

Transferring to the Organ from the Piano

(This leaflet was originally written for would-be organists in the writer's own parish, where there were already experienced organists to help the beginner. If your parish doesn't have an organist, organists in neighbouring parishes will often be prepared to help, or you could contact your the local Society of Organists)

THE DIFFERENCES

Most organists were pianists to start with, and have found the move quite straightforward. A pianist first has to get used to the different touch required, and to have someone explain the stops and couplers. People generally find it doesn't take too long to get accustomed to this. The pedals aren't really necessary at all, although most beginners do want to try them out after a while, because their effect is so good.

LEARNING TO LEAD

Then there is the task of leading a congregation, which is quite different from that of accompanying a soloist. The organist has to set the pace and keep the congregation moving, otherwise they will slow down. Again, this technique can be acquired with advice and practice.

READING THE MUSIC

Pianists of Associated Board standard Grade 6 and upwards should have little difficulty using the hymn book as it stands. Others may work better with melody and chords, or with the easy accompaniments obtainable from the Forth in Praise Organ Learning Project.

PRACTISING

You should set aside a regular practice time at the organ, and ideally, you should have a piano or keyboard at home to practise on as well.

PLAYING FOR THE FIRST TIME

If you are feeling nervous about playing in church, your introduction to the actual 'performing' can be very gradual, starting with, say, one hymn at Communion, while another organist plays the rest of the music. Bit by bit, your contribution will increase until you can do the whole thing. This way confidence will gradually improve – there will be no jumping in at the deep end! Eventually, you will find out what a real joy it is to play the organ in church.

RESOURCES

Help and advice from church organists is very useful, and there is online information on the Forth in Praise website. Many easy hymn settings, including Christmas carols, are available from Forth in Praise, which also runs training days from time to time. The Scottish Churches Organist Training Scheme (SCOTS) is another organisation which helps beginner organists.

COMMITMENT

While you are learning, it will help you to play in church as often as you can, even if only a hymn or two. Once you are confident and established, you will probably be able to choose your own level of commitment, from once a week to once every few weeks, depending on what you can manage.

And once you are up and running, even if you are playing only the odd hymn, please –

DON'T EVER SAY: 'I'M NOT A REAL ORGANIST, I'M A PIANIST'!

(Quite apart from issues of self-esteem, you might get landed with a piano!)