

Stop & Reed

July 2020

San Joaquin Valley Chapter American Guild of Organists

Dean's Message

Pandemic Pandemonium

Like many of you, back in March I never thought that we would still be in this COVID lifestyle come July, but here we are. So many things have had to change, some for the better and some for the worst. Personally, the beginning of this shutdown was a bit of a blessing with a new baby, but we are starting to get a little stir crazy! As for church, spending Easter on the couch watching our service on the laptop was something I never expected, but here we are. Our church (University Presbyterian) has remained online, even with some of the restrictions being lifted. For our process we film during the week and I record the music separately at home. I have learned so much about technology in the past few months and have a deeper appreciation for audio engineers and AV staff! I really miss my Sunday mornings and choir. Unfortunately I think our choir will be on hold for quite a while. Even with the negatives, there have been a few positives and a lot of great resources coming about to adapt to all these changes.

So, what can we do as the AGO? Well it's time to adapt to the situation and get creative. Our plan for the fall is to hold virtual programs that are engaging and can broaden the participation across our membership. The first project we are launching will be a virtual members recital. This will be a great opportunity for all of us to brush up our favorite pieces and play them where we are most comfortable, whether that is at home or your church. Help will be provided if needed! More information and details will be in the next Stop & Reed. Until then, start thinking of something you would like to play to join the fun. Here is what the Northern New Jersey chapter did-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9k1rG5qSzNw&feature=youtu.be>

Have a "cool" July everyone, and stay safe!

-Dean Cactus

Executive Board 2020-2021

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Webmaster

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Chapter News

FUTURE DEAN?



Winston Banks Harris
born May 8, 2020 at 3:22 PM
8 lb 11 oz and 20.5 inches
Congratulations to the proud parents
Krista and Cactus Harris

NEXT SJVAGO BOARD MEETING:

Tuesday, July 28th at 10AM
 Virtual meeting on Zoom. An
 invitation will be emailed on
 July 27th with instructions for
 joining the meeting.



Proposed Officer and Board Member Slate
 of the San Joaquin Valley AGO Chapter
 for 2020 Election

First Posting of the Nominating Committee's
 Proposed Slate of Officers and Board Members:

Officers Terms expiring in 2022
 Dean Cactus Harris
 Sub-Dean Michael Varlas
 Recording Secretary Catherine Walker,
 CAGO
 Treasurer Michal Hembd

Member-At-Large (Term expiring in 2023)

Sharon Massingill and Jean Hays

A second posting of this slate will be published
 in the August 2020 edition of the Stop & Reed.
 If there are no additional nominations the slate
 as it stands will be elected. Procedures for
 making additional nominations are:

1. The nominee must agree in advance of
 the nomination
2. The nomination must be signed by five
 (5) chapter voting members in good
 standing
3. The nomination must be submitted in
 writing to Michael Varlas 1701 Riverview
 Drive, Madera, CA 93637 no later than
 September 1, 2020

If there are additional nominations a ballot will
 be prepared and voting members will vote for
 their choice.

Chapter Events



Uncle Sebastian needs you....

to come up with ideas for virtual events in this time of COVID-19 restrictions. So let's all put on our thinking caps and come up with some creative ideas. Please get them to Mike Varlas by email at mvarlas@yahoo.com or phone (559.930.3287)

Invitation to all organists (and other musicians)!

*Our chapter is in the initial planning stage of a
VIRTUAL Member/Friend Recital*

More info to follow in the August Stop & Reed

This is a "heads-up" so you can start practicing!

COVID-19

By mid-March I think we were all aware that COVID-19 was going to have an impact on our lives. March 15, 2020 was our last in-person service at Redeemer Lutheran Church for 2 1/2 months. Decisions were made quickly; we were half way through Lent and our mid-week service was cancelled. I had already cancelled Thursday evening choir rehearsals. We cancelled Sunday worship thinking we'd be back in church for Easter services on April 12th. Little did we know. . . .

That first week we turned to video recording our service and posting on the Redeemer YouTube channel. Fortunately we already had a good camera for that purpose. We came up with an order of worship and did our first recording on Saturday, March 21 with one pastor, one singer (my husband) and myself. Our goal was to record the service in one "take" just like an in-person service.

Of course we looked at what other churches were doing. I watched services from Lutheran churches in Northern and Southern California as well as Texas and Indiana where I have friends and relatives. As the weeks passed we kept refining our process. A group of 6 (two pastors, two singers, our pastor's wife and myself) made the recordings on Friday or Saturday. Then they were edited by a staff member who added lyrics and responses. The videos were posted in time for "church" on Sunday mornings.

