

Chapter 1: Good relationships

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Introduction

The organist is a key figure in the worshipping life of the church. Playing “the king of instruments” is a wonderful experience in itself. Doing so for the glory of God is a particular blessing.

The work of a church organist requires a knowledge of music and theology (both generally outside the scope of this book) plus practical skills and knowledge in many areas. While all church offices require particular mixes of knowledge and skills, the office of organist is unique in that:

- so few church members can play the organ, compared with the number capable of holding other church offices;
- the organist plays a key function in leading worship without having undertaken any formal training or licensing arranged by the church authorities;
- the organist must work with a minister who may have had little training in the organist’s work; and
- as choirmaster, he is the only church officer whose regular duties include telling other church members (the choir) what they are doing wrong.

None of this need be a problem, provided the organist starts from a secure base. That base starts by having a good relationship with the minister.

In 1995, the Archbishops’ Commission on Church Music report *In Tune With Heaven* found only 3% of clergy reporting a poor relationship with their organist. Unfortunately the report did not ask the equivalent question of organists. The authors’ experience is that an organist is fortunate if he can manage a career without at least one serious run-in with the clergy.

The authors have witnessed and experienced horror stories of serious breakdowns in relationships, often with some of the most bizarre behaviour. These breakdowns cause huge hurt to individuals involved, create problems for church organisation and distress for other members. Perhaps worst of all, such breakdowns are dishonouring to God and set a poor witness of working together as one Christian body.

It is long overdue for these issues to be confronted. This section aims to tiptoe through this minefield with some guidance on how to prevent problems from arising, and what to do when they do arise. The separate issues of running a choir and enjoying good relations with the congregation are addressed in chapter 2.

An organist must use all reasonable efforts to maintain good relations with the clergy, understanding their position at all times, and should seek to remedy any problems as quickly and as amicably as possible.

Unlike many of the following chapters, there is little unequivocal law which may be quoted in this area. Instead, this chapter seeks to collect together received wisdom, common sense and experience in the form of recommendations to solve problems, or, better, to prevent them from happening.

What follows is intended to advise in situations most commonly encountered by organists. The advice may need amending in a church or community which has a significantly different culture.

Prevention

The elements

Prevention is better than cure. An organist should strive to prevent problems developing, even if you believe that others are not making similar efforts.

There are three elements to any relationship:

- your attitude;
- their attitude; and
- how you interact.

You have absolute control over your own attitude, significant influence over the interaction, and very little influence over the attitude of the other party. Indeed the comments below only address the first and third elements. Any influence you have over the minister will naturally flow from your attitude and how you interact.

So the first step for the organist is to have a positive attitude. Ask yourself these questions:

- am I committed to serving the objects of the church?
- can I work with the minister and other church officers?
- am I prepared to listen to what others want?
- am I prepared to explain myself?
- can I work with other people (whatever I think of them)?
- do I appear cheerful?
- do I appear self-confident?
- can I take criticism, however seemingly ignorant and unjustified?

This list is not exhaustive. It simply addresses some of the main elements in self-preparation to make you as effective an organist as is possible.

The second step is establishing a working relationship with the minister. You begin by simply getting to know each other. See if you can answer these questions about your minister:

- how long has he been at the church?
- where was he before?
- why did he move?
- how long has he been a minister?
- what job did he have before entering the ministry?
- is he married?
- how many children does he have?
- where did he grow up?
- what are his hobbies and interests?

Does he know similar information about you? How willing have you been to share this?

You should make opportunities simply to chat, such as by having lunch together occasionally. Learn to relax in each other's company, and to discuss subjects far removed from church music, while not allowing such discussion itself to become a difficulty. All this will help stop problems arising, and will create the right atmosphere in which to solve any that do arise. You will find out what values are important to each other, and what makes each other "tick".

The book *Weary and Ill at Ease* by Robin Rees (published by Graceway Books) conducted a survey of attitudes by ministers and organists. This survey finds that a minister gets on better with an organist:

- who is younger;
- who has not been in post as long as the minister;
- when the minister enjoys the organist's solo playing;
- who is involved in other church life; and
- where there are regular discussions between them.

Factors that Rees surprisingly found did not affect the relationship include:

- whether the organist is a Christian;
- how long the minister spent in secular employment;
- whether the contract gives the organist a right of appeal.

