organist-choirmaster was able to overcome the difficulties by “sticking to his guns” as well as patiently building relationships, warming-up the environment, and educating about changes, among other things (See Chapter Five: Agency). The next respondent also followed a long-established program, developing “a thicker skin” in order to cope with pushback:

I went from a position in [city] where I built a program from scratch and they didn't have one at all—so everyone loved everything I did—moving into a situation where there were four decades of precedent and some of it I thought needed to change. So I developed a thicker skin.

As mentioned in the prior quote, following a “quiet” or “nonexistent” music program meant few or no preconceptions and an easier time building a program. One respondent noted the counterpart to this, however. More effort is needed when starting from square one:

One of the things that I realized early on when I got here. It is sort of that double-edged sword. Because the music program had been so relatively quiet for a long time, there were no preconceived notions. There was nobody coming to me my first week saying, "Well, I'm always on the solo Christmas Eve," or, "We have all..." There was absolutely none of that. But the flip side of that is there wasn't a tradition. Does that makes sense? It was a clean slate. But, it was also like you were building from the ground up. That has been mostly positive.

Finally, one organist-choirmaster benefited from very effective predecessors who shaped a culture of music appreciation in their church.

The work of my two predecessors, but the one who was there for forty years...he was so in love with his congregation and he was such a good pastor and he really capitalized on the evangelical pull, if you will, or draw of good music. He really is the one who turned that parish upside-down and built it....He opened the doors by putting on so many concerts and special services. It just grew the church in a huge way and a lot of people there are explicit about saying that they came because of the music. Now, they've stayed and they've loved everything about it. So, I'm forever amazed at how engaged the congregation is by its music.

Physical Resources

Various interview participants noted established physical structures that were important tools for achieving their goals. For example, the following organist-choirmaster worked in a church with an acoustic that naturally supported singing:

Regarding congregational songs, this congregation is willing to try anything. And part of that comes because of the acoustic of the church; everyone can hear each other and the congregational singing is really robust.

Others benefited from the instruments. Several commented on the merits of their church's pipe organ; one pointed to value in the paucity of instruments:

I've never had to fight for using the organ because we don't have any other instruments in the sanctuary.

Good physical resources are not always a guarantee of success and naturally effective tool, though. One interview participant learned early in his tenure that a prestigious building and instrument actually creates significant problems unless managed well:

I learned pretty quickly that when all eyes are on you, you had better have a plan for what to do with this space. Otherwise...it actually starts to detract from what you are trying to do very quickly. The building is great, but it's only part of the battle and it could be good or bad depending on people can get disgusted with it, too. Because of all the money that went into it, they feel like they are not getting their due that's from other parishes. People say, like, they are not getting their wedding there when they should. Everybody wants to have their wedding there. You have got to have a plan to deal with all of the interest that comes with where you are....You better have a plan for what you are going to do when you have the monumental instrument and the monumental space, otherwise it becomes a liability for you.

Individual Idiosyncrasies

Various interview participants discussed individual people in their congregations and ensembles who had particularly strong impacts on their work (aside from clergy or other supervisors, covered earlier in this chapter). This aspect of the social structure—the “individual idiosyncrasies” that are bound to show up in organizations with open, voluntary membership—played an important role in how organist-choirmasters could achieve effectiveness, both helping and hindering.

While few organist-choirmasters explicitly pointed to church or ensemble members that made particularly positive contributions (generally they discussed the “talent” or “dedication,” for example, of the group as a whole), those did exist. One respondent discussed someone who started out as a thorn in his side, but—after being won over—wound up being a valuable asset to the program:

So now he is very much willing to do anything for me. You know, he is one of the few people in the choir who can play the piano. Like, sight read really well. And so whenever I need help with sectionals, I often enlist him to help me.

Another participant—who had followed a long-established predecessor—attributed part of the positive developments in the ensemble environment to the actions of one individual:

The most important thing was one of the old timers started getting a group together to go out for drinks after rehearsal every week. So that’s actually key [and] that group kind of grew. Well, anywhere from six to fifteen people out there on Wednesday night after choir...just hanging out, getting past the tension and complaints.

Other respondents had to deal with difficult individuals. One summed up the general predicament he experienced thus:

And to some degree, unfortunately—and I don’t know how widespread this is—but one of the things I find challenging is I am just going to blanket it with “personalities.” There’s some people that I think no matter what you do, you’re just not going to have the right answer or maybe say what somebody needs to hear or be able to provide them with everything that they need to feel okay. And there’s just absolutely nothing you can do about that.

Some of these individuals had particularly difficult personalities and behaviors, as evidenced by the following:

So that man was a little bit...he'd get mad, and throw his music on the floor, and everybody else would just stare at me and say, "Just go on and ignore him." So that was a huge big challenge.

I had a paid choir member who’s no longer with us and that fellow was—he could be a little brash. He was just sort of raw in the way he dealt with stuff. And we had one situation where we were getting ready to do Advent wassails and carols one year. And this guy came in late, we were at the back of the church, we were trying to practice the responsorial that we were going to do. And he walked up to this new guy in the choir...and pulled up this guy’s cowl and looked at his rope, said, “You’re wearing my rope.” The new guy turned around, walked out the door, we never saw him again. I was “PO’d” to say the least.

Other individuals had strong musical opinions they presented to the organist-choirmaster:

There was one member of the handbell choir who was a very straight, Baroque performer. He wouldn't abide by anything like a *ritard* or any inaccuracy. One person played the wrong note, fire that person. Well, I am not like that. If somebody was playing something reasonably well, but not really the right way, I let it go. I let it go. That's just the way it's going to be. I would rather have people pleased with what they are doing than disturbed about the fact that they are not doing it right. Obviously, there is a balance in these two things.

There's a man in the congregation who will always ask me, he's like, "Oh, for us old folks, can you play the hymns slower?" And I really do think I play them reasonably and I don't want to just change that to make one person happy. So all I say is like—and I have actually slowed down some of the hymns because I do think maybe some of them I play too fast. So all I said was, "Oh, I've been slowing them down a little bit. I'm not sure if it's enough but I want to make sure that people can keep their breath when they're—," I don't know what I said.

More detailed discussion of specific situations with individuals—relating to their personality, behavior, musical opinions and requests, conflict, etc.—and the different techniques organist-choirmasters used to deal with them is found in Chapter Five: Agency.

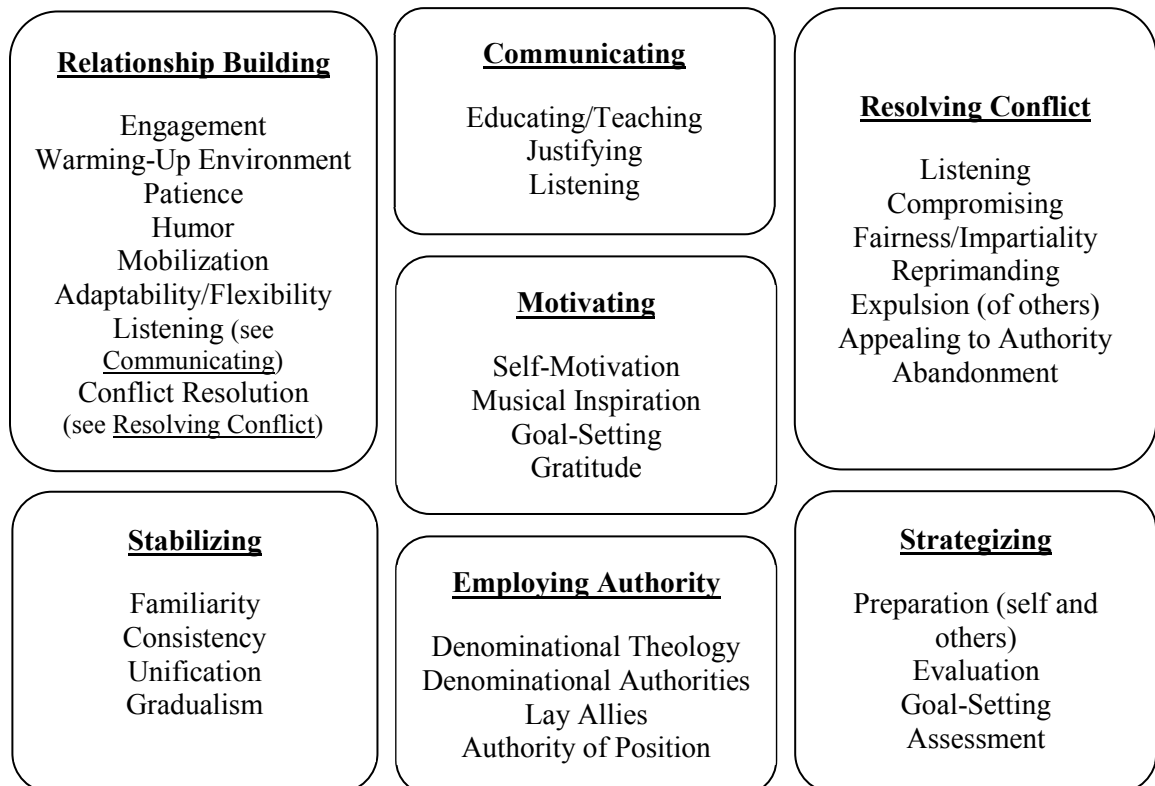
Conclusion

Though many of the aforementioned factors of social structure are fixed and uncontrollable (such as certain denominational hierarchies, physical location, or predecessor's actions), others naturally ebb and flow (individuals involved in programs, financial state) and some can, to a significant degree, be influenced by the organist-choirmaster's actions. Several of these actions were touched on in the examples in this chapter, however the next chapter systematically considers the ways in which organist-choirmasters exercise agency—the overarching themes that emerged as they discussed their methods for achieving effectiveness.

