CLERGY AND MUSICIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Sometime it seems that clergy and musicians are always at odds. Musicians get together at conferences and air their grievances about clergy. Clergy get together at conferences and air their grievances about musicians. It’s time for that to stop! Clergy need to talk to their musicians and vice versa. Let’s look at some ways to develop and sustain healthy musician/clergy relations.

- Pray for each other. One is not likely to remain unhappy or angry with another member of the staff if earnest praying for that person takes place on a regular basis.

- Share expectations. What do clergy want from church musicians, what do church musicians want from clergy? Be clear about expectations desired and check to see if they are unrealistic.

- Remember that clergy and church musicians may process information in differing ways. Some rely primarily on the spoken or written word, others perceive from visual and audio stimuli. One way of comprehending may not be accepted by the other, and tension may develop.

- Communicate with each other. Talk, share dreams and goals. Avoid assumptions. The more you understand each other, the better your working relationship will be. If someone needs extra time to consider information, be patient and allow the process to take place. If one is easily distracted, hears a word or phrase and goes off on a tangent, or simply does not do well in face to face communication, then put thoughts, ideas, and requests in writing. Try not to resent differences; instead, discover and make use of whatever works.

- Find music and worship opportunities you can attend together, whether a diocesan event, retreat, conference, or AGO meeting. Share what was most and least enjoyable about the event. Learn each other’s likes and dislikes regarding music and worship.

- Be flexible and willing to compromise.

- Try not to take each other for granted.

- Refrain from derogatory criticism and blaming. Given directly or heard indirectly, condemnation causes internal defense mechanisms to rise and communication becomes blocked.
• Do not share dissatisfaction regarding clergy and church musicians with parishioners, even those who have become close friends. If you are not happy about something involving another member of the staff, go to that person, with a facilitator if necessary, and resolve the conflict. Ignoring or denying differences can cause irreparable harm.

• Compliment your clergy when they do something you really respect and appreciate (a sermon, article in the parish newsletter, attention to a needy choir member, brief attendance at a choir rehearsal, note of thanks to the choir, effective communication). Likewise, if a parishioner says something commendable about the clergy person, pass the praise on.

• Compliment your church musician when he/she does something you notice, respect and appreciate. . . an exciting postlude, a meditative prelude, a fine offering of an anthem, a healthy spirit forming in the choir, attention to liturgical detail, willingness to have a choir program that is not exclusive, flexibility of incorporating music of varying styles to meet needs of worship and the people, growing personal spirituality, positive attitude, increasing level of competency in music skills, evident desire and motivation to work toward providing a music program of excellence.

• Work with your clergy to develop positive relationships based on Christian love, trust, and respect.