The more pro-active elements of a good relationship are explained further below.

Two fundamentals

The two requirements for a good relationship between organist and minister (or any other relationship) are:

- common agenda; and
- mutual respect.

These two fundamentals are like railway lines. They do not guarantee that you will not hit problems, but they should ensure that you stay on track.

The requirement for common agenda means that the minister and organist are agreed on what they are trying to achieve.

The requirement for mutual respect means that both the organist and minister respect each other, including the skills and experience they each offer. This involves an appropriate attitude by both parties. From this comes the trust which should lie at the heart of any relationship.

One of the authors of this book was organist and choirmaster of Saint Stephen's Church, Norbury and Thornton Heath in the mid 1970s. The then vicar, the Revd Michael Alan Collis, without exception thanked the choir for their singing after every service and always made a point of thanking the organist for the music each Sunday. This appreciation generated an atmosphere of immense loyalty. The few but sincere words encouraged folk to give of their very best.

Common agenda

A common agenda means that you are both working towards the same goals. There should be clear boundaries, and no ambiguity about responsibilities and duties, or who does what.

In the Church some of these are general. It is the function of all churches to worship God, welcome visitors, pray for the world, help the needy, read scripture and preach the gospel. If a church fails to do any of these things, it has problems far more fundamental than its relationship with the organist.

Some issues arise in connection with the conduct of worship. Many of such issues are covered by the canons or rules of the denomination. Read them.

How any particular church implements those policies in its own situation is a matter for the church leadership. The structure of this leadership varies according to the denomination. These range from the centralised authority of Roman Catholics and some house churches, through to the totally congregational policies of the Baptist Church. Most churches in between have a mixed leadership of minister and council. The Church of England has a mixed government of clergy and parochial church councils (PCCs). Each provides a check on the other, allowing the church to have the advantages of both single leadership and collective responsibility.

At an individual church level, a parish may properly adopt such local policies as to link up with other churches, to concentrate on particular areas of ministry, or to engage in particular activities. It is not the function of an organist to second-guess the minister and church council on such matters. An organist is as

entitled as anyone else to contribute to the discussion on local policy. Indeed, an organist has a particular training and expertise which should be made available to the church. However once a policy has been agreed, it is the organist's function to follow it and not question it, much less to obstruct it.

Examples of policies and how an organist can help deliver them include:

Link with other churches

Make contact with the organists or other musicians in those churches and consider opportunities for working together, such as joint services with other choirs or organ-swapping.

Reach-out to a particular group

Consider how the choir may be involved. If reaching out to children, you could tie in a campaign to recruit children to the choir, explaining the benefits and linking it to other initiatives. If reaching out to other groups, you could arrange for the choir to sing to them.

Undertake an event

Consider what music would be appropriate for this event. If a policy does not itself involve music, such as starting an Alpha course, consider choosing an anthem to perform when the policy is launched.

Fund-raising

Organise a concert for the purpose.

Any policy

Use your imagination to choose a voluntary which ties in with the theme. If the church is launching an appeal to repair the clock, play Haydn's Clock Symphony as the voluntary, and have this noted on the service sheet. Such things are appreciated.

Musical agenda

In addition to the church's overall agenda, it is good policy to have an agenda for the music. This may include:

- enlarging the choir;
- introducing a children's choir;
- introducing a training programme;
- producing a hymn book supplement;
- setting up a music group;
- planning a festival or performance of a major work;
- introducing some new forms of music.

It is good to have an over-arching music policy in a church, but this is outside the scope of this book.

A church with no musical agenda is unhealthy. Church life is like a down escalator: you need to keep moving forward to stop going backwards. The musical agenda need not be radical, but you should have one.

The organist should be at the forefront in advancing such ideas, but should ensure that the minister accepts it and "owns" the idea. The organist should always be ready to explain ideas. One unobvious example was an organist who said, "vicar, for the carol service we can do traditional carols with some modern items, or we can do modern carols with some traditional carols, or we can do a mixture of modern and traditional carols." The vicar chose the mixture, the organist praised his wisdom to the skies, and continued with the selection of music he had chosen two months earlier. Most discussions on musical agenda are more open-ended!

If the minister has a specific request for music, it is politic to accommodate him even if you consider it not the best music. Making clear that an item is included "just for you" demonstrates co-operation and buys goodwill. Hymns and songs can be traced through the Hymnquest Database (details in Appendix 1).

