

# THE COUPLER

## THE DEAN'S MESSAGE



### Step up and jump in

So, it came to mind this morning that when I question “why” a little too persistently, I need to take a step back and think.

I am a strong proponent of asking why to discern my motivations and where my loyalties lie, but usually the *doing*, the activity, the planning and moving forward lead me into a stronger sense of purpose. I have been strongly reminded of this by the events of recent days.

Last week when our chapter website went down, as bleak as the situation may have felt to me, doing the work of making phone calls, sending emails and asking for help is what solved the problem. Multiple chapter members and past deans stepped forward to help, and for this we are grateful. But I must admit that the nagging question, “why am I doing this?” kept me moderately distracted.

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FEBRUARY 2021

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Organ curator Irv Lawless talks about his experiences with the Kennedy Center’s old Aeolian-Skinner.

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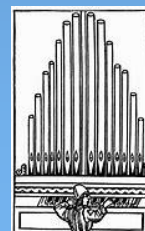
This month’s Member Spotlight focuses on chapter member liaison Jeff Kempeskie.

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Tom Stehle writes about the music chosen for the Inauguration Day Mass.

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The Franciscan Monastery, National City Christian Church and St. Matthew’s Cathedral will host recitals this month.

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**Mark Your Calendar!**  
*Our Feb. 15 our chapter will host a Zoom session featuring music on the theme of love plus an open discussion about our continuing revitalization and future.*  
**See Page 2.**

## CHAPTER NEWS

### A “lovely” February program



Join our chapter on Zoom at 7:30 pm Feb. 15 for music and brainstorming. We will hear some colleagues play works on the theme of love, to be followed by a discussion about our chapter’s progress in revitalizing and our hopes for its future. Please be thinking of how you might contribute. Watch your email for the Zoom link.

For the best listening experience, we suggest headphones or high-quality speakers.

### Join the DC AGO Board!

Our chapter will elect 2021-22 officers in May.

Please consider running for a position – dean, subdean (program coordinator), membership liaison, treasurer, secretary, Coupler editor/website administrator or education and certification coordinator. You can indicate your interest by sending an email to [dcagochapter@gmail.com](mailto:dcagochapter@gmail.com).

### Chapter programs available online

Our Jan. 25 interview with organ curator and builder Irv Lawless is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rijWOjt8xSQ>.

Our Dec. 14 program, Advent and Christmas Bonbons from the Board, is available at

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/WashingtonDCAGO/video>.

It featured accessible seasonable music.

The Nov. 16 program, in which chapter members Joy-Leilani Garbutt and Eileen Guenther discussed Joy’s research on women composers in France, is available

at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPf8xM3RuOo>.

You can also watch the Oct. 25 tri-chapter Pipes Spectacular featuring Nicholas Sheehan at the organ at the Washington National Cathedral. Go to: <https://cathedral.org/event/tri-chapter-american-guild-of-organists-online-pipe-spectacular/>.

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## The Coupler

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## LET ME TELL YOU...



On Jan. 25, organ curator, builder, chapter historian and life member Irv Lawless sat for a wide-ranging fireside chat with chapter treasurer Rob Church.

The full, fascinating program is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rijWOjt8xSQ>. During the interview, Irv shared his experiences with the Kennedy Center's old Aeolian-Skinner organ. Here is a lightly edited excerpt:

### IRV LAWLESS IN HIS INTERVIEW WITH ROB CHURCH

**Irv:** Aeolian-Skinner called me when they were in a dire financial situation and asked if I would join the company and install the Kennedy Center organ and see it through no matter what happened in their Boston headquarters. I had always wanted to be involved with the Kennedy Center, which was brand new then, even if it was as a janitor, so this was my chance to get in there.

It was January 1971 when the first truck came in. The hall wasn't finished so we didn't start until September. I ran into problems there I don't think I've run into since.

One was union problems. The union people wanted to unload the trucks, so I let them do that. The first thing on the truck was the blower. The union carpenters wanted to set the framework up. The electricians wanted to wire the organ, and it finally got to the point where the HVAC people wanted to put the pipes in because they were in charge of all air handling units in the building. So I had to shut the job down until they were out of the building.

We ended up having to install the whole organ at nighttime and quit at 7 am when the unions came back to work. It was probably three months of night work.

Part of my contract with the Kennedy Center was to be there for every rehearsal and every concert. In later years the organ started having a lot of problems. And Aeolian-Skinner, I hate to say this, didn't do their best work on the chest work. And it started acting up.