We enjoyed "sleeping in" on Sunday morning and watching the service on our smart TV. Fortunately I have a practice organ at home so practicing was not a problem. Our church invested in new microphones for the sanctuary, mounted our camera for consistent recording and wired our other buildings so that we could simulcast our services once we re-opened.

We had our first in-person service on June 7th with the CDC protocols for masks, social distance, disinfecting and limited capacity in place. Many members are afraid to come back due to age or health concerns so we will continue to record and post our services. I have had "special music" provided by my singers and instrumentalists. I am planning to start up my Handbell choir with masks and social distance but it will probably be awhile before I feel comfortable holding choir rehearsals.

God has blessed us with the capacity to do our jobs in spite of this pandemic. I had to reduce my hours at church and closed my piano studio (which re-opened on June 1) but we have been healthy and know that this too shall pass.

Michal Hembd

Director of Music

Redeemer Lutheran Church

COVID-19

Dear Fellow colleagues of the San Joaquin Valley Chapter American Guild of Organists,

These are challenging times as we continue to shelter-in from COVID-19. This has really changed our lives in so many ways, and it appears we will be challenged even more as the days and even months go by until we have a vaccine and spikes in the illness decline.

Music stopped on March 13, my last day of worship leading/planning, choir directing at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, playing for memorial services and weddings at various churches, and teaching my studio of piano students. I was so busy, and then it was eerily quiet. It wasn't quiet for long, for right at the same time a bulging disc in my lower back "bulged," leading to a sheltering-in of doctor appointments and injections for pain management from that time to the present. I'm not done with the injections/pain management, but I feel so much better and have regained my stamina and strength for planning and playing.

Although I'm still on staff at Good Shepherd, I haven't had any responsibilities music-wise as our worship service on Sunday is a devotional, liturgy, and prayers, which are printed and available online so that each worshipper can read and worship. For an extra blessing our talented Praise and Worship band leader has included in the devotional email a couple of music files in which he sings a praise song and traditional hymn done with guitar accompaniment. He has sound equipment in his home for recording, and can attach the songs to the worship devotional email.

So while traditional piano and organ selections have not been used in this format, I've had time to organize the church's choir library, ensemble pieces for various instrumentalists and vocalists to be used when it is safe to do so as we come together in worship or when we would add traditional service instruments and music to our online format.

I have tried to be an encourager to my choir with weekly emails of current events and prayer concerns to keep us linked together. Phone calls, texts, and cards have been useful in connecting with everyone (choir and members outside of choir). During this time one of our choir members passed away, so we experienced together losing one who was so special to us. Some choir members have felt very alone as they've sheltered-in, being very afraid to leave home as they are in the high age risk group (over 60). so I've tried to keep morale up and keep them connected to life events as well as to listen to fears about this challenging time.

Our Lutheran Bishop has put a timeline of possibly opening doors for us to worship in our sanctuary after July 31. I imagine for that to be a reality, during July, leadership will have much discussion about how to creatively do worship for both contemporary and traditional worship styles in the sanctuary. With creative thought and heartfelt prayer for our reopening to worship on campus after being strictly online since March, I'll look forward to what God will guide us to do as we use our musical gifts for Him.

May you all continue to have a song in your heart as we look to brighter tomorrows!

Blessings,

Susan Berg

COVID-19

Laurell Huber narrative:

At the Second Church of Christ, Scientist the organ was silent for only three weeks from March 18th until Easter Sunday. Since then, vocal soloist Barbara Vlymen and I have, once again, partnered to provide music along with the spoken word on Sundays.

For several years both weekly services have been available by telephone conference. That continued throughout the quarantine and will continue. The congregation was invited back to attend services on June 7th.

Coping has been mostly pleasant, having set forth challenges to accomplish:

- JS Bach Well Tempered Clavier II
 - Preludes and Fugues (harpsichord)
 - in A flat Major and G sharp minor
- Arranging hymns for my “assistant” organist (age 9)
- Transcribing piano pieces of Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn for the organ
- Completing a jigsaw puzzle of the Red Sox World Series Win of 2018 (a challenge from neighbors)
- Gardening/basil, oregano, tomatoes have done the best
- Reading —History of the Renaissance by Will Durant, Radium Girls, Sunday NY Times
- Vintage LP listening/ mid 20th century musicals, at present
- Cooking experiments (poor Wayne) due to abundance of free produce from neighbor, even squash cake
- Sewing patio furniture coverings and pillows, clothing repairs. But, my 1938 Kenmore machine bit the dust last week (parts not available).
- Daily exercise— bike, swim, walk, table tennis, chores
- Napping
- Reach out to someone each day and think of my AGO colleagues
- Very little STREAMING and ZOOMING

COVID-19

Cathy Walker has encouraged me to write my story. Hope it will be therapeutic, as you suggested. This really happened to me; I still can't believe it.