The organist's job, like any job, will inevitably include some parts you enjoy less than others. It may even include parts you do not enjoy at all, family services or youth services perhaps. Remember that if you accept the job, you accept the whole package. Do your job in every part of that package as well as you can.

Mutual respect

In a good relationship, the organist must respect the minister and the minister must respect the organist. You can deliver the first, and then expect the second.

There is a biblical principle that the church is like a single body where the members are like the parts of the body working together (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). This should be the basis of the relationship between minister and organist. A minister who has an experienced, trained organist capable of exercising a musical ministry should allow that organist to do so. If the minister sees such an organist as nothing more than a human juke box to play the numbers the minister chooses, you can count the days before there is a bust-up. According to Weary and Ill at Ease, over half of all clergy spend less than four hours of their training studying music in worship.

Many problems arise because of differing expectations, sometimes reflecting the different abilities of organists. It should be clearly understood what the organist's role is and where the boundaries are. It should be agreed whether there is a separate music group and, if so, who co-ordinates the music.

It should be added that respect in itself means nothing unless it is demonstrated. Respect does not mean pretending that failings do not exist, but simply accepting a person despite those failings.

Some examples of how an organist can demonstrate respect for a minister include:

- a friendly relationship, such as inviting the minister to all choir social events, and seeking opportunities to socialise, such as the occasional drink at the pub or invitation to dinner. Food and drink is the currency of goodwill;
- words of encouragement, such as saying when you thought a sermon or leadership of a service was good;

- sympathy when he has problems.

You may be surprised at how much goodwill can be generated by a simple handwritten note of appreciation or sympathy.

Preachers sometimes mention hymns or other music in a sermon. Quietly playing a verse of the quoted hymn, or a snatch of other music, later in the service is usually very much appreciated. An ideal time is just before the final voluntary.

Avoid making criticism. It is probably better for an organist not to comment adversely on sermons or prayers. Do nothing unless it has a clear constructive purpose. It is difficult to see what purpose is served by telling the minister that his sermon was boring. Acts 20:7-12 records how Eutychus fell asleep when Paul was preaching, so the problem is not new.

Be careful of jokes about the minister. A verbal or practical joke on someone is only funny if the someone sees it that way. Lampooning leaders is a time-honoured custom in free democratic societies – children lampoon parents, pupils lampoon teachers, choristers lampoon the choirmaster, and everyone lampoons the prime minister. The British army once ran advertisements in which the right to lampoon leaders was seen as a fundamental freedom worth defending. However not everyone may see jokes in such an enlightened way, so be doubly careful. If a joke does backfire, simply apologise. Do not tell the minister that he is a humourless fool.

(One day you will be asked the joke: What is the difference between an organist and a terrorist? Answer: you can negotiate with a terrorist. It is a matter for your judgement whether you reply by asking what is the difference between a minister and a terrorist? Answer: the terrorist knows what he is doing!)

It is also worth sharing your own problems with the minister. This helps to build up trust and a sense of collaborative ministry. It can help protect your position if the problem is not resolved as you hoped.

Some practical issues

Organists are probably more vulnerable than other church officers for two main reasons:

- the choir can take on a life of its own; and
- the organist may have a strong personality.

A survey by Oxford clergy found that organists stayed in post longer than Anglican clergy, noting “the parson may have his freehold but the organist may have the stranglehold on the parish” (Parish and People 1986). Subsequent surveys indicate an average tenure of seven years for a vicar and ten years for an organist.

If you ask what are the hallmarks of an independent body, your list might include:

- its own name;
- its own leadership;

- a defined membership;
- regular meetings;
- its own premises;
- its own property.

All these probably apply to a choir. It may also have its own funds and produce its own newsletters, and even have its own rules and policies. Some of these apply to other groups, such as Sunday School and youth group, but they are unlikely to have them all. Also most other groups exist to “be”, whereas a choir exists to “do”, so a choir is usually the most disciplined of all church groups, and therefore the most coherent.

The choir may be the largest church group under a single leader. In some churches, the choir can represent a quarter or more of the entire congregation. All this can happen without any intention to set up a rival body. Some ministers see the organist as leader of the opposition. Sometimes the minister is right.