Towards the end of my time there, I was sitting up in the organ for almost every program when it was being used. Sometimes I'd been sitting in the organ and the orchestra was playing something else, not using the organ yet, and it would just start to cipher. I'd look down and see Bill Neil (the National Symphony Orchestra organist) sitting in a chair beside the console (not near the keys). So I was constantly up there pulling pipes during rehearsals and concerts.

**Rob:** How did you feel about the decision to remove the instrument? I imagine it was bittersweet.

**Irv:** It was part of my soul, but I knew something had to happen. We took the whole organ out in 1997 when they renovated the hall, but they didn't want to spend any money on repairs that I knew

needed to be done. They had a government expert come up and look at it and he said, “It looks fine to me.” So it went back in.

And of course one of the problems is that when they rebuilt the hall, the organ was 15 feet farther back than it was before, buried in a hole, and then they hung the canopy in front of the organ so the sound just stayed back up in the organ. So it really couldn’t stand up to the orchestra and our huge choruses.



**Rob:** Later on you oversaw the eventual removal of that organ (in 2012). You got to see it on to a happier home?

**Irv:** Yes, fortunately I had been doing consulting work with a company down in Atlanta. The Kennedy Center gave me the organ. I called one of the people in Georgia and said, “You got a spot for a 76-rank Aeolian-Skinner?” He said, “Hold that thought.” So it went down there.

#### ROB CHURCH CONDUCTED THE FIRESIDE CHAT

We took the whole organ to his shop and they completely rebuilt it from the ground up – new manual chest work. And it went into an 800-seat United Methodist Church with a huge music program. They raised the whole amount of money to rebuild that organ in six weeks. Their parking lot looks like a BMW-Mercedes dealership, so there’s plenty of money there. They’ve been doing a lot of recitals on it so it’s much happier down there.

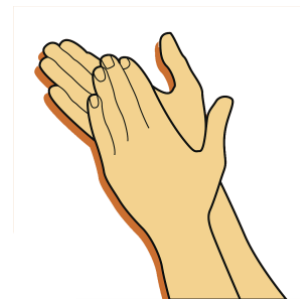
## Now it’s your turn...

*One benefit of AGO membership that we are missing in the time of Covid-19 is in-person fellowship. Chapter get-togethers provide the chance to swap tales about the quirks of our jobs – and we do have some stories! So, what is the weirdest...scariest...funniest... thing that has happened to you as an organist? Got a wacky wedding tale? We’d like to share some of your stories in our newsletter. Email them to [pathenry33@gmail.com](mailto:pathenry33@gmail.com). Include a photo if you’d like.*

## THANK YOU, DIANE!

The DC chapter board sends a big THANK YOU to Diane Heath, who compiled our chapter directory listing all those who volunteered their contact information.

The latest version is being sent with this issue of the Coupler.





## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### Jeff Kempskie, chapter membership liaison

*What first got you interested in the organ?* Despite growing up attending the Catholic church on a fairly regular basis, I have little recollection of the organ as a child. Instead, I loved the folk group with guitars.

I began studying piano at age 8. When I got my first church job at age 15 (it was a Unitarian Church in my hometown in central Massachusetts), I remember someone pointing to the Allen organ at the opposite end of the church. Not once did I even approach the console in my 2 1/2 years there!



**JEFF KEMPSKIE**

It wasn't until I was 25 and in school for my master's degree in choral conducting that I first played an organ. A friend in the same program was going to be moving away and wanted me to take over his church job where playing the organ was expected. I liked the novelty of it and, over time, was really drawn to the repertoire. After a few years as a self-taught player, I finally began organ lessons and auditioned for some master's programs.

*Tell us about your education and professional experience.* I received music education and choral conducting degrees from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, teaching middle and high school choral music for a few years in between. After a couple more years of teaching,

I decided I wanted to get out of the field and pursued organ studies at the Eastman School of Music with the intention of working primarily as a church musician.

After completing that degree I moved to DC to be the director of music at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Capitol Hill, where I've been since late 2010. For the past five years I've served as a pianist on the faculty of George Washington University. For a number of years I sang as a substitute countertenor at the National Cathedral and elsewhere. Most recently I have served as the associate conductor for the Reston Chorale.

*What do you value most about the AGO?* I most enjoy connecting with colleagues who share experience in our unique field. I also value the many resources that are available through the AGO, including The American Organist magazine.

*Who are your favorite composers?* As a kid I was obsessed with Mozart. After delving into some of his piano music, I later grew to love Ravel. For a while I was really into John Adams. I'm currently enjoying getting to know Max Richter and other minimalists and composers of film scores. And of course, in terms of organ music I am a huge fan of Bach, among many others. So I like a wide variety of music!

