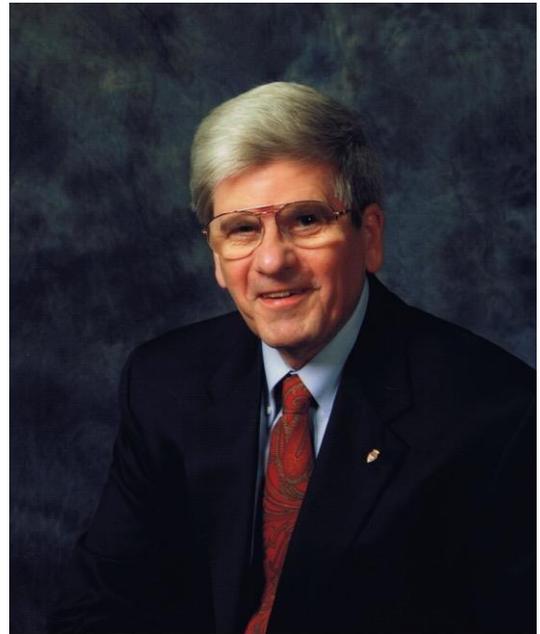


## From the Dean – Carl Parks

September, 2015

An old army buddy of mine expressed a sentiment that is probably shared by many of us organists. We'd just like to practice our art and be paid handsomely. For better or worse, this usually means working for churches, because that is where the organs are. My friend was a brilliant organist with a Master of Sacred Music from Northwestern.

We connected a few years after serving our military obligation. He had hung up his organ shoes and was a traveling sales representative for a publishing house, passing through the area. He enjoyed playing my residence tracker, the first time he had played an organ in many years, but he had no desire of returning to church work.



We organists are a deeply spiritual group. Whenever I would play J. S. Bach's E-flat Prelude and St. Anne Fugue on the big Casavant in Detroit's Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament, I could truly feel that this was the old master communing with God. For Bach, the organ was his pulpit. Organs were also the most high-tech gadgets of the 1600s and 1700s. They were often unreliable. In addition to being able to play the organ, an organist was also expected to keep it in repair. So, when Bach had a reliable organ, that freed his time and enabled him to compose the great masterworks that form the backbone of our repertory.

Like many of us, Bach was often at odds with local church and other authorities. He composed the Orgelbüchlein while serving time in jail over a pay dispute with the Duke of Weimar. He once compared the playing of a certain bassoonist to the bleating of a nanny goat. When the bassoonist and five others ambushed him, he drew his ceremonial sword and was severely reprimanded. Bach also made it known that he hated menial chores that he considered beneath his dignity, such as teaching Latin. He was also severely reprimanded for visiting a wine shop during the long sermon of a service that would have typically lasted all day. Because peasants were required to attend church against their will, many churches had hour glasses -- which you can still see today -- to tell the preacher when his time was up. Of course, the nobility had their own private area that was walled and glassed off from the "great unwashed."

Today, as we organists strive to practice our art, we face many of the same obstacles that have plagued organists throughout the centuries: inferior instruments, singers who can neither read music nor carry a tune, incompetent clergy, unappreciative "peasants," declining attendance, and a host of other things. Yet, we carry on as God has called us. Thanks to our fellow organists in our Guild, we do not have to suffer alone.

Soli Deo gloria.

Carl Parks, Dean

Sarasota-Manatee Chapter

American Guild of Organists