I have been employed as organist at a local church since the early 1980's. The choir and music director have grown to be like family to me over the years. In March of this year, the district leadership suspended all services because of the pandemic. Then, on June 14 I heard that services would start again, but only for 100 people at each mass. I talked to my music director to find out how much and what kind of music I would be playing at these services. The music director said there would be no choir and no congregational singing, just quiet music during the service at various times. On June 11 I went to the church to practice. My music director said he had a meeting there earlier that morning and that, after the meeting he would come to the church and we could talk further about the music. While I was there, the woman who is the office and facilities manager came to me. She said my services were no longer needed. She asked for my church key and then escorted me out of the building. I should have known that my job status was about to change. For a couple of Sundays before this incident, because I missed playing at services so much, I had been going to the parking lot of the church on Sunday at 11 A.M. and playing hymns on my electric keyboard, out of the back of my car. On the third Sunday, just before I was terminated, I found all but one of the entrances to the lot blocked off. I drove in the only one left open. Immediately, the senior pastor came from out of nowhere. Standing in front of my car, he said, "You can't come in here; this is private property". I leaned my head out the window, thinking he didn't recognize me, and smiled and identified myself. He, again, said the same thing. I left, trying to figure out what had just happened. I should have known.

Needless to say, I am looking for another church and/or choir accompanying job, but, since many churches are still not meeting in person and not much music is going on, I am not optimistic.

Jean Hays

The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us. - Dorothy Day

COVID-19

Catherine Walker
 For STOP and REED
 June 24, 2020

As former organist of Sierra Vista Presbyterian Church, Oakhurst, the year beginning May 2019 was my year of retirement. I had been a church organist for 15 years at the Church of the Brethren, Fresno, then Organist/Director for 33 years at Sierra Vista. We were selling our home at Yosemite Lakes Park and moving to the Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens in Fresno. I was excited about not being tied down on Sundays so that we could travel, visit grandchildren, and maybe even worship in other churches. I did have 8 months of that freedom, then we were quarantined. I didn't have to worry about losing my job, but life changed for all my organist friends. After four months my church in Oakhurst is back to worshipping together outside in their amphitheater. No hugs, limited singing, wearing masks, but together even though very spaced out. It's a beginning, but such a limited experience. Keyboard, guitar and drums are the accompaniment for a blended service, and I watch on Facebook. The organ I played sits silent in the sanctuary.

I have also enjoyed watching the services at University Presbyterian Church, Fresno, where we had begun to attend; my college church - the LaVerne Church of the Brethren, where I enjoy Shawn Kirchner's music; and First Congregational Church, Los Angeles. This one is especially enjoyable because Christoph Bull plays 30 minutes of excellent organ music every Sunday. The voices who provide music, virtually, during the service, are outstanding. Many musical variations of hymns, classical worship music, praise songs, folk songs and different instrumentation have been used in various worship services. From other churches, I have heard banjos, hammered dulcimer and ukeleles! Choir Directors and Worship Leaders have certainly used their creativity and have had to learn so much about producing worship music virtually, without a choir.

I am so sorry for those of you who have lost income because of this crisis. It is a sad time for church musicians, and I do sympathize with you. I have had plenty of time to practice the piano, since I don't have an organ to practice. I have worked on a Beethoven Sonata, Brahms Intermezzo, a lot of Debussy, Chopin, John Field, and of course I always warm up with Bach. I really miss playing Bach on the organ, so I listen to a lot of it on Youtube!

Phil and I miss singing in Fresno Community Chorus and Coro Solare so much. Again, we have time to listen to excellent choirs on Youtube. It will be many months before choirs can enjoy the experience of blending their voices. We have a small choir at the Terraces, and that had to stop, too. My grand piano is right by a window, so on cool evenings I open the window wide, put up the top of the piano, and invite friends to sit outside on the walkway at 6 feet apart to enjoy some piano music. It's a fun way to enjoy music together.