Chapter 5: AGENCY

Though there are many aspects of social structure that constrain or enable organist-choirmasters along their path to being effective, there are also many ways in which they have agency. Through a variety of actions, they work towards goals and sometimes even influence or change the social structure. The interview data revealed that organist-choirmasters exercise agency in the following seven categories: Relationship building, communicating, resolving conflict, stabilizing, motivating, strategizing, and employing authority. Some of the actions in these categories are mutually supportive while others can be mutually undermining. For example, one action that organist-choirmasters sometimes took to resolve conflict was to dismiss troublesome personnel. This action inherently breaks down a relationship with those particular people, though it may at the same time improve relationships with others.

Figure 3: Agency Themes



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

One of the key ways in which organist-choirmasters achieved their goals was through building relationships, thus earning the respect of those around them and the ability to influence others. Organist-choirmasters primarily spoke of building relationships with engagement and patience (giving it time). They also spoke of warming up group environments, utilizing humor, mobilizing congregation members to extend their network, and being adaptable and flexible. Listening (a type of engagement) and conflict resolution were additional aspects of relationship-building that are discussed separately elsewhere in this analysis (see the sections in this chapter Communicating and Resolving Conflict). All of these techniques contributed to relational effectiveness, which in turn helped in attaining musical, liturgical, and theological goals.

Many organist-choirmasters spoke of engagement when building relationships. At a very basic level, one respondent stated that he makes sure to periodically give announcements so that the congregation “know[s] who I am.” One attends quarterly vestry meetings so that “the vestry and I kind of get to know each other—that I know who the leaders are.” Another commented on “being present and [having] as much face time as possible, after services especially, and in the halls all week. Just casual greeting...and making people feel that they have contact with the musicians.” Yet another tried to “be available for teaching [classes] and for coffee hour and for newcomers’ receptions and social events.” Many also elaborated on getting to know people in more substantial ways:

I think I've had to—over the years—learn how to be myself around a huge group of people that I don't necessarily know. To...open up and kind of tell them my story about me....I found that as soon as you open up about who you are, then that gives people something they can relate to.

Take probably almost anybody and just sit down and start yakking. There's a couple guys I can think of in particular—they're not in the choir....One guy, he'll tell me, “Well, how's fishing?” And we'll get on to the whole fishing thing...and we started comparing notes and what have you. That kind of stuff is wonderful but that's also building that relationship with these people because they see you as something other than the guy who's sitting there on the bench. And that counts for something.

You know in any church...you can't expect everybody to be a natural ally for the organ or for choral music or for high liturgy. It's just not going to happen. But you get to know people on their own terms and respect them for their own interests. You can get a lot done and make a lot of bridges.

One interview participant specifically noted how building these relationships helps make people more receptive:

I think when I'm with people I try to show a genuine interest in them. I think that helps them to bring their own walls down and become receptive to things that I have to share for them or invite them to.

A few people commented on building relationships with congregation members and volunteers but still maintaining boundaries in those relationships. In their experience, these were not necessarily mutually exclusive actions, nor was it harmful to effectiveness.

I always try to keep a slight boundary...I try to give them the benefit of the boundary that I kind of wish I had with my boss [who "wanted our relationship to be that of good friends"], which is to say that if I need to tell them something that comes as a direct—"this is my job and I'm going to tell you to do this now"—I don't want them to feel as though that is impacting a friendship that is existing. So I wouldn't consider myself close friends with any of them. But we get along quite well.

So with all those people, you know, I don't tend to become close friends with the congregation, people that I'm serving because...I personally like to keep those boundaries a little bit. But overall, [I have] a very positive relationship with most. There's always people that don't like me and people that I don't like...

Many organist-choirmasters spoke of the important role social time played in improving the relationships within their groups (typically ensembles). One instance of this was mentioned in the section on individual idiosyncrasies in Chapter Four: Social Structure, when the "old timer" started getting a group to go out for drinks after rehearsal. The following is a similar example:

Last season was when...you could really count on conversation outside of rehearsal like where people were talking with each other, and then even folks suggesting going out for drinks after rehearsal. That really had not happened. And I certainly didn't want to be the one to institute that – not institute it but, I mean, even suggest it. But every couple weeks people go out for drinks and socialize and I think that's a good sign that they're getting along well and look forward to being in each other's company and singing—if they're going to be sacrificing and volunteering their time.

Several interview participants, however, did discuss specific actions they took to create more occasions for socializing, in order to warm up the atmosphere of their ensembles. Two discussed setting aside time for the youth choir to socialize, among other things:

There were social hours and I was always part of those social hours. I had some occasions when I would have a fun day on a Saturday [with the youth choir]. The parents would come in and bring some goodies and we would have a nice chitchat time. I did a lot of socializing and encouraged the kids to have fun, but not destroy the rehearsal because they were having too much fun.

It's been really gratifying...to see just a little more life around the edges with people coming early and staying late and going to brunch after church. A little bit more of that is coming out. I'm trying to warm up the atmosphere so it's a little less cut-and-dry without losing any of the standards. I think it's been very exciting....We take the choir kids on one social outing a month. It could be ice skating, it could be a movie, or bowling, or whatever. With the families of the music board or the music commission, we spend a lot of time with them socially....It wasn't bad before. I think it was perfectly fine but maybe a little more introverted than I wanted to see. So, I was just trying to get people to know each other's names. It's a large choir so it could be easy to hide in the corner and not know everybody's names. It's just socializing more.

Another restarted parties with the adult choir and noted (similarly to above) how choir members informally socialize after rehearsal:

We party together every now and again. We just had a choir party this past Saturday night. We hadn't had a choir party—they did not have a tradition of like a Christmas party or end of the year kind of a thing. Those have been kind of sporadic. Then sometimes after rehearsal on Wednesday nights, there are a couple of basses in the choir that usually would say, "Hey, we're going out for a beer. Come join us." There are informal things like that.

These stories also highlight how relationship-building needed to be given time and patience. Respondents often discussed this and gave many examples:

I think part of the thing is I have been there for a long time. I have established a really good tenure there and people know me really well on a personal level since I actually do come down from the balcony and talk to people. I think I have been able to form good relationships that way.

It's sort of a family relationship after this long. I know these people pretty well and they know me and they know what to expect. In rehearsal they know my sense of humor. It's nice to be understood in that sense. I find that didn't really start to happen until three or four years into the process....Getting to know the people in the church context takes a while, even when you're in rehearsal with them every week.

Certain situations can make building relationships particularly difficult and take extra time. As examined in Chapter Four: Social Structure, following long-established predecessors can be hard. The organist-choirmaster who took a position after his predecessor's fifty year tenure discussed how it took years for the volunteers to "feel like it was family again" after having "lost their father figure." Another respondent spoke about how slow relationship building was with one of his ensembles, attributing part of it to an initial lack of trust:

I do have a recorder consort, who also have taken a very long time to warm up to me because they were used to functioning without [an organist-choirmaster in charge]. And I made suggestions about how things would sound better. So it's taken the best part of the year for them to realize that I'm an asset, not an enemy. Change is slow, slower than I am used to....Change...can be perceived as a threat, especially if you're coming from another part of the country and people don't know you. There's a longer time to establish that trust.

However, doors open once these relationships have been built over time. In the following example, a musical opportunity arose for the organist-choirmaster:

Right now the choir is learning Kenneth Leighton's *Solus ad victimam* and I think they all hate it. But they also really like me, and they can see that I like the piece. And so they're humoring me by learning it.

Humor was an additional aspect of relationship building utilized by interview participants. Several organist-choirmasters discussed how they employ humor to diffuse situations, maintain good relationships, and build "camaraderie:"

I think the camaraderie comes in because when stuff happens...you just laugh. On Christmas Eve, before we started our Christmas Eve prelude, one of the sopranos knocked over a full cup of coffee in the loft. Just everywhere, just as I was getting ready to give the down beat for the Paul Manz *E'en So, Lord Jesus* and I just smiled. It was like, what are you going to do? It's fine. It's okay. I was going to wait for her, and she was like, "No, no. Start, go ahead. I'll get paper towels." And I thought, "Well, we're down a soprano now." But what do you do? You just smile and laugh, because it's going to happen. We're humans. It's not a professional establishment. No one is listening to the webcast. So I guess that is an example of trying to have camaraderie with the choir....I try to take it seriously in that I don't want to waste time goofing around. Some people like to tell jokes or whatever. And you think, "Gosh, you have a limited amount of rehearsal time." But if something is funny or happens that is weird, I just try to go with it. I want the choir to feel comfortable.

