

Church Musicians and the Value of Compensation

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It is a great honor to be invited to direct the 2018 Choir Festival here at Ferris University in Yokohama. Today, the combined choirs from Ferris University and J. F. Oberlin University spent many hours rehearsing three choral anthems and several hymns that will be sung tomorrow evening at the conclusion of the Festival. The magnificent Taylor and Boody organ in the rear gallery will be heard accompanying both the choir anthems and the singing of the hymns by all who gather here for the Festival.

The hymns that we will sing tomorrow evening were chosen in memory of Yuko Hayashi Sensei, who died on January 7, 2018 at the age of 88. For over 40 years, Hayashi Sensei was organ professor at the New England Conservatory in Boston. Two of your music faculty members, Tomoko Miyamoto and Hatsumi Miura, and I received our graduate degrees in organ performance under her tutelage. Hayashi Sensei also served as professor of organ here at Ferris University from 1989-1995 and taught countless Japanese organ students. This evening, I would like to dedicate the 2018 Choir Festival at Ferris University to the memory of Yuko Hayashi.

Yuko Hayashi was born on November 2, 1929. Her father was an Episcopal priest who served St. Andrew's Church in Yokohama for many years. Like Yuko Hayashi Sensei, music and the singing of hymns surrounded me from a very young age. My parents – Helen and Wallace Brownlee – served as missionaries in Japan from 1951-1990. I was born in Tokyo at Eisei Byoin in Ogikubo and was the eldest of five children. My parents' first work assignment was in the northern island of Hokkaido where we lived for 14 years. Many worship services, prayer meetings, English classes, and women's group meetings were held in our home in the seaport city of Tomakomai. My mother accompanied hymns on her accordion until my parents were able to purchase a reed organ, and finally a piano. By age six, I began playing hymns on the reed organ, and when I was 13, I had my first professional job as an organist at the US Army Base Chapel in Chitose, Hokkaido, playing services on a Hammond organ! During my high school years, I attended the American School in Japan in Mitaka and studied organ with Kazuko Sacon Sensei. During that time, I became organist

at West Tokyo Union Church. Both of the jobs I had as organist involved preparing organ solo pieces, accompanying soloists or choirs, and playing hymns. It required a good deal of practicing, and I was grateful to be compensated for my time and work.

Upon graduating high school, I went to the USA for college and enrolled as a music education major, thinking that teaching would be a secure way of making a living. When I was 20, my college organ professor convinced me that I should be an organ performance major rather than an education major, and I continued to pursue both a bachelor and masters degree in organ performance. This is a decision I have never regretted despite the financial risk, and over the course of my career, I have fought hard to be fairly compensated for my work.

As a professional church musician, I have served as organist at two churches in Japan and eight churches in the USA. Six of these positions required that I conduct adult and children's choirs as well as play the organ. Not only did I prepare organ pieces and anthems, I had to select hymns that were appropriate to the season and complemented the scripture readings for the day. My compensation ranged from a weekly salary as an organist to full-time yearly salary as organist and choir director. Some churches had all volunteer choirs, and others had one to as many as 16 professional singers that provided solos and supported the volunteers as section leaders. Professional singers increased the confidence of volunteers as well as the quality of music offered at worship services.

When a church musician is compensated financially, one feels valued. To be able to play the organ for worship services requires years of training and hours and hours of practice. Private lessons are expensive, and many organists have to pay fees just to get practice time on an organ in a church or studio.

In Japan, and in some areas of the United States where congregations are small and have limited resources, musicians are often expected to volunteer to provide music for worship services. Sharing one's musical talents without pay is noble and commendable. However, the quality and consistency of the music in worship can then vary greatly. When the primary church musician is paid, along with a few singers, the musical offerings at worship services are expanded, and the quality greatly improved.

In a worship service, music is as important as the spoken word. Music illuminates scripture readings, prayers, and theological thought. Having competent musicians selecting and leading the

music truly enhances the worship experience whether the musicians are organists, pianists, instrumentalists or singers.

