

From the Dean – Carl Parks

October, 2015

Florida, it is said, has two seasons: tourist and construction. Now that October is upon us, we Floridians experience our own version of a Fall color tour. It is not the trees that change color, but rather the license tags on cars. “Snowbirds” are returning from up north. This is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, our streets will be clogged as we choke in exhaust fumes. We will idle away our fuel, stuck in traffic and waiting at stoplights. On the other hand, the influx of people will add singers to our congregations and choirs.



As a rule of thumb, approximately seven percent of a church congregation may be available for all things musical. If your church has experienced a mass exodus, and the congregation has dwindled to 30 people or so, the best you can probably hope for is a pickup choir of half a dozen non-readers with very limited range. Still, you can get a decent sound from the loft with easy voice parts set to nice accompaniments. Barring factors beyond the organist-choirmaster’s control, there are ways that we can help to build or rebuild a music program and hopefully increase participation. However, there is only so much that we can do as church attendance declines on a worldwide scale.

While opportunities may be fewer, there are some bright spots. If we are to keep our art and profession alive, we need to try to keep our patience and sense of humor. True, fewer young people are becoming organists. Many schools, colleges and universities have shuttered their organ departments, but there are notable exceptions. One is the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester in New York.

The October issue of *The American Organist* features an article on the Eastman School's rescue and restoration of a rare, 18th-century Italian Baroque organ. The reconstruction was the first in the Eastman School's multiyear plan to assemble a collection of new and historic organs throughout Rochester. To date, eleven organs have been installed as part of the Eastman Organ Rochester Initiative in various locations in the city. This has created a collection that is unparalleled in the United States. Of course, these and other instruments cannot play themselves. They require well-trained organists. In this regard, the Eastman School is noted for its teaching excellence.

Our featured recitalist on October 11th is Chase Loomer, a very promising sophomore at the Eastman School. There, he studies organ with David Higgs and harpsichord with Eduardo Bellotti. Last summer, Chase won our chapter's competition. He then went on to receive first prize in the AGO/Quimby Southeast Regional Competition for Young Organists. In addition to being featured as our chapter's opening event of the 2015-2016 season, Chase will be presenting recitals around the eastern part of the country. These include the AGO National Convention in Houston next summer.