I've got one choir member who absolutely hates Britten so I have to sort of announce ahead of time, "Hey, you know, I've got this Britten anthem scheduled.

So Steve, if you want to take the weekend off and go visit your grandkids, this is a good weekend to do it.” And we just laugh about it to no end.

Many interview participants commented on extending their relationships beyond the musical volunteers and members of their ensembles by mobilizing congregation members to support the music program, often in simple, non-musical ways.

I went around asking people, “Well, who could provide this [prop for a production]?” So I got to meet a lot of new people by people saying, “Oh, go ask Roger and his wife. They probably could do that.” So Roger and his wife became [my] friends. So there is a very good positive return on that kind of thing.

[I involve] as many members of the congregation as possible in the music program, and that can be non-musical things like bringing food for the brunches. We set up a bell cleaning morning last summer and invited anybody to come and do that. Some people came who had no intention of ringing the bells. But they just helped clean them.

One pointed to a particular benefit of having a full-time position, in that it gave him time to “immerse myself in other ministries:”

I just wasn’t a person who flew in at night to do a rehearsal and flew out the door. My job is to be here and to build relationships. With that comes, after some waiting, the relationships to build and the trust which leads to people making commitments of their time which is very valuable.

A few organist-choirmasters discussed learning to be flexible, whether with the music they chose for the choir, their plan for rehearsal, or the liturgy on a Sunday morning. For some, this was a way to deal with problems discussed in Chapter Four: Social Structure, like attendance and musical literacy/ability. Adapting in the moment improved these organist-choirmasters’ immediate relational and musical effectiveness:

I wish one thing they would have told me at [my university] sooner is that...flexibility is also important. That would have saved a lot of anxiety....Like with the choir anthems, I should have just gone to plan B. You know, I should have just kind of gone with the punches a little bit more....I was kind of worried about myself for the first couple years [and] I kind of did not pay attention to other people....I am better at reading a room and seeing if this is going to really work with them or not.

I had a handbell choir....There was a very sad time when one of our ringers died. I called everyone and told them to come to rehearsal but not to come to the rehearsal space—to come into the church parlor where we would have a chat. I provided provisions and we spent the whole hour in there. We needed that. So I

didn't mind putting aside what I had to do and needed to do if there was some crisis.

For one interview participant, in-the-moment adaptation even improved her liturgical effectiveness:

A few weeks ago...we had so few people at the second service that communion just took no time at all. And I had what I know is a congregational favorite hymn during communion, but there wasn't really time to do it....And so, what I did instead, and I had never done this before...when we came to the final hymn, I said, "Okay. We're going to do a mash-up. I know you all love the hymn that we didn't get a chance to do at communion. I love it to, and I know you love this last hymn. So, instead of singing both of them, we're going to sing the first stanza of this communion hymn and then that's going to lead into the first stanza of the sending hymn." They actually worked really well because not only were they in the same key—because I had thought about that—they sort of worked off of each other. That's how we ended the service. I had more people come up to me and say "Thank you for letting me sing the first stanza of that communion hymn. I love it so much." "I know, I know. I get it." It was good theology. If it wasn't good theology, I wouldn't have picked the hymn in the first place.

It should be noted, as discussed in Chapter Four: Social Structure, that adaptations and simplifications (such as with choir anthems) can also be part of downward spirals of reinforcement. For example, a choir may learn to expect that the organist-choirmaster will simplify things and "make do," slowly becoming less committed to rehearsals or performances because they perceive less value in them or need for their own presence.

One organist-choirmaster summed up the importance of loving people above the musical aspects, thus building relationships:

I would always say [to music education students] you have to love people...And if you don't, you have to love music...and if you don't love people more, you're not going to have a good time. And the same thing is probably true for working in church. You have to love the people and want to be with them. There are many organists [who] love Bach and they love the organ, but that's not doing this all a good service because that's the churches where people are saying we don't need the organ anymore.

COMMUNICATING

Actions relating to communication between the organist-choirmaster and clergy, committees, congregation, and volunteers contributed to musical, theological, liturgical, and

especially relational effectiveness. Respondents frequently used educating/teaching (and a specific component of that, justification) to get people on board with their musical and liturgical goals, often influencing musical opinions and increasing financial support. Listening was also a key component of relational effectiveness, particularly as a way to resolve or forestall conflict and sometimes deal with “wild card” individuals.

A number of organist-choirmasters discussed educating clergy, committees, congregation members, and other individuals in order to achieve the financial support needed to meet musical goals, such as employing choral scholars or replacing the organ. After the first stage of announcing the need generally (whether for time, money, prayer, etc.), they presented strong justifications for their needs in letters, newsletter articles, and presentations.

I think you just have to keep giving them information. “This is what [the organ] is going to look like. It’s going to enhance worship because of this. It’s going to cost less money in the long run to the church.” Those kind of [things]. Just give them more information. At least that’s how I did it.

I had to present that document and it probably took the best part of three days to [make] a very strong document—what I felt was a strong document—with listing rationale [for choral scholars], description of program, history, what’s at stake. And, only one page. So, those things sometimes take an inordinate amount of time, but I think you need to make the best case. I probably spend as much time as possible trying to make the best case I can with those things.

Many interview participants spoke of educating people in the church as to why they made a certain musical, liturgical, or theological change, hoping to maintain or improve their relational effectiveness and mitigate conflict. This was done in similar ways to justifying financial needs, through articles and presentations as well as discussions in rehearsals and meetings. In one case, an organist-choirmaster discovered after a significant amount of time that his choir had no idea why they were being asked to sing a particular type of music. A little education went a long way in impacting musical opinions:

I would try to slowly teach about things that I thought were important....Just for an example, they had started to do antiphons and griped about them for a long time. I was introducing a little bit of proper antiphons and getting a really bad response. Eventually, I asked them if they knew what proper antiphons were. I had sort of assumed that they had an idea what they were. Nobody had any idea

what they were or why we were doing them. This was probably...a year and a half after I got here. So there was an explanation at that point about what they were and why we do them in the first place. That actually went over quite well. Nobody had ever bothered to talk to them about them...It was just sort of imposed by the bishop randomly.

Another spoke of educating the congregation about changes to the altar and altar rail that were taking place:

All of those changes were grounded in Lutheran theology and people couldn't really argue about it...[but I did] a lot of education, preaching about it, talking about it and not just doing it to do it. It had reasons.

Educating and teaching do not always work to get people on board and mitigate conflict, however. One organist-choirmaster noted that after explaining a certain music choice, "[Some] people still grumbled. But they at least knew that it was with a purpose." Another did not think his conversation with an individual to justify his choices bore much fruit:

I remember a really awkward meeting where this guy had basically written a memo, "Here are all the things you're doing wrong, points one through twelve." The rector said to me, "I'd like you to meet with him and talk about these." I'm trying to remember a specific example from that conversation, but it was basically like he said, "I don't think you should be doing this." I said, "Well, here's why I'm doing this... This is why this is important." He heard me say that, but I don't think that carried a lot of weight with him.

One of the most recurrent actions that organist-choirmasters took to further their relational effectiveness was to listen, being receptive to people's thoughts and opinions and not taking complaints personally:

I've always made it a point to let it be known that if anyone I'm working with is having trouble understanding something or for some reason they happened to be disgruntled about something, that they have the right to come and talk to me and share whatever that might be in hopes that I can talk to them and give them whatever information they need to feel better about what's being done. I have an open-door policy, and unfortunately not a lot of people have always taken advantage of that and I think sometime to the detriment of the ministry as a whole. Because of that, people form their own opinions about why they think something is being done, and there are negative actions that often come out of that...I do know that the times that I have had people use the open-door policy, the end result has always been positive.

I had [a] situation years ago... When I got back to town [from a trip] I heard from the pastor that "So-and-So is really ticked at you." "What do you suggest we do?" He says, "You just really need to just meet with him and don't talk. Just let

him talk.” And so he came in one day and we sat down and I just sat there and listened. And at the end of it, I said, “Thank you for talking. I hear your concern. Thanks for coming.” And sometimes that’s really all you need to do.

Interestingly, respondents also often suggested that it did not seem to matter if they ultimately followed through with people’s requests or addressed their issues, just as long as they listened.