Many of us have learned that those who manage the church's finances do not always understand that financial compensation for the church's musicians benefits the entire congregation. When engaged in a conversation about whether receiving financial compensation will increase a church musician's skills, some church treasurers have been known to respond by saying, "The organist is doing excellent work without being paid." This kind of attitude is very discouraging and defeats the will to improve. Churches with limited financial resources could at least offer to pay for private lessons or continuing education classes if a salary is not feasible.

We have an organization in the United States called "The American Guild of Organists" that vigorously supports church musicians in their training and continuing education. This organization provides collegiality and a sense of community to musicians who often work in isolation and feel cut off from other colleagues. It also offers salary and contract guidelines that are very helpful to clergy and church music committees hiring musicians.

In the USA, the experience of church musicians has proven that increased musical and liturgical skills for musicians will benefit the entire congregation and its clergy. For example, we know that when the musician is able to confidently play the piano or the organ to accompany hymn singing, the congregation joins in the singing with enthusiasm. People don't hesitate to sing because they become confident that the musical accompaniment will be there at the time they are expected to join in making music. They know they won't unexpectedly be singing a solo!

In 1993, I was one of a group of professional church musicians in the United States that met at Princeton University to discuss a plan to organize a system of classes designed for musicians who were willing to work to improve their skills as church musicians, but were not able to enroll in formal degree programs because of cost, or the lack of availability in the area where they lived and worked. This national program, titled "The Leadership Program for Musicians", offered courses that were taught by experienced local church musicians and clergy, and within five years had 90 sites across the country. The two-year program offered classes monthly, usually on a Saturday for six intense hours.

Typical class topics were:

“Hymnody of the Christian Church”

“Service Playing”

“Leadership of Congregational Song”

“Choral Leadership”

“Teaching New Music”

“Resources for an Effective Music Ministry”

“A Philosophy of Church Music”

Over the next two decades, the National Board of the Leadership Program expanded its offerings to include a website, online courses, and PowerPoint presentations for the benefit of churches and those who use their God-given talents to serve them. Hundreds of musicians received proper training and were certified to effectively serve as church music leaders. This program came out of a desire for both clergy and musicians to work collaboratively to increase the skills of musicians and worship leaders. It may serve as a model to be used here in Japan.

Inexperienced church musicians need mentors or training programs to further expand their knowledge and build confidence. After graduating from New England Conservatory, I was very fortunate to have three very prominent Boston church musicians – Donald Teeters, Edith Ho, and Sally Slade Warner - take me under their wing. They shared with me their music libraries, service leaflets and special music programs covering many years, and favorite seasonal anthems. This was important information I never learned at the conservatory where the primary focus was the training of excellent performers.

Church musicians need to not only be capable performers, they need to be informed leaders of worship. There are numerous planning materials and guides available to church musicians in the USA, and most churches provide these resources for their primary musician. Churches also provide some funding for continuing education so that musicians can attend conferences, workshops, and seminars, and learn from other professional church music leaders. The collegiality experienced when attending such events is invaluable. Musicians come away feeling refreshed, invigorated, and supported in their role as church music leaders.

I highly encourage church musicians in Japan to seek out others in the same field, to share experiences and resources, and to support each other. I also encourage clergy and church members

to be appreciative and financially supportive of their musicians. Most church members are unaware of the hard work and many hours a church musician puts in quietly, behind the scenes. Like an athlete who prepares for games or competitions by daily practice, a church musician also needs to maintain good technique and learn new music by daily practice. One can't just "show up" to play a service and do a good job!

Over the course of my life, I have served many churches as organist or music director, and can truly attest to the fact that this is valuable and extremely rewarding work. Planning liturgies with clergy, making music with singers and instrumentalists of all ages, and being actively involved with members of the congregation for weekly worship services as well as significant moments in their lives such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals means being part of a community that ministers to the spiritual needs of all. Indeed I am grateful – first to my parents for making sure I had music lessons as a child, secondly to numerous music teachers and professors, particularly Yuko Hayashi Sensei, who helped form me as a musician, and finally to the many mentors – both clergy and musicians - who guided and assisted me on my journey as a professional church musician. Every day I give thanks to God for creating me to become a musician, allowing me the great privilege of giving praise to our Creator.

Soli Deo Gloria.