*What do you like to do when you are not on the organ bench?*

I've recently become fascinated by hypnosis and have enjoyed learning of its therapeutic benefits. I've studied Buddhism and practiced meditation for a number of years. I love reading and listening to news podcasts. I am endlessly interested in learning about things related to NASA and space exploration. To stay fit, I run, bike, sometimes hike, and play tennis whenever possible.

## MUSIC FOR AN INAUGURATION DAY MASS

**By Thomas Stehle**

*Pastoral associate for liturgy and director of music ministries at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, DC*

The Joe Biden and Kamala Harris families began one of the most important days of their lives on Jan. 20, Inauguration Day, with a Mass intentionally not for public display. That decision gives an insight into the way Biden lives his faith not as a garment but as integral to his life.

During the height of a pandemic in which the act of singing is itself considered dangerous, planning music for an indoor public liturgy attended by 150 family members and invited leaders of both political parties was particularly daunting. Despite the challenges, it was decided that music could be an essential part of this liturgy because of its unique power to interpret the Scripture and its ability to speak to the heart in ways recited words alone can't do. By agreement of the inauguration committee and the cathedral, the assembly would not be permitted to sing and any cantors or choir members would be masked at all times.



As guests arrived shortly after 8 a.m., they were greeted by an organ prelude on the cathedral's recently completely French Romantic pipe organ. "Prière" is from a collection of "Quatre Pièces" written in 1910 by Belgian organist and composer Joseph Jongen (1873-1953) and was played by cathedral organist Paul Hardy.

**THEN PRESIDENT-ELECT JOE BIDEN LISTENS TO THE LAST VERSE OF "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL" BEFORE GREETING RENEE FLEMING AT THE END OF MASS JAN. 20 AT ST. MATTHEW'S CATHEDRAL (THOMAS STEHLE)**

The second prelude piece was a plaintive fiddle tune, "Ag Críost an Síol," written by Irish composer Seán Ó Riada to accompany a traditional Irish text that speaks of Christ as both the source and destination of our life's journey.

This was followed by the Irish hymn "Be Thou My Vision," sung by the cathedral cantor, Maggie Brown, accompanied by violin and organ. This 8th-century text in many ways mirrored the themes of the previous piece – that with God as our vision and our wisdom, we may always dwell in God and God in us.



**ST. MATTHEW CATHEDRAL'S ORGAN**

The fourth prelude also took advantage of the violin's unique voice in Irish culture, but here employed to bring to life a piece associated with the American Civil War. "Ashokan Farewell," written by Jay Ungar in 1982, is indelibly associated with the images and stories of that war by its use as the theme for Ken Burn's monumental 1990 [miniseries](#). The events of recent weeks and the survival of our democracy give this piece a new relevance and meaning.

Four veteran members of the Washington-based [St. Augustine Gospel Choir](#), under the direction of Samuel Edison "Eddie" Cromwell, then sang the soulful "Jesus Is Here Right Now," written by the late Leon Roberts, St. Augustine's director of liturgical music from soon after the choir's founding in 1977 to 1994. The text speaks of Christ's peace, which is to be found in the celebration of the Eucharist. It quotes the Last Supper discourse in the Gospel of John: "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

The Mass began at 8:50 a.m. with a rousing song led by the gospel choir, "We've Come This Far by Faith," a traditional processional hymn for African American congregations of many faith traditions. Like the final prelude piece, it asserts

that we need not be discouraged in the face of life's troubles, because "trusting in his holy word, [God] has never failed me yet."

Christians listening to the conclusion of Biden's Nov. 7 [acceptance speech](#) would not be surprised to learn that the setting of Psalm 91 by Fr. J. Michael Joncas, "On Eagle's Wings," would be prominent in the president's Inauguration Day Mass. One can imagine that it has been chosen countless times at Biden family liturgies, most particularly at the funeral of his son Beau. Here it was used as the response to the first reading from Isaiah 58, echoing the phrases: "the Lord shall be your rear guard" and "you shall cry for help, and he will say: 'Here I am!'"

The familiar Gospel acclamation, "Celtic Alleluia," accompanied by the Irish violinist Patricia Treacy, reminded everyone of the immigrant roots of this second Irish Catholic president of the United States, inaugurated exactly 60 years to the day after the first, John F. Kennedy. The occasion was especially poignant as Biden marked the beginning of his term at the very spot from which Kennedy was taken to his grave in Arlington National Cemetery – a sacred place visited by President Biden

*Continued on Page 8*



*Continued from Page 7*

just five hours after the conclusion of this Mass.