Some, though, did take action based on the conversations, like in this example:

I got an e-mail from a lady who was really angry because we didn’t sing “Earthen Vessels” during Lent. And I remember—she sent me an e-mail. It was kind of harsh. . . an e-mail, which is, of course, always easier to do than like face-to-face, right? No one ever, that I recall, complained about music to me to my face. So I called her. . . and I distinctly remember, I said, “Hi, Nancy. I just got your e-mail.” I didn’t say another word. She talked for twenty minutes, and then she cried a little bit. It was something about her mother, and I don’t know. It was all this stuff. I didn’t even have to say anything. She just needed somebody to listen to her. And I said, “You know what, Nancy? I’d be happy to play “Earthen Vessels” for you this Sunday.” And we played it. And nobody in the congregation sang it, but Nancy heard it. And that’s all it took.

Many cited listening as a key way to earn trust. The following organist-choirmaster, who was brought in to rebuild a music program and reinvigorate worship, pointed to listening as how he achieved the trust needed to accomplish his goals:

Listening. Listening and not forcing my ideals. . . . It involved a lot of listening to people and not shutting down their ideas and thoughts right away. Then sharing with them my ideas and thoughts and also not just because I want it that way but why I think it’s that way.

Several expressed learning to listen as an important stage of their own personal growth in the profession:

Early on, I got a lot of suggestions, criticisms, things like that. I think something that I learned was not necessarily that I have to respond to all of that. But, I had to listen. If I could just show them that I was listening, that went a long way.

The other thing I’ve learned to do is listen. . . . Let’s say somebody’s coming to me with a complaint. I’ve learned to just keep my mouth zipped shut until they quit talking or until they’re done. I don’t try to interrupt them. . . . I let them fully get it off their chest and I always thank them again for their input and so on and so forth.

I just sort of let [certain music] sit in the files and some of them lament that. But part of this whole process for me has been realizing that they’re allowed to lament and they’re allowed to say “I wish we were singing that.” And part of that

is for me to learn to not take that personally and just say, “You can think and feel that. That’s great. This doesn’t change what we’re doing.”

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Not surprisingly, being able to resolve or prevent conflicts was a major contributor towards relational effectiveness. Organist-choirmasters used a wide variety of techniques to accomplish this, most frequently listening (as discussed in the section on communication) and compromising. They also pointed to being fair and maintaining impartiality, reprimanding on occasion, and appealing to higher authorities. In the most extreme cases, problematic people were dismissed from their positions by the organist-choirmaster or other church staff, or the organist-choirmasters removed themselves from the situation entirely by quitting their jobs.

Two interview participants discussed ignoring conflict; in neither case did it resolve itself. Interestingly, two also discussed situations where they think a person in the church was looking for ways to cause trouble and retrospectively decided it would have been more effective to not engage with the individual. According to one, “In hindsight, I think she was trying to pick a fight and I was dumb enough to take the bait.”

Though compromising inherently means making concessions, many organist-choirmasters found it to be a necessary step along the way to reaching their relational, musical, or liturgical goals. They compromised with clergy and other supervisors (both forced and voluntarily) as well as with the congregation as a whole and other church groups. Many framed compromise as “choosing your battles” and giving up on what is likely futile.

Sometimes you just have to pick and choose your battles in terms of what you’re going to go to bat for. There are some things that I may have thought needed to be done, but there are things that I really did not jump through hoops to advocate for because I knew it was futile to do so.

You kind of learn there are places that force you to define which swords you’re willing to fall onto.

Several told stories of doing this regarding requests or demands from their clergy or other superiors. The following interview participant, knowing that his supervisor likely had a limited tenure anyway, found it best to go along with her requests instead of fighting them:

The previous Director of the Office of Worship [and] I really butted heads a lot. And I thought I went out of my way to get along with her. I certainly wasn't looking for battles. I kind of knew what she was about and I wouldn't purposefully suggest things—I wouldn't consistently suggest things that I knew she was not going to agree with. I always try to “go along to get along.” But I think the antagonistic relationship between the Office of Worship and the cathedral was so entrenched that I don't think she would've liked anybody who was the music director....She didn't get along with the Bishop so it was a matter of time [until she was replaced] anyway....Ever since she [forced my hand regarding guest instrumentalists], I just did whatever she told me to do and that was just less headache for me. So that's how I resolved it. I just didn't care.

Another organist-choirmaster came up with a “two steps forward, one step back” sort of bargaining approach with his clergy. He would compromise in one area while at the same time making headway in another:

Eventually I think I bargained with [the priest] at some point....I waited two years to put the “let's sing the *Gloria* when it's appointed” on the table. I said, “We can look and find a setting of the *Gloria* that we both like and think is good.”...And then we sang it pretty much every Sunday that it was appointed until summertime. And then he really didn't want to do it during summer....So I said, “What if we don't sing the *Gloria* during summer, since you'd rather we not. But in exchange for that, what if we start saying a *Confiteor* during Lent?” And Lent was a long way off. And he was like, “Okay.” So now we're coming up on Lent and we're going to get the *Confiteor*. But it's give and take. You take two steps forward and one step back. And it looks like you're relinquishing something. But actually you are, over time, if you just wait and are patient enough, getting what you think ought to be done.

Though this type of compromise helps keep reporting relationships positive (which benefits effectiveness in all realms), it can have mixed results among everyone else affected. In the next example, the choir was not pleased with their assigned task, which was a compromise in the eyes of the organist-choirmaster:

[The pastor] will come to me and say “I would really like to have this on a certain occasion.” I say, “Yes, of course. Brilliant. Great idea.” I may think it's a piece of absolute trash and complete and totally nonsense. Whether it's musically or it is just rubbish as a piece of church music. But, we do it....For example, he remembered in his childhood they did this piece called “The Great Parade.”...It was basically sort of an Avery and Marsh song from the seventies. It has this

lurid orange cover which is often a giveaway that you're going to open it up and it's going to be unpleasant inside....But, anyway, we had to do it and I came up across great resistance from the choir. They were like, "Why are you putting this shit in front of us. It's trash. We hate it. You're wasting our time...." I was like, "You know what, this is what we're going to do and we're going to do it really, really well. You'll just have to come with me on this one. It's not my first choice but it's what we're doing so get with the program, people."

Other interview participants found themselves compromising with congregation members, in this instance regarding the choir's use of building space:

We had to advocate for a new space for the choir....It was very complicated. There were entities of the [children's ministry] group and in the congregation that wanted to claim the old chapel space on the ground floor. We ended up with a compromise situation....We have maintained a peace now in that space.

Another, working in a Catholic church, came up with a compromise regarding the type of music he programmed in order to prevent conflict with congregation members:

I consciously tried to integrate what we might call late twentieth-century Roman Catholic music with, I don't know, is classical hymnody a phrase we use?...It's just that combo that we find in all the Roman Catholic hymnals. I tried to do some of both. And I tried to include at least one sort of 1980s Haugen/Haas once a week or once every two weeks because I knew people had an attachment to it. So, that was intentional, and I think that may have mitigated some other people who would have complained about the style.

One interview participant—also working in a Catholic church—took a very different approach to prevent this type of conflict over style, using responsorial songs because they functioned well (flexible in terms of length and user-friendly). With this action, he was thus able to avoid the typical disagreements that stem from differences of musical opinion and still meet his musical and liturgical goals:

And I think in terms of the format of music, a lot of what I've done over the last three years is really kind of functionality-minded. I've really kind of insulated myself from any style wars because I have functional reasons for doing the music that we do....Because [responsorial songs] have kind of a lower learning curve across the board for parishioners and visiting clergy alike, people are less likely to say, "Oh, we don't know that hymn." They just hear a refrain once and sing it. So it calls attention to itself less than maybe putting a hymn out there that a lot of people don't know. So a lot of my musical planning has, like I said, been a lot more practically-minded. So that saves me a lot of headache and trying to justify style.

In another situation, the respondent avoided conflicts by making sure choir members realized the impracticality of taking requests, and his ultimate impartiality.

I now look at people and they say, “I wish we could...” And I say, “I don’t really take requests.” Because this is the thing—if everybody makes a request, there are thirty-five people in choir and we sing about thirty-five Sundays a year. Then you get to the point where you took what she said but not what he said.

One organist-choirmaster told a story of a particularly difficult choir member who also heavily influenced two other singers’ attitudes and needed to be directly reprimanded for his disruptive comments.

And so [these singers] kind of gave me a hard time in rehearsal. They would try to stop me...With one of them in particular...I had to pull him aside one time and I had to say, “Look, I know this is my first time here and I am trying to get used to this and I am very different from the previous guy, but I really cannot have you trying to stop me in rehearsal. It is just not a very great environment for the group.”...He would just say very snide remarks. (So, I might be working with the sopranos on something...and he would say, “Well, maybe you should work on the altos who are missing their notes here.”)...What I kind of had to do eventually to sort of get it to stop is to...just look at him and say, "Well, that is a very snide remark." And then I would just go back and work with the sopranos, you know? And I just had to lay down from the start that those kind of comments were just not good to the atmosphere.