As organist, you direct the choir only in rehearsal and performance of music. You do not direct choir members in any other area of church policy or activity, and must accept that choir members will exercise their own judgement in such areas.

Strong personality can be seen as a problem in an organist, particularly if the minister is a weak personality. It should be understood that a certain strength of personality is a job requirement for an organist. Self-confidence is needed to perform week after week in front of hundreds of people, to direct a body of musicians and to inspire them to greater performance. However self-confidence is easily mistaken for arrogance.

There is a vulnerability in performance for both ministers and organists, which they can cope with differently. A sharing of that common experience can help improve the relationship.

One survey showed that 60% of musicians but only 8% of church ministers are extroverts. This highlights the significant extent to which a self-confident organist can appear out of place in the church.

A new minister

A change of minister can be a difficult time, as the new minister inevitably comes with his own ideas into a church with its own routines.

Normally, a wise minister will not immediately try to make changes, but will largely follow the existing arrangements for a year or so. However, there will be changes simply because the minister is a different person. The organist should be sensitive to the fact that a new minister may not even be aware that he is doing things differently.

It is essential for the organist and new minister to get to know each other, as already outlined.

Choosing the music

A sometimes controversial area of the relationship is who should choose the music. The ideal arrangement is:

- the minister prepares a list of forthcoming services, noting any special themes, visiting preachers or other special arrangements or departures from the lectionary or church calendar;
- the organist prepares a draft list of hymns and other music which is sent to the minister, and possibly to others; and
- the minister checks that he is happy with the list, or suggests changes which the organist accepts.

Ideally the music list is prepared for a period of between one and three months, and is published before the start of that period.

Such an arrangement cannot be followed when the organist is not able to exercise such a ministry (such as a “reluctant organist” or stand-in organist), or where the culture of the church is that a single person plans the entire service, as in the Methodist Church. But in the latter case, the church should realise that it is compromising the quality of its music by excluding those trained to exercise a music ministry.

Once the music list is prepared, it should be followed but not inflexibly. There must be a balance between the two biblical principles of:

- not quenching the spirit of spontaneity (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and
- worship being done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

For music lists, these two principles are met by allowing occasional departures from the published music list for good reason, such as to change the hymn near the sermon (which is usually written after the music list is compiled) to reflect the sermon’s message, or to reflect a significant event such as the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001.

There are many useful guides to choosing music, particularly the Royal School of Church Music’s excellent quarterly guide Sunday by Sunday.

Church councils

Where a church has a council, worship committee or similar, that body must clearly understand its role in the worship of the church.

In the Church of England, the PCC or worship committee has no control over the music whatsoever, which is solely a matter for the minister and organist. Most other denominations have similar policies. We have been aware of problems when church councils and worship committees interfere in the work of the organist.

It is good practice for there to be an occasional discussion at church council on music, but this should only be done with the organist present. The council should know that it has no authority to pass resolutions on music. It is useful if a member of the choir is also a member of the church council.

When things go wrong

Perspective

When problems arise, it is first necessary to identify the underlying reason. The minister changing the last hymn is not a problem. The minister is almost certainly entitled to change a hymn and may have good reason for doing so. It is more likely that the problem is not telling you in enough time, changing the hymn just to annoy you, or simply not appreciating that the choir spent an hour practising the descant. A wise minister will first ask the organist if he is happy to change the hymn, which will usually avoid the problem.

Similarly an organist changing a hymn or otherwise departing from what is expected can be unsettling to the minister. The organist must try to avoid wrong-footing the minister, and be ready to listen and explain if this happens.

Next, decide whether the problem goes to the heart of the relationship or is simply the result of normal human fallibility. Issues which arise because of forgetfulness, thoughtlessness or clumsiness may be very irritating at the time, but do not undermine the relationship. They should be addressed, particularly if they keep happening, but they should not be blown up into a fundamental problem.

Conversely, the same principle applies if you make a mistake from fallibility, such as forgetting to come in at the right part of the service, forgetting the last verse or playing a fistful of wrong notes. If you have made a mistake, simply admit it and apologise. Do not justify it.

Incidents based on fallibility must not be regarded as portents of the apocalypse. Not every slip-up is the tip of an iceberg. They should still be addressed, usually by making an effort to be more careful next time. Avoid imposing new procedures to deal with a single slip-up. Such new procedures often create more problems than they solve.