Catherine Walker

COVID-19

For Fowler Presbyterian, corona close-down coincided with arrival of an interim pastor to fill the gap after resignation of our former minister last fall. (During intervening months we were fortunate to have Sunday leadership of our friend, Ron Owens, newly retired from pastorate of Easton Pres.).

Paul Irwin, our 'official' interim now, had led Fowler PC from about 2004-2012. An excellent keyboard person, he had just retired from ministry in upstate New York. He and Annie were anxious to be back on the West Coast near family. Due to illness of the organist in NY, he'd been doing all the music, as well as preaching, for several months. Paul has helped streamline the church's online system. He also leads hymns and praise songs for the online service.

My assignments are prelude and a brief meditative piece. (No postlude.) Given the uncertainties, congregational needs and anxieties of the times, I'm using mostly familiar pieces the congregation will recall . . . also many hymn tune arrangements. Emphasizing the familiar and reassuring.

When we do carefully return to "regular" services on July 12, a hymn or two and postlude will be added to my part. Really looking forward to the indefinable in-person quality that communicates the whole spectrum of worship more fully.

My best to all,
Andrea Belau

Scott Horton - First Congregational Church, Fresno

*Worship service on-line since March 22, through Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube

*Service includes a prelude selection, 2 hymns with a song leader, and more recently a postlude selection to transition to the fellowship time on Zoom.

*Providing a different recording of the organ weekly in the e-newsletter.

COVID-19

I have been minimally involved with the Sunday service that is put together by Badveli Balabanian at Pilgrim Armenian Congregational church. I have recorded 2 different hymns on my organ at home (my granddaughter records the video on her iPhone 11). This is emailed in and used in conjunction with our choir director who sings the verses of the hymn. The composite is then used in the service. The recording is shown online on Sunday at 10:30 am. I currently will be recording another 2 hymns to be used in the same way.

So since mid March, I have been used for only 2 online services. There has been no word yet on when the service will restart in the sanctuary.

Faye De Long

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a game changer for me in many aspects of my life. As organist at First Armenian Presbyterian, Fresno I went from playing two Sundays a month to playing every Sunday, which was OK with me, since we were pretty much staying home anyways. Since mid-March the church changed how services were held, switching to an online format. Initially the service was pre-recorded during the week and run on Sunday morning. Zoom was the tried for broadcasting the service. There were some problems with using that platform. The sound quality was not the best, and it really wasn't the ideal format for the service. After a couple of weeks using the pre-recorded service it became apparent that a live streamed service would be the best way forward, and the wheels were put in motion to accomplish that task. The church had already begun to make significant upgrades to the sound system. Broadcasting the service made it crucial to include video production in the mix. Quite interesting to walk into the sanctuary and see lights, cameras and microphones where people would normally be sitting. After about three weeks of trying new things an order of service was decided. The organ prelude, which has been hymns was 10 minutes before the start followed by a welcome and prayer. The Praise Band then plays for 20 minutes. After that the service pretty much follows the regular order that was used when we were meeting together in the sanctuary. The hymn is with organ and soloist, as is the Hyer Mer (Lord's Prayer in Armenian). The broadcast is on Facebook and is later posted to Youtube. A nice thing is that I can listen to it later with a critical ear. I have been able to fix some issues that I was hearing. Each week is a learning experience for the whole worship team, and I feel we are all becoming better at leading a worship service.

During this time of what I refer to as "time-out" or "lock-down" I have learned to accept situations in which I am not in control, and to make adaptations and keep on going. When the high school pool where I swim closed I got my old mountain bike out and started riding the canals and back roads. I found that I enjoyed it, so I bought a new bike. Two and a half months later and the pool opened. I went back to swimming, and also riding three days a week. I have also done a ton of baking (which is why I swim and bike!). Who says you have to be miserable in "time-out!" I have been practicing a lot more on the organ during this time, and am enjoying learning new pieces. Really..we are doing well! **Blessings, Mike Varlas**



COVID-19

agoorganfest2020.org 



AGO ORGANFEST 2020

*beauty in the
midst of chaos*

JULY 20-24, 8 PM EASTERN



*American Guild of
ORGANISTS*

AGO OrganFest 2020 is now just two weeks away! Check out the video below for some highlights from the week's online activities.

For more OrganFest news and events, [click here](#) to access our festival Facebook event page.



Note: This page will be sent as a separate email so that the video portion may be watched.

 **James E. Thomashower**
Executive Director

 **Michael Velting**
OrganFest 2020 Coordinator
Councillor for Conventions