The organist-choirmaster noted how two other choir members would “always follow suit with him,” but once his snide comments stopped, they also discontinued “the eye rolling” and “long sighs.” Over time, the atmosphere of the group became more team-oriented, and “now I would say we are all good friends.”

In a few situations, the organist-choirmaster or other staff terminated one or more relationships—an obvious blow to “relational effectiveness” with the specific people who left, but a boon to other relationships and goals. One organist-choirmaster asked two people to leave the choir. Another had a problematic worship and music committee chairperson who was asked to resign by the pastor and council president. As discussed in Chapter Three: Effectiveness, a difficult cantor threatened to leave and was taken up on her offer.

Occasionally, an organist-choirmaster had such a serious conflict with clergy that he or she had to appeal to higher authorities, whether a committee (as is the case in some Protestant

denominations) or other clergy (such as a bishop). An organist-choirmaster working in a Methodist church addressed conflict with clergy over his job responsibilities by working through a congregational committee member:

And my liaison just said, “You’ve given your time [doing this extra work]. You don’t need to keep doing that.” And I said, “Well, I tried to tell [my boss], but he just acts like that’s how it is and nobody’s ever going to do it or whatever.” And she said, “Well, you need to write a letter, and just say that I told you to write,” because that way he couldn’t really blame me since she told me to do it.... And so he got really mad, of course, but... I won because they didn’t want me to leave.

Two interview participants (one in a Catholic church and the other in an Episcopal church) appealed to their bishops and/or archbishops when conflict arose with their immediate clergy supervisors. One was able to reach a partial resolution through this; the other was not.

Finally some organist-choirmasters experienced troubles so extreme that they decided to cut their losses and resign from their position, such as in this story:

There were unresolved issues between my adult choir and, at the time, the current rector of the church—things that had predated my tenure.... My choir had requested the rector to come to a meeting. They wanted to speak with him.... He came to the meeting and almost as you can just assume, he felt ambushed, so he did not react well.... The following day was Sunday [and] once the mass was over, we had gone back to the choir room and the pastor came in to address the choir. The first few words out of his mouth were, “I am aware that people have been trying to set me up,” and from there the entire meeting went downhill fast. And quite honestly, the atmosphere became quite tumultuous to the point where I had people almost coming to blows with each other. I looked at this, I looked at choir members turning to each other, arguing then with each other. And then I looked at the rector, and he walked out of the room without saying a word while the choir was arguing. And it was after he walked out that I walked out after him and went to his office and told him that my resignation would be on his desk by the end of the day, because I had no interest in serving in that kind of a situation, and especially with someone who would choose to be not pastoral in a situation where it really calls for it.

As he continued to point out, this did nothing to improve the situation itself. The decision to quit inherently excludes being effective through all the other possibilities of action. However, it “solved things” for this respondent:

So in that sense—in that situation—that solved things for me. It didn’t solve things for the relationship with the choir, but it solved things for me at the time.... I just did not want to work in, serve in that kind of environment, so I chose to leave.

STABILIZING

Organist-choirmasters frequently brought up actions they took to stabilize the environment as methods for achieving effectiveness—whether for musical, theological, liturgical, or relational goals. The primary stabilizing actions made the environment familiar and consistent for both church members generally and volunteers specifically. Some interview participants also gave examples of pursuing overall musical or stylistic unity within their churches. Changes were tackled very slowly and growth was gradually encouraged, not rushed or forced.

Consistency and familiarity were common themes that contributed to meeting liturgical goals such as effective prayer and worship. Several organist-choirmasters indicated that they specifically shrank the choral or congregational repertoire in order to achieve this, stating that the more familiar a piece of music is, the more enjoyable it is for participants. People will want to sing that music again, or can sing or listen with more recognition and understanding. When asked how he was able to improve the congregation's singing during worship, one respondent listed a few actions he took including aiming for "familiarity in all we do." Another respondent elaborated in more detail:

I think that I also was very attentive to not expanding the repertoire but shrinking it and focusing it so that there was enough repetition of hymns and songs for the congregation. Even the choral music—repeating enough that not only does the choir know it really well but members of the congregation started to recognize certain choral pieces. That was part of their training in uniting heart and mind with the voice of the choir.

He learned the importance of familiarity from both watching how his non-musician wife acted in church as well considering the type of complaints he would receive about the music:

Because one thing I noticed was that my wife was not a musician, but I watched her at mass. If she recognized a song that she kind of knew from her childhood or something, she would instinctively pick up a hymnal and open the page. If it was something that wasn't really familiar or she didn't recognize at kind of almost a subconscious level, she didn't bother to pick up a book.... What it made me realize is that familiarity is really a big deal.... A lot of the difficulties I've experienced with people complaining about music or liturgy is that they say, "The music we're doing, we don't know it, so we don't like it. We want to do

something that we learned a long time ago.” So, if there are things that I think are worthy of them knowing or that I think they should know, I feel like I have to provide enough opportunity for repetition for familiarity to grow.

Consistency in musical quality was also a path to liturgical effectiveness, according to this interview participant:

Musical consistency for long periods of time [contributed to my effectiveness]. It might sound kind of simplistic, but my plan was markedly different from my predecessor. I slacked off a little bit at times, but generally my playing was really good. I was there every week and I played all the masses until I started the doctorate. I think that that consistency created the expectation that “When I come to mass, I hear good organ music.” I think that was really important.

He learned to value this consistency and its effect on the experience of the liturgy while attending another church:

I sort of learned that from [clergy] at [church]. I think he...is the most consistent person liturgically I've ever seen in my life. And he did that intentionally....There was a regularity to how he celebrated the liturgy that contributed to an expectation that ‘it will be like this’ and there won’t be goof-ups and he’s not going to make stuff up....So, I sort of did the same thing at the organ....People knew what they were going to get. There were no surprises. Music was “singable.” The organ wasn’t too loud. That kind of thing. I think it creates an environment that’s more conducive to prayer and to the liturgy....Again, it sounds simplistic, but that’s what I tried to do. I think that created an expectation of how things were going to go.

Another way to achieve consistency and familiarity was to unify the musical traditions within a church. Bridging style conflicts in this manner helped some organist-choirmasters be more musically and liturgically effective and mitigated conflict, thus also improving relationships. One church had two different liturgies on Sunday mornings, one more “traditional” with organ and one with “praise music”. When the church combined services during summer months, as was their custom, the resulting liturgy was contentious. Over more than a year, the organist-choirmaster worked to slowly merge the two Sunday services liturgically and musically until “everyone’s on the same page. Everyone’s used to the same thing.” She educated the congregation about their hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and what a large, unifying resource it is, while still containing different styles of music. At the end of the process, with the church no longer bifurcated into two different congregations at two totally different services, she

no longer received complaints. “We all learn the same things, the same liturgies. Everyone’s used to the same thing. It’s not a culture shock of going to praise music or going to organ music.”

Another organist-choirmaster tried a similar approach at his church. He felt that it was important to have “a shared musical language that we all understand,” especially since the church held combined worship services six or seven times a year. He even noted that during his job interview he asked about introducing some organ to the contemporary service and was given “an enthusiastic ‘yes.’” He initially felt he “had the rector’s support,” but midway through the process of introducing organ to the contemporary service (as well as making other changes to “broaden the repertoire and the musical styles at that service”), the situation changed. “All the strides that I had made in introducing some new things were kind of undone piece by piece.” Tension with the rector had been building, and, in the end, the project was stopped:

The challenges [were] kind of not having a shared vocabulary with the senior clergy person; sort of having difficulty with really sort of being able to talk about music on any kind of specific level. Eventually, the way that manifested itself was with a series of edicts like ‘You must do these things. You must check these boxes.’ So what that really felt like was a stifling of creativity... When the rector finally gave me that edict about what I was allowed to do, that was one of the points. No organ at that [contemporary] service.

The organist-choirmaster was uncertain, ultimately, what might have resulted had he been given the chance to continue the project, given the wide range of responses to the initial changes:

I think there were people who didn’t care one way or the other. There were people who approached me and said, “We really enjoy hearing the organ at 9:00. Thank you for doing it.” [And] there were people for whom that service and its musical traditions, which involved not ever hearing the organ, were really deeply held and so they objected to it and never let it go.

Consistency and familiarity also contributed directly to musical effectiveness in ensembles. Two organist-choirmasters pointed to this as their logic for having paid section leaders or choral scholars, discussed in Chapter Four: Social Structure – Congregational Norms/Practices. It was not necessarily an issue of needing more advanced musical skill than volunteers could provide (though, undeniably, that is sometimes the case). Instead, the effectiveness of paid section leaders came from their consistent attendance. Volunteers knew that

they would never be alone or unsupported and the organist-choirmaster could always count on a having a musical quorum, so to speak. This was one way to handle the fall-out of attendance problems and, in fact, improve volunteers' dedication.

Having paid section leaders has really made the building of the choir possible. One of the retention problems we previously had is that people come to rehearsal and nobody's in their section and they don't feel confident enough doing it. So, having the confidence that there's going to be singers in each section has really helped with our overall retention and recruitment of new members.