The serious issues are when the matter in contention indicates a breakdown in relationship. Examples include deliberate annoyance, non-communication, abuse, shouting, gossip and arbitrary behaviour. None of these are acceptable. They cannot be excused on the basis of pressure of work, divine nature or artistic temperament.

As a rough guide, consider overlooking the first instance if not too serious. Walk away and act as if it had not happened. It may be that the minister will realise what he has done, and there will be no recurrence. Only when something happens a second time is it usually worth addressing.

Next, ask yourself if this behaviour is in character. Suppose a person is normally happy to be teased about their weight. One day you make such a remark and get a mouthful of abuse. The natural reaction is to be equally abusive in reply, but that is almost certainly the worst option. An out-of-character remark often indicates that a person is under pressure in some way, for which a sympathetic response is usually more appropriate. Answering a cry for help is not only morally correct, but will help improve future relations.

Banter is a normal part of a healthy relationship. It demonstrates the trust and respect people have for each other, and keeps the relationship happy and open.

It is noticeable that any musical ensemble from symphony orchestra to rock band has gelled when members tease each other about their performance. It is a fundamental mistake to see banter as a problem. However banter must never be used as a cover for expressing serious views, and banter should avoid known sensitivities. It is best to avoid banter based on race, sex or disability, even if the “victim” makes such comments.

Sometimes a minister may shout at you because he is having real problems elsewhere, and you happened to ask about a hymn tune just after the minister heard a harrowing tale of a family suicide. To see this as a fundamental problem when it isn't one could lead to an otherwise avoidable breakdown. You can test this simply by coming back later.

Never attempt to solve a problem when you or the other person has lost their temper. You will not resolve anything, and will possibly say things you regret. Say that you will address the matter when both of you are calm. Although postponements can be appropriate for unfortunate moments and lost temper, postponements should always be kept short, otherwise the wound will fester.

The body is designed to tell you when it is reaching its limit, such as if trying to lift a weight which is too heavy. You do not continue until you strain a muscle or damage your back. Similarly, learn to detect emotional limits so you know when to step back before the needle goes into the red zone and you explode in anger.

Identifying problems

There are some specific skills which can help in identifying where real problems lie.

One method is analysing what people say. When people speak, they convey their meaning in three ways:

- what they say — the content of the words;
- how they say it — tone of voice, intensity and
- what else they communicate — body language.

Some much-quoted research says that the impact of the spoken word is determined:

- 8% by what is said;
- 37% by how it is said; and
- 55% by body language.

To this, we can add a fourth element of what is not said.

How someone says something is indicative, as any comment expressed in anything less than a straightforward manner may be hiding something.

Body language is the range of mannerisms or physical expressions which can convey what a person is really feeling. For example, smiling or frowning when someone first sees you may indicate whether they really like you. Most people are honest in relating facts, unless in great difficulty. People, particularly in the church, may find it more difficult to articulate negative or contrary views. Body

language can give clues about such views. However you should check your conclusions by asking open questions which allow such views to be expressed.

When listening to others, some basic principles are worth remembering:

- listening is about showing respect and seeking understanding, not about agreement;
- listen loosely to the words and tightly to the meaning;
- stay curious and open, and not assuming or judging;
- remember that the other person will usually listen to you, but sometimes only after you have listened to them.

“Listen loosely to the words” means trying to understand the message that the person is seeking to convey, and not becoming focused on any barbed words used.

How an argument is expressed is also telling. If the argument is emotional, “you don't understand what it is like....” or similar, this can mean that there is no logical basis to their view, because if there was, they would use it. If a person resorts to insults, they may not even have an emotional argument, or may feel very threatened.

What people do not say is sometimes called dogs barking in the night from this famous quote from the Sherlock Holmes story *The Silver Blaze*:

“Is there anything else to which you would wish to draw my attention?”

“To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.”

“The dog did nothing in the night-time.”

“That was the curious incident”, remarked Sherlock Holmes.

He was investigating a racehorse nobbled in the night and noted that the stable dog had not barked, indicating the dog knew the person.

Suppose you have just performed a magnificent carol service to a packed church, and the minister says nothing. Or suppose you tell the minister you are thinking of leaving and just get the reply, “you will be difficult to replace” without asking why are you leaving, or if there is a problem. There is a deafening silence from dogs not barking. Something is clearly wrong, and a further conversation is needed.