The violin was again prominent in accompanying the preparation of the altar and gifts, using Patrick Cassidy's "The Proclamation."

The vibrant musical setting for the Eucharist Prayer responses was written in 1981 by Leon Roberts and named for the patron of St. Augustine Parish, which is considered the mother church for Black Catholics in the U.S.

The music chosen for the Communion procession was the 1967 "Prayer of St. Francis" by Sebastian Temple. It is not only a Biden family favorite, but also reflects his commitment to build bridges and heal wounds.

Renowned opera singer Renée Fleming was the soloist for the post-Communion meditation and the recessional hymn. Schubert's "Ave Maria" is perhaps the most frequently sung solo at Catholic weddings and funerals, but in this context, it had a deeper significance. Joe Biden's quiet and often hidden regular use of the rosary suggests that his desire for the "Ave Maria" reflects an authentic reliance on Mary's intercession as a part of his devotional life.

"America the Beautiful," the chosen final hymn, is perhaps the most authentically religious and least nationalistic of all the patriotic hymns that might be used for such an occasion. It begins with an implicit thanksgiving for the wonders of God, especially in creation. This giving of thanks is at the root of the Greek Eucharistia, which was just celebrated. But the hymn continues in ways especially relevant now. In the first month of 2021, Americans might hear these phrases in a fresh and more poignant way: "Crown thy good with brotherhood ... God mend thine every flaw ... Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law."

The organ postlude was J. S. Bach's "Fugue in C Major, BWV 545."

Biden came to speak to several of the musicians after the Mass and thanked them for their contribution.



[Thomas Stehle](#)

Chapter member Tom is the pastoral associate for liturgy and director of music ministries for the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C.

This piece was excerpted from an [article](#) he wrote for the National Catholic Reporter that also examined the readings and prayers for the Inaugural Mass.



## COMMUNITY EVENTS

**Sunday, Feb. 14, 4 pm:** Carol Feather Martin (Trinity Presbyterian Church, Arlington, VA) livestreams a recital from the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America in Northeast DC. Log onto [myfranciscan.org](http://myfranciscan.org) to view.

**Recital postponed:** A recital by Joy Leilani-Garbutt scheduled for Feb. 17 at St. Matthew's Cathedral has been postponed with the date to be determined.

**Sunday, Feb. 21, 3:30 pm:** David Lang plays a recital at St. Matthew's Cathedral, 1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW. Masks and social distancing will be observed. Also to be [live-streamed](#). For more information, visit the Cathedral [website](#). Donations accepted, but not required.

**Wednesday, March 7, 3:30 pm:** Lynn Trapp plays a recital at St. Matthew's Cathedral, 1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW. Masks and social distancing will be observed. Also to be [live-streamed](#). For more information, visit the Cathedral [website](#). Donations accepted, but not required.

*Members are encouraged to submit recitals and concerts to [dcagochapter@gmail.com](mailto:dcagochapter@gmail.com) for public listing on the DC AGO website as well as in the newsletter.*

### Music at Midday

Fridays, 12:15-1 pm at National City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 5 Thomas Circle NW. The concerts are offered live with social distancing and masks required. Concerts are also broadcast on the NCCC [YouTube channel](#). Admission is free, though donations are accepted.

**Feb. 5: John A. Wolfe, organist** (New York City)

**Feb. 12: Laurent Jochum, organist** (Paris, France)

**Feb. 19: Pierre Zevort, organist** (Paris, France)

**Feb. 26: Amir Farsi, flute** (Baltimore, MD)

**March 5: Samantha Scheff, organist** (Washington, DC)

**March 12: Sondra Goldsmith Proctor, organist** (Canton, NY)

**March 19: Colin MacKnight, organist** (New York City)

**March 26: Nicholas Will, organist** (Pittsburgh, PA)

**April 2: NO RECITAL** (Good Friday)

**April 9: Kelly Lenahan, organist** (Washington, DC)

**April 16: Loreto Aramendi, organist** (San Sebastián, Spain)

**April 23: Carson Cooman, organist** (Cambridge, MA)

**April 30: Lisa Mitchell Tyler, organist** (Reston, Virginia)

**May 7: Chuyoung Suter and Erik Wm. Suter, piano/organ** (Gaithersburg, MD) Piano Concerto No. 2 - Sergei Rachmaninoff

**May 14: Egor Kolesov, organist** (St. Petersburg, Russia)

**May 21: Justus Parrotta, organist** (Washington, DC)

**May 28: Carter Stevens, organist** (Falls Church, VA)

**June 4: Sara Su Jones, violin, and Tatyana Stepanova, piano** (Chicago, IL)

**June 11: PRIDE RECITAL: Christopher Reynolds, organist** (Richmond, VA)

**June 18: Brent Nolte, organist** (Circleville, OH)

**June 25: Michał Kopyciński, organist** (Lublin, Poland)

## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Please advise the web administrator at [pathenry33@gmail.com](mailto:pathenry33@gmail.com) if any position has been filled.

