

The Forth in Praise Organist Blog Archive

www.forthinpraise.co.uk

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Organist funeral fees

Here is the link again to the salaries page of the Scottish Federation of Organists:

www.scotsorgan.org.uk/sfo-04.htm

The SFO minimum recommended fee for a funeral is currently £50. This came into effect in January 2009 and will last for two years from that date. If you look at other details on the salaries page, you'll see that they are quite complex, and relate chiefly to the Church of Scotland, which pays its organists a salary as a matter of course, wedding and funeral fees being additional. For the Catholic organist, apart from some few in cathedrals and major churches, the world of contracts, deputy fees and second-job tax forms is very far away indeed.

Best not to take the controversial salary subject any further just now (maybe I will in a later post), but the fact is that 'the wee lady who plays the organ' (unpaid) at the RC church is frequently viewed by priest and parish as being in a different class from the 'real' organist (salaried) at the C of S up the road. She is not. When it comes to weddings and funerals, she is just as much a professional, and should be eligible for a professional fee.

Now I do know that some Catholic organists don't want ever to be paid for a parish funeral. That is laudable, but it should be seen to be their own choice. It doesn't mean that the fees are not merited, just that they have been waived. This post, however, is directed at organists who are either not paid at all for funerals, or paid very little, and who would appreciate an appropriate recompense for their professional services. The best way forward here is to try to work with the local undertaker.

Until fairly recently, a priest would usually handle this whole area himself, agreeing the fee with the family, receiving the payment and passing it on to the organist. A much more satisfactory method for priest, organist and family is to give this job to the undertaker, who

does it for every other Christian denomination. The Liturgy Commission recommends this, and it is being adopted more and more in Catholic parishes. Some different ways of organising it:

- The undertaker may have the same organist fee for all the local churches and, with the priest's agreement, will include the RC church in this arrangement.

OR

- Priest and undertaker can agree on a rate for priest's church, which the undertaker then applies each time. Here the organist should keep an eye on the market, and give the occasional nudge if needed.

OR

- The undertaker can negotiate the fee on a one-off basis with the organist. This usually happens when undertaker and/or organist is not local.

Regarding payment amounts, undertakers' rates can vary, but are usually around the current SFO figure, sometimes exceeding it. Priests, however, can have wildly-varying ideas of what the parish organist should be paid for a funeral, including zero. Of course, a family can be in poor circumstances and the priest aware of it; in such a case, most organists wouldn't want a fee at all. But in the normal course of things, a priest may just simply not know what should be charged, and would be grateful to be put in the picture.

So the moral is, get your priest to have a word with the local undertaker, and keep your own eye on the SFO rates. You are performing a professional service, and you deserve to be offered a suitable fee. And my experience is that in most cases the bereaved family actually *want* to show their appreciation for your comforting music at their difficult time.

November 28, 2009

[Fees: what if you don't get paid?](#)

I've never pursued an unpaid funeral fee, except possibly when I think it might have been an undertaker's mistake. But if you have a payment routine as described in the previous post, this problem will rarely happen.

Unpaid wedding fees are different. I wait a fortnight for them to come back from honeymoon, then pounce. Usually it transpires that the best man had all the envelopes and forgot about them, or they were left in someone's sporran and only found by the kilt-hire shop the following week.

Only once was I let down completely over a wedding fee, and in that case it turned out that the middle-aged couple involved had also left church fees unpaid, entire reception bill unpaid, and skipped off abroad on honeymoon. They never came back.

April 13, 2010

[Should Catholic organists be paid?](#)

A recent comment from Paul on the [Funeral fees post](#) has decided me to tackle at last the tricky but important subject of organist remuneration. It will probably take a few posts to cover it all, and any comments turning up along the way would be very welcome. Particularly interesting would be information about what happens in other countries, especially those where Roman Catholicism is the established religion. So emails or comments from readers abroad (apart from Ivan, Boris and friends) would be appreciated. See *Commenting* at the top right of this page for how to make contact.

Some organists playing for Catholic liturgy *are* paid, of course, in cathedrals, major churches and the occasional smaller parish where the priest believes in paying for a skilled service. Elsewhere, an unpaid parish organist might get a ‘thank-you’ in the form of an honorarium or a box of chocolates at Christmas. But others get nothing at all, the philosophy being that ‘this is done for the Lord’.

OK, so virtue is supposed to be its own reward, but the real importance of a ‘thank-you’ to an unpaid organist cannot be emphasised enough, as one or two comments on this blog have already signalled. The ‘doing-it-for-the-Lord’ attitude, if it means there need be no token of appreciation on this earth, is rather poor psychology. A small present in cash or kind at Christmas or Easter reaps goodwill a hundred-fold, to everyone’s benefit. If this were generally realised, fewer organists would be lost. You’ll notice that Paul, a youngster playing the organ for his parish for several years, had received absolutely nothing in appreciation, not even an Easter egg.

The next post on this subject will look at just why the organist’s job is so special, and eventually we’ll consider the question of *real* payment.