There is a problem

The previous sections are designed to prevent problems and to deal with any which still arise. Sometimes this will not deal with the matter, and the problem remains.

First, don't go it alone. Talk to a friend, preferably a fellow organist. However tough you are and however conclusive your eventual victory, any issue imposes some strain which may not be obvious to you at the time. A friend can also help you with encouragement, restraint, advice and strategy.

It can sometimes be helpful to write down what has happened as a story. This not only provides a contemporary record but can help you work out in your own mind what the real issues are, and what is not important. Breach of trust is important. Bad language and abuse usually are not. Writing something down can also be cathartic.

Second, stay calm. Avoid dramatic gestures, such as shouting, walking out, slamming doors or hanging up on the telephone. You may feel better for three seconds, but you may have made the problem worse and weakened your own position. It is easy to get into a difficult situation; it can be much harder to get out.

Third, make sure the minister is the first person to know of your concerns, not the last. Be honest and complete in expressing your concern. It is always appropriate to be as polite as possible, but not to the extent of being less than completely honest. If honesty and kindness become incompatible, honesty must prevail.

Sometimes when a problem arises with a minister, they may treat this as a pastoral issue for which you need help. This may be a ploy to distract attention from the real issue, or they may have picked up a real need. It is up to you whether to accept such an approach. Doing so means that you acknowledge the problem is largely on your side. Be humble enough to acknowledge that this may be so. If you conclude that you may need counselling or support, ensure you follow it up, although you are likely to seek this from someone else.

However, if you believe the problem is largely on the minister's side, the matter should be dealt with as a complaint. Once you know there is a problem with the minister, see if the problem is specific to you.

Clergy can find their work difficult and lonely. Listening to confidential tales of grief can be mentally draining, and the church has a poor record of supporting its ministers. Parishioners can be unreasonable in demands. Clergy are not immune to marital, financial, medical and practical problems, but may be less willing to admit them. It is possible that the organist is simply the first port of call during a stormy period for him. For a church organist, moving house, changing job and changing church are usually three separate decisions; for a minister, they are usually one.

If you are having such problems with the minister, so will other church officers, but remember organists may be the first to be affected. This is because both minister and organist are trained professionals, but each of whose training involves little overlap with the other. You can become a qualified organist with no theological or ministerial training whatsoever, and you can become a minister with no musical training. Other factors are that both minister and organist bear responsibility in the church, and both can be strong personalities.

After organists, youth leaders and lay readers are often next to be affected by a minister's problematic behaviour. The answer is to discuss a problem with other officers, particularly those who work closely with him. Don't be surprised if some officers say there is no problem out of loyalty to the minister.

If the problem is with the minister, sympathy and support can help address the matter. It will not only resolve the problem, but a supportive approach can create goodwill for the future.

If there is a problem with the minister, such as alcoholism, misconduct or a breakdown, it is the responsibility of other church officers to deal with it. In the Church of England, this duty falls to the churchwardens who legally must report it to the bishop. The churchwardens have no discretion not to report a serious problem. If necessary, do not hesitate to remind them of this duty.

Complaints

In life, people knock against each other and sometimes hurt each other. In any community, it is important that any response is proportionate.

There is a difference between a bruise and a wound. A bruise you leave to heal itself over time; whereas a wound must be treated or it will fester. Similarly, some knocks and hurts are best ignored while other issues must be addressed.

The seriousness of the hurt depends wholly on the reaction to it. It is entirely subjective. Just as a blow may bruise one person but wound another, so the seriousness of a problem depends on how it is received rather than on the nature of the problem itself. One person may laugh at a jibe while another is offended.

If something bothers a person, it is a problem. The problem may be that the person should grow up and not let these things bother them, but that is a different issue. The fact that someone takes offence at what you have said does not mean that you are necessarily in the wrong, as people can largely choose what offends them, but it does mean that there is a problem.

A complaint is like an order form. The complainant wants something: an apology, compensation, recognition, redress or whatever. The art of dealing with a complaint is to see what the person wants, and then decide whether to give it. All organisations which deal with complaints routinely report that an apology is usually sufficient, even for serious cases. Many personnel problems can be attributed simply to ignoring people. If you do not recognise any wrong, the matter may be resolved by a letter acknowledging the concern and saying it will be properly considered.