I have the same expectations of work ethic [of paid singers and volunteers]. But really, I can be less flexible in terms of absences. The stipend is so that you have people there...It's less about the talent. That's part of it, but it's more about, if somebody's getting paid to sing in a choir, they don't just leave on a whim like the volunteers do.

In both these situations, the organist-choirmaster was able to use financial resources to change the structure and eliminate a significant problem, initiating an upward spiral of success that improved musical and relational effectiveness.

In response to the question of what he does that contributes to his effectiveness overall, another organist-choirmaster pointed to consistency first and foremost, with both the congregation and choir. "I try to provide week-in and week-out consistency. They simply know I'm going to be there." He told a humorous story of acting inconsistently, and how the choir members took it upon themselves to rectify the situation:

The big joke is, if I'm away, the choir always has to sing one *Ave Verum*, usually Mozart. And it can't be in English. I made that mistake one time I was away. There was a revolt. I had passed out copies in English and they sang it in Latin. I just had to sit back and laugh. What else are you going to do, you know?

He also noted how his presence was a particularly important element for the congregation, helping to maintain a positive atmosphere on Sunday mornings during some turbulent periods:

Maybe it's because they now are pretty used to the way I play hymns and that sort of thing. But there's this constancy to it. That's what they know. And they see that as this positive element of stability where they know that the clergy's been kind of this rotating door....The last time before we got the current rector, they were really scraping to find an interim. That was really hard. So they walk in on Sunday morning and they're like, "Oh, Mike's still here." So it's like, "We're okay. We're going to get through this."

Consistency also has an effect on relational effectiveness (i.e. building trust). When one interview participant was asked if she does anything to gain trust from those around her, her initial response was, “I’m just consistent and reliable.”

Hand-in-hand with maintaining stability through consistency, familiarity, and unity was the idea that changes needed to be implemented slowly and the growth process takes time. Just as relationship building benefited from a gradual approach, people needed time to adapt to musical, liturgical, and theological changes and for things to become familiar. Several organist-choirmasters spoke of long-term strategizing, giving time for people to acclimate:

The changes were very gradual. Each year, I have had a little goal. Each year I try to think of something to make things a little better. So in the first couple of years it was just a simple as trying to make the hymn repertoire a little better.

Another spoke of a few gradual changes to congregational norms that have taken place during the fourteen years he has been at his church, including the congregation becoming comfortable chanting the liturgy. He was surprised when an assistant bishop, substituting while the church was between rectors, unexpectedly sang “The Lord be with you:”

...and the whole congregation chimed right in, “And also with you.” And I’m going, “Yes, this is what it’s all about.” Because now, it’s accepted as norm and it’s really changed.

The following organist-choirmaster intentionally waited years before suggesting a change, in order to achieve his liturgical goal without jeopardizing a relationship:

I’m technically in charge of any of the decorating that goes on in the church...I’ve been making incremental steps towards gaining control of certain things, because I feel like if you do things slowly and while laughing, people don’t notice that you are getting what you want. That’s a terrible thing to say, but it’s true...This will be my fourth Lent, and this is the first Lent that we will have abolished the small sand-flowing empty riverbed thing on the side of the sanctuary. Which is just like, “Why? Why is that there?”¹⁷ But I didn’t do anything for three years, because I wanted to gain the trust of the lady who does

¹⁷ When asked to elaborate, he described the item in more detail: “The floor of the ‘riverbed’ was of burlap, and the outline thereof was of large, rough stones, and surrounding it were clay pots filled with dry and thorny-looking branches. It communicated, I suppose, a ‘dry and thirsty land without water’? It was as ugly as the sin that we renounce at Baptism.”

the decorating. And now I feel like I completely have that. So I can say something like, “You know, for this Lent, let’s try having nothing in the sanctuary except the purple altar frontal. Let’s just see how that goes.”

He took the same approach with musical decisions:

I’ve changed [things] just really incrementally. If you look at the way that the music was when I arrived and what the music is now, it’s drastically different. But I didn’t make any of those changes at once. So for instance, the first Advent that I was here, it was a tradition that the congregation, every Sunday, sang this really ghastly Advent entrance song...I was like, “This is terrible.” But I’m not going to change anything my first year. So I didn’t. I just played it. And then the second year I suggested that we maybe do some familiar Advent hymns the congregation knew for the entrance hymn. And then over the course of being here [four years], like this past Advent, essentially every Sunday we sang a really good Advent processional hymn...That is an example of something that has happened slowly rather than all at once.

One interview participant began his tenure with “middle of the road things and then after a couple years just kind of start[ed] to push the envelope a little bit and do some new repertoire.” As discussed in the section of Chapter Four on flexibility, he was able to effectively use Larry King’s *Transfiguration*, an anthem for choir, organ, and electronic tape, in his church’s traditional service.

MOTIVATING

Motivating oneself and others was another action to achieve effectiveness in music, liturgy, and relationships. Interview participants discussed self-motivation, as well as inspiring their ensembles and congregations through musical experiences, goal-setting, and gratitude.

Two organist-choirmasters mentioned the need to keep learning and challenging themselves by, for example, attending workshops and seminars—learning what is new or “coming down the pike”—or keeping up a personal performing life. They felt this inspired them and helped them maintain energy, in addition to developing their practical skills.

Interview participants discussed a variety of methods for motivating and inspiring congregations and choirs. One respondent stated that having professional singers join the choir at Easter raised the bar for the “singers who weren’t particularly good.” Additionally, as discussed

in Chapter Four: Social Structure, this organist-choirmaster organized a concert series which not only inspired his choir but also raised the bar for the congregation as a whole, thus changing the congregational musical norms. Commenting on the choir in particular, he noted the effects of the concert series:

The choir would come to hear the [regional chorus], and then they wanted to sing better because they heard an example of a choir that was really good.

Even the children's choir can be an inspiration for the rest of the church, such as in this example:

If it's a hard hymn that people are going to balk about, I have the kids sing the first stanza by themselves. No organ, no nothing. No one can come complain to me afterwards, "That was hard." A bunch of third and fourth and fifth graders just did it.

By having the children sing the hymn first, it undermined the congregation's assumption that the hymn was too difficult or unsingable, creating a new congregational norm about the particular song.

Visible success also inspired people to support musical goals with money, time, or effort, creating an upward spiral. The following interview participant concentrated efforts on rebuilding a children's choir, initially laying the ground for congregational support by sharing videos of the children singing and holding Sunday morning forums discussing his success at a previous parish, planting seeds and highlighting the program's potential. Over the next few years he was able to increase financial support from individuals and in the congregational budget, as well as expand the program's resources like staffing and the music library. Success bred success:

The children's choir had just disintegrated like ten years ago and when they saw my energies to resurrect that, people just got behind it in every way possible. Financially, just offering words of encouragement all the time. And you have this constant lament in an urban parish that used to have 1,000 people there on a weekend. It used to be "The young kids just aren't in church anymore" and when I'm filling the choir loft with thirty-five kids on a Sunday morning and fourteen of them are nonmembers, I'm like "This is outreach, people." I'm getting them in church and their parents are here. It's more than any program you've ever done. You can't argue with it.

Other organist-choirmasters motivated the people around them by articulating goals. One spent months with a committee coming up with a mission and vision statement that articulated priorities that have “been kind of our guiding light ever since.” These priorities are now being pushed to the level of parish priority. Another articulated goals on a smaller scale with the choir, contributing not only to musical and liturgical success, but also relational:

I get the sense that they are validated by that. They find it rewarding. This coming year is the first year that we’ll actually do a project outside their regular liturgical schedule.

A final but major motivator for support—and thus contributor towards effectiveness—was gratitude. As the following interview participant found, people are much more likely to give time or financial support if they were thanked for it in the past:

I tend to thank people. If they give money to any particular thing they get hand written thank you notes. If we do a particular bit of fundraising when the choristers or the folks go off and their families go to a music program in the summer we write notes to every single person who gave that year, which last year was seventy-eight people. So, they each got something in the mail signed by all of us with a little testimonial. Sometimes it’s a printed piece of paper that we all sign or sometimes it’s a card. We like to think we’re a hospitable bunch and it fosters goodwill. People are much more likely to give you money or time [which] is the most valuable thing that you have nowadays. You’re far more likely to give time if you’re thanked the last time you gave your time or your money or your gifts or your talents.

Another noted how much of a time commitment volunteering in music ministries can be, and the necessity to show appreciation:

I mean, it’s not rocket science. I think people, especially volunteers who are committing as much time as singing in a choir—it’s one of the most demanding volunteer ministries at any parish, you know. If people feel underappreciated, then they develop chips on their shoulders very quickly.

STRATEGIZING

For many organist-choirmasters, the process of reaching their musical and liturgical goals involved a degree of strategizing actions. Interview participants specifically discussed their preparations, how they evaluated the needs and capabilities of their volunteers and congregation, goal-setting, and assessment.