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**Musician and director for Catholic worship**, Washington Navy Yard

Musician will plan music and provide piano accompaniment at Sunday Mass and Holy Days. 1 weekly Sunday service, 1 weekly musician rehearsal, 1 weekly choir rehearsal and special services and rehearsals. Contact Michael Aldeguer at Sawyer Contracting, 407-602-7780 loc. 103, or [info@sawyerglobal.com](mailto:info@sawyerglobal.com).

### Maryland

**Director of Music (organist/pianist/director of church choirs)**, Oxon Hill United Methodist Church, 6400 Livingston Road, Oxon Hill.

A minimum of a bachelor's degree in music or related training is preferred. Email cover letter and resume to [oxonhillumcmd@gmail.com](mailto:oxonhillumcmd@gmail.com).

### Virginia

**Organist/accompanist**

First Baptist Church, 2932 King St., Alexandria. 12-15 hours per week except during busier seasonal weeks. The church opened a new sanctuary in October that includes a 45-rank Schantz pipe organ. Pay: \$30,000-40,000 annually based on experience. For details, go to <https://jobs.agohq.org>.

**Part-time Catholic Mass pianist/organist**, 1099 position with Music Ministry International at Fort Belvoir. Apply at <https://music-ministry.jobsoid.com>.

### For sale: Walnut Clavichord made by Robert Goble of Oxford, England



Measures 48 inches long, 16 3/8 inches wide and 31 1/4 high. Has 56 notes. Tuning fork, tuning hammer, extra strings, key to lock keyboard, and original packing crate included. Detachable legs. Located in Washington, DC. \$3,000. Call 202-526-2220.

## *The Dean's Message from Page 1*

Then on Jan. 25, we heard a fascinating Zoom interview with organ curator and builder Irv Lawless, led by Rob Church. Irv shared his career highlights, describing the instruments and situations, both local and international, which fueled his passion for the organ and organists. We are grateful for his care of instruments we play and hear in the DC area. As of this writing, more than 65 people have watched the interview, either on Zoom or YouTube. You can view it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjW0jt8xSQ&t=1082s>.

On Jan. 24, 25 and 26, I and other board members attended a Zoom leadership conference organized by national AGO. It was helpful to speak with chapter officers from across the country, sharing information, pushing one another to explore new ideas, and seeking to work through our current challenges.

In our chapter Great Website Crisis of 2021 (*really? was it that dramatic?*), I slinked on the edges of Bunyan's *Slough of Despond* and peeked into the open door of the *Doubting Castle* (*insert eye-roll gif*). Yet the activity of fixing the problem coupled with the inspiring evenings of meetings shifted me to an awareness of purpose that I needed to reconfirm. Being in touch with some of you via emails and phone calls regarding your suggestions for programming and confirming your connection to the guild were heartening.

The above seemingly random threads of thought can be woven together to say: The DC Chapter needs you to step up and help it be an organization of action and inspiration in the coming years.

To our questions of "yes, I want to help, but can you tell me why I should?" I say: Remember what it was that made you fall in love with the instrument ... remember how you used to savor every page of *The American Organist* ... remember the thrill of nailing your first piece by Bach and your teacher's "well done!" ... remember hearing organ and orchestra play the Poulenc Organ Concerto in G minor, or...

Then, help your chapter build a guild that will be an inspiration for others in our area. We need volunteers to serve on the board in various positions (perhaps reviving the member-at-large position), to help with programming, to offer hospitality, and to reach out to others with phone calls or general *checking-in*. If there are other ways you can offer your expertise, let us know and we'll find a way to get you involved.

I must give a special thanks to my fellow current board members, Pat, Tom, Jeff and Rob; to Irv for his work with chapter archives; and to others who have helped with recording projects, the directory or other tasks. It takes many hands and there is much to accomplish.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve the guild as dean during these crazy times – the guild that has fed, challenged and inspired me over the years. My commitment to serve is renewed, and I seek your participation to grow and shape the chapter's future.

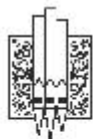
Respectfully yours,  
David

January 29, 2021

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***Patrick J. Summers, M.S.***

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