If you make a mistake, admit it. More people get into trouble for cover-ups than for the original failing, see page xxx.

Sometimes there may be a mutual complaint — A complains about B who complains about A. In such cases, each complaint must be dealt with separately, usually in the order in which they arose. A second complaint should not be dismissed as retaliation (even when it is), and the two should not be addressed together.

Methods for dealing with problems

The first point to make about dealing with problems with the clergy is to show restraint and self-control yourself. You may wish to lash out, but a calm and considered response is more effective and has fewer negative consequences.

There are three basic ways to solve a problem:

- concession;
- conciliation; and

- confrontation;

and you should consider them in that order.

Concession is where you simply let the matter pass, perhaps just registering an objection, but otherwise doing nothing. This accords with the biblical principle of turning the other cheek (Luke 6:29). This is not an injunction for Christians to let anyone walk all over them, but to show restraint.

Conciliation is where you discuss the problem with the person. If two people want to solve a problem, they will; if one of them does not, they won't. It is as simple as that.

Conciliation should be discussed in a face-to-face meeting. Avoid setting out your grievances in a letter. Letters are hard and impersonal and can entrench positions. (Drafting a letter to clarify issues in your own mind can be helpful, but don't post it.) Telephone calls are not so bad, but they still lack the personal interaction that comes from a meeting and is so important in conciliation.

Be particularly careful about e-mails as they are so easy to send, particularly on impulse. If an issue becomes emotionally charged, stop e-mail traffic and seek a face-to-face meeting. Disputes are rarely resolved by e-mail exchanges.

Many breakdown problems are attributed to attitude. Attitude is the set of responses a person usually follows. Study has shown that attitude is a combination of belief values and group experience. For either clergy or organists, bad attitude can result from belief in self-importance compounded by group experience of other clergy or organists with similar belief.

Attitude problems can only be demonstrated by means of examples, but the problem with offering examples is that the other person can then argue each example and never address the real underlying issue of attitude. It is usually better to state your view about the other person's attitude and invite them to confirm or deny it.

In starting any conciliation, it is advisable to be honest about any failings on your part. Suppose you were abusive when the minister was being unreasonable. It is a good idea to apologise for your rudeness at the start of your meeting. This will create a suitable atmosphere of contrition which is more likely to lead to his willingness to admit his own failings. If not, you have at least cleared your record and removed his ammunition should the matter move to confrontation.

For serious problems, conciliation may start with what appears to be a very negative period of recrimination in which accusations fly freely. This is not as negative as it may seem. When things have got really bad, it is necessary for people to unload their burdens and for everyone to see what the issues are.

A conciliation meeting should usually be separate from meetings for any other purpose. Conduct it in private and in as relaxed a matter as possible. Every problem is an opportunity, and relationship breakdowns are no exception. A conciliation meeting is a wonderful opportunity to clear all the other baggage that has been bothering you both. When there is no goodwill, there is no goodwill to lose. When a relationship is at rock bottom, it cannot fall any further.

The first step to conciliation is to try to see the matter from the other person's point of view. The second step is to help others to see it from yours. The focus

should be on trying to agree on how you will behave in the future, as well as reaching reconciliation for the past. The time is often spent on establishing the working relationship that should have been there in the first place.

An element in successful conciliation may be to draw a line under the problems and move on. As in all dispute resolution, it is advisable to be gracious but honest. Do not concede failures you honestly believe you do not have, but neither conceal failures you do have.

Confrontation is only appropriate when concession and conciliation have not worked. When a matter can neither be ignored nor resolved amicably, it becomes necessary to force the issue.

If an issue remains unresolved but will not go away, it may be necessary to "up the ante". This means that the problem must be made worse to start the process of making it better. This is needed when the other party will not co-operate in conciliation. As a problem becomes more serious, more attention is paid to addressing it, and others may become involved in finding a solution. A letter from a solicitor to the minister is an effective way of upping the ante.

If you decide that confrontation is inevitable, you should check your contract of employment to see what grievance or discipline procedure you have agreed. You should also note that there are statutory discipline and grievance procedures from 1 October 2004 (see page xxx).

Good biblical advice on church disputes is given in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7. The main point of this passage is that resources for handling disputes should be found within the church. Church bodies should identify those in their midst who have listening, mediating and (finally) judging skills to resolve disputes between church members. Church bodies should also