Several highlighted the need to be prepared. Respondents generally described a prepared organist-choirmaster as personally organized and disciplined, thus able to balance all aspects of the job (administration, rehearsal planning, practicing, short- and long-range planning, etc.) and “keep [one’s] head above water.” As one commented, without being organized “I could almost sit there every day and just sit on the computer and do the emails.” One organist-choirmaster additionally commented on how motivating it was for the congregation and volunteers to see disciplined and hard-working leadership, and suggested it improves dedication because they are more likely to put in effort themselves. Another—discussing the potential liability of having a prestigious building—emphasized the necessity of big-picture preparedness, and how a lack of it contributed to many problems (see Chapter Four: Social Structure – Physical Resources).

Respondents also found it important to sufficiently prepare their volunteers so that the latter can participate with confidence, which also motivates them to participate more in the future:

But also I think that they trusted me. I would always tell them, “I’m not going to ask you to do something that I don’t think you can do.” So, I did try to instill a sense of confidence that we can try anything. And “I’m not going to ask you to sing something that’s impossible.” That’s sort of my half of the bargain.

In order to prepare their volunteers, organist-choirmasters evaluated them, gauging their capabilities, attitudes, and capacity to learn and be challenged. Many interview participants discussed trying to find a balance by “push[ing] without overstepping the line too much,” highlighting this need to evaluate their ensembles and balance musical/liturgical goals with the experience/relationships. One had a compelling story of misjudging his choir and pushing volunteers too much, seriously jeopardizing musical and relational goals:

During Advent and Christmas we did all of the music in foreign languages to sort of have a kind of world music [focus]. Finally, after we had done the piece in Swahili and we had just rehearsed the piece in pidgin French and we had done the piece in Korean (and we have a Korean lady), I said, “Okay, let’s bring out that piece in Mandarin Chinese.” Finally, there was this one lady in the altos and she said, “Nope, I’m not doing it. In fact, I don’t think anyone else can. Look, it’s Christmas and we need to have Christmas carols. No more. We’ve just done four pieces of foreign languages and no more.” That is the closest to sort of massive mutiny that I’ve ever had to face.

He responded by trying to justify the choice and “bring people around,” though ultimately learned he had pushed the group too far:

I said “Well, this section of the program is in two weeks’ time. I understand there’s a little resistance to this and I hear what you’re saying. It’s difficult. It’s hard. But, it’s going to bring something to this particular Advent worship service that we’ve never had before.” I sort of tried to bring people around but it was very, very challenging. It was very, very hard and that was a tough one.... That was fairly early on in my tenure. But that was a very, very difficult rehearsal. In fact, I seem to remember that I was in tears by the end of it....The adults...just let me have it. Just vitriol, vile and just “You’re not listening to us. We just can’t do this anymore. This is too much.” So I got that message and I’ve obviously never done that again. I sort of dropped things that are non-vernacular in with much less frequency and certainly not all at once. But that was a good lesson to learn and it was good to know that there was a limit.

Interestingly, this negative experience actually allowed for growth in relationships:

Those people [are] still in the choir and we would do anything for each other. They would do anything for me that I ask them to do. In fact, they do do anything that I ask them to do. That particular lady, we now have this sort of level of mutual—we can kid with each other more than we used to be able to now, maybe as a result of that.

Several respondents commented on the balance necessary when leading ensembles in terms of letting their volunteers “flourish,” as one put it, “without taxing the choir too much in terms of musical demand:”

Sometimes I have to work harder just to make sure things work the way I see them, as opposed to trusting that they will come together. I still have to spend a little more time making sure that every ‘i’ is dotted and every ‘t’ crossed, so when we walk in, the choir knows “He’s got it.” You may not be altogether, because we didn’t rehearse properly, but it’s going to come out okay one way or the other.

I really go out of my way to either simplify things, to transpose things down because all my sopranos are basically altos....I have occasional Fs at the very highest but certainly nothing above that. So I transpose a lot of things down. I do a lot of things to make them succeed as much as possible. And I think they appreciate that.

Another discussed evaluating the congregation, too, to determine their particular musical, liturgical, and theological needs:

The other thing that goes into this that I think makes me somewhat of a successful church musician is that I try to be very specific to the place that I am, and what I know they can do, what I know they have a hard time with, where I

know they are theologically, and where they're going to appreciate something that's maybe a little bit deeper. And I go from there. It's hard when...in the first year or two in a position where you're just kind of feeling out the congregation, and that's when the most perceived mistakes happen because you don't know the history. But once you know them, you can say, "Okay. I know what you are longing for, so I'm going to give you not only what you're longing for, if it's good theology, but I'm also going to give you what I think you need a little bit, something new that maybe you didn't know you needed, and go from there."

All organist-choirmasters worked towards various goals, as explored in their descriptions of being effective or discussed in terms of actual successes, failures, and future plans. Some, however, specifically honed in on the goal-setting process.

[After achieving a goal, I ask] "Okay, where do [I] want the parish to be next? What would be the thing to do?"

I define effectiveness as clearly communicating and achieving specific results. These may be incremental, but there should always be a clear sense for the ensemble of what needs to improve, in the moment, and an honest assessment of whether or not that result has been achieved. The effective organist-choirmaster does not back down, but sets achievable goals and then works until they are actually achieved (whether attendance, or tuning, or diction, etc.).

A final component of strategizing was looking back to assess whether the goals were achieved. The following organist-choirmaster did this constantly, often looking for concrete ways to track progress:

I need to reassess every time things didn't go according to plan. I need to sit down and figure out why it was these other things that I know have worked so well in other places are just not working right here,...are not hitting the ground the way I want. [It helps me determine] how can I serve people better so they can flourish. That has been kind of a curve that forced me to rethink some things that I took for granted previously. I've been an organist in [a variety of places], and now here in [state], and when you think you have it and now you realize, "Nope, this is not working," it forces you to reassess....I do try...to have some way of tracking progress that we've made. So, it could be the amount of hymns that we have made part of our repertoire, the amount of choir anthems that we can say, "Okay, we know them well."

EMPLOYING AUTHORITY

Ultimately, organist-choirmasters often had to appeal to or assert authority in order to reach their goals. Participants gave examples of relying on theological authority, denominational

authority, respected lay church members, or their own authority as the paid music staff member.

Essentially, each of these are different aspects of the social structure that serve as valuable tools.

Some appealed to denominational theology to justify their changes or make a case with clergy:

I try to be careful about citing my sources, so when I say you know we really should do this and that or the other, I can point to the chapter and verse in the music documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, so I try not to ever say, "Let's do this" without having background information.

Others experienced roadblocks with clergy and appealed to higher denominational authorities like committees or bishops, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Resolving Conflict). Still others worked through long-term lay allies in the congregation who already had the trust of the congregation, especially early on in their tenure when they had not yet earned that trust themselves:

So my strategy has basically been to know who my allies are [and] kind of work through them...and those are long-time congregation members. I know those people have the trust of the congregation as a whole. But until I've been there long enough and things have settled long enough for me to have the real trust of the congregation, that's kind of what I've been doing.

When wanting to make changes that were supported by or viewed neutrally by clergy, many asserted the authority inherent in their staff position and moved forward with what they believed would help realize their musical, liturgical, and theological goals, despite resistance from the congregation and/or volunteers (and likely with negative short-term or long-term effects on relationships):

People have an inclination to expect that music functions on a consumer-oriented model...There was a lot of pandering and people got what they want. And I came in here and I said, I said, "No, we're going to align our readings and our sermons and music to serve the worship situation, the worship space."

If you think you're going to please all the people all the time, I'm not sure about that. You have to be willing to know that the buck's going to stop somewhere.

I have learned that if I have made what I think is a sound decision, I'm just going to go with it. Because you can't be swayed by the court of public opinion.

I know on more than one occasion I just had people who have been very used to doing things a certain way, and no matter how much explanation or how much education you try to give behind the decision for a change that's being made, it's just met with resistance. And you as the music director...then have to be the one to ultimately make a decision about how you move forward given that resistance style.

Several used the language of “sticking to [your] guns,” “digging [your] heels in,” and “developing a thick skin” to describe these assertions and decisions. One organist-choirmaster made sure to assert the authority of his position over the worship and music committee when he started his job: “I told the committee that they're not here to tell me what to do. They're actually more of an advisory committee.”

Two of my interview participants were ordained and worked as musicians in churches that place them on the same hierarchical level as the other clergy. One commented on the significant additional authority this situation provides:

[Being ordained] gives me a certain level of credibility amongst the staff. Some things are non-issues....It's harder for a pastor to play a trump card when it's another pastor. And that's really unfortunate that that exists, because then we're not respecting each other's vocations and responsibilities and supporting them. But I have felt there have been times where I've gotten my way because of a collar, not because of organ shoes. And have I made use of that, maximized that capacity at times? Yes.

Interestingly, one organist-choirmaster highlighted how being an outsider to the religious tradition in which he worked enhanced his authority and ability to appeal to denominational theology. He pointed to the freedom he had to critique his clergy supervisor:

...I felt like because I wasn't a stakeholder in the Roman Catholic tradition, I could tell them things that maybe they would have had difficulty hearing from someone who was Catholic, because I had no agenda. I think this happened with the difficult priest once. He was always sort of trying to reinvent things, how he thought they should be better. Good Friday was an example. He wanted to bring in the cross from the back, but also unveil it and also do something else. And I told him, “Well, in the book, this is how you're supposed to do it. I just want you to be aware that you're not doing that.” Like, do whatever you want. I don't really care. But I know your traditions and I know how Good Friday is supposed to go, and this isn't it....He's not my priest. I'm not Roman Catholic. The rules don't apply to me, basically. But as an outside observer, I can tell if...you're doing it according to your own rules or not. I think that gave me a certain amount of freedom to say things that maybe other people couldn't say.

Though they could appeal to their own authority as staff members, two interview respondents (both in Catholic churches) gave examples from their work of how little liturgical training and church experience carried weight with those around them. The first found that the congregation did not appreciate his prior positions:

I actually followed two professional musicians. One was an orchestral conductor who kind of did this on the side. The other one was a virtuoso pianist who was really great but she was young and kind of using this as a part-time job while she was in school... So, both of them had reputations and I think that when I came here, they were kind of celebrated as being these great musicians and all that. When I came there was no such celebration and really no appreciation of the kind of prestigious church positions I had held. That was just completely on no one's radar screen and nobody cared. So, that was certainly a humbling experience for me.

The second got into a dispute with a supervisor over the weight of each's musical opinions:

"Well, you know, I may not have musical training but I certainly know what's appropriate for music." And she just said something that was really preposterous. She said, "It doesn't make a—You don't have to have formal training to know what's appropriate for liturgy or liturgical music." And I said I wasn't going to get into that. All I said was, "But it does make a difference, having the training. You can't say that it doesn't make a difference. Whether or not it's necessary for church work, I'm not going to get into that right now. But it does make a difference." And she hung up on me.

In their situations, at least, this type of expertise was not a reliable basis for authority.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

This study explores the complexity of organist-choirmasters' environments and the ways many organist-choirmasters have chosen to act in order to be effective. While it is not meant to prescribe specific goals for effectiveness or actions for every situation, I do offer a few general suggestions based on the data.

The social structure of churches had a remarkable impact on what organist-choirmasters could or could not achieve, beginning with official policies governing staff hierarchy. Several denominations placed the organist-choirmaster more or less at the mercy of another individual. For most interview participants (but not all, as seen with Lutheran respondents, for example), the staff reporting structure was inflexible, and thus many actions hinged upon endorsement by or the ambivalence of these supervisory individuals, and, consequently, upon the latter's methods of leadership and views on music. Musical effectiveness in particular was dependent on these individuals, as they often had the authority to issue dicta about the music program regarding things such as style or staffing. Even when the staff structure was unchangeable, though, several organist-choirmasters illustrated that there might be recourse to higher denominational authorities when extreme conflict arises (though that by no means guaranteed success for the organist-choirmaster).

Because of the particular importance of the aforementioned policies and the authority granted to other church staff (most often clergy), organist-choirmasters would be wise to make themselves aware of the definitive staff structure dictated by both their denominations and their particular churches, especially as present in constitutions, contracts, and other legal documents. Organist-choirmasters should also ensure that they understand what recourse they have if problems arise, and to whom they may turn. Even if one cannot foresee trouble, clergy or committees might change, creating a very different environment without warning.

In addition to demonstrating the influence of policies, clergy, and supervisors, the data also revealed many enabling or constraining congregational attributes, norms, and practices. These characteristics were sometimes fixed, sometimes flexible. For example, no one can change the geographical location of a church if that is contributing in some way to ineffectiveness. (However, organist-choirmasters may have some control over where they accept a position in the first place; they can also still take positive action within demographic constraints, like the organist-choirmaster who recruited non-member students from the church's school for his children's choir.) Likewise, changing aspects of physical structure such as building acoustics or instrumental resources (which could be inherently beneficial or detrimental) are both major undertakings. Norms that are heavily influenced by changing macro-social factors—like lay dedication level/attendance—might also be particularly difficult to address.

Some congregational norms and practices are more flexible, however. The findings showed many instances where organist-choirmasters or their predecessors influenced factors like musical values, attendance practices, financial support, ensemble personality, or even vocal self-confidence. One congregation was taught to appreciate and expect higher quality music than that to which they were accustomed and thought they “deserved.” At another church, choir attendance problems and fears of volunteers “being the only one on their part” were improved by employing financial resources (itself a part of the social structure) to hire reliable staff singers. Elsewhere, the doubtful adult attitude about singing a particular hymn was proved untenable by having elementary school singers successfully demonstrate it first. These norms and practices are not necessarily set in stone, even if they may appear as such initially.

Taking action to change social structure is still not the whole story of the organist-choirmaster's agency, however. The findings revealed seven general categories of actions that organist-choirmasters take to achieve musical, liturgical, theological, or relational effectiveness: relationship building, communicating, resolving conflict, stabilizing, motivating, strategizing, and employing authority. (I do not claim that organist-choirmaster agency is limited to only these

categories, though). The last of these agentic themes, employing authority, is itself a way in which organist-choirmasters use an aspect of the social structure to their advantage.

Certain groups of actions had particularly strong influences on different areas of effectiveness. Unsurprisingly, building relationships benefitted relational effectiveness particularly but ultimately was a key tool for achieving any type of effectiveness; it generated goodwill and support for organist-choirmasters and allowed them to act on decisions and make changes. It would behoove organist-choirmasters to prioritize relationship building but also remember that it—along with effecting change—requires patience.

Communicating was another frequently discussed action, not only helping to build relationships but also improving support for musical decisions and needs. Like many of the interview participants, organist-choirmasters should take opportunities to write to, present to, and simply have conversations with the people in their churches, whether other staff, volunteers, or congregation members.

Actions that encouraged familiarity and consistency (such as reducing or refocusing a congregation's or ensemble's repertoire) particularly impacted musical and liturgical effectiveness. One remembers humorously how a choir, accustomed to singing a particular anthem in Latin, broke into Latin of their own accord when directed to sing in English instead. The evidence was abundant that church members appreciate stability and repetition.

Flexibility contributed significantly to in-the-moment musical success and effectiveness, but had to be carefully utilized. For example, the organist-choirmaster who blended two hymns together at the close of a service did so not haphazardly but with serious thought about the congregational need, hymn structure, and theology. Some interview participants dealing with unpredictable attendance in their ensembles frequently adapted repertoire to the particular circumstances of a rehearsal or performance; if volunteers expect that the organist-choirmaster will bail them out, though, they may take advantage of the situation and be even less reliable. Organist-choirmasters need to find the balance between being flexible and being lenient so as to

not create a downward, reinforcing spiral of problems like absences, boredom, or unpredictability.

Finally, employing authority—especially their authority as staff members—was an important way for organist-choirmasters to realize change in any area, particularly regarding musical matters like style. It will never be possible to please everyone all of the time, so putting one's foot down will likely come at the short-term relational expense of someone in the church. However, if organist-choirmasters have already prioritized relationship building, communicating, and stabilizing (along with resolving conflict, motivating, and strategizing), the damage may be little and the achievement much.

Appendix: Sample Interview Questions

1. How long have you been at your current organization? Can you tell me a little about the history of your employment?
2. What are the more positive aspects of your job? What are the challenges?
3. Can you describe the relative roles and relationships with other employees in your position?
Are there protocols or formal channels for your communication with a person to whom you report? How are those channels or protocols set?
3. Can you speak a little bit about your relationships with the congregation members in the church? Do you interact with committees? Do you interact with volunteers?
4. What kinds of things do you find enjoyable about working with this congregation and the volunteers? What kinds of things do you find challenging?
5. What have you found yourself doing in order to earn the trust of your congregation?
6. Do you act as an advisor?
7. Have you ever found yourself in the role of advocate? Do you have any stories of advocating for something, with either positive or negative results?
8. Would you feel comfortable describing a time when you experienced conflict, and how you took steps to resolve that conflict?
9. Can you explain the ways, or in what situations, you feel validated and successful at your job?
10. If you have not already mentioned these things, what are the most important things you do that contribute to your effectiveness?
11. (Emailed follow-up question): How would you define effectiveness as an organist-choirmaster?

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¹ This provides fifty-five references, primarily to articles in practitioner journals like *The American Guild of Organists*, *Church Administration*, and *Journal of Church Music*, as well as several book chapters. Examples include "Building Positive Staff Relationships," "When There's Conflict in Your Church," "Clergy-Musician Relationships," and "What Pastors Wish Choir Directors Knew." No entries from this bibliography have been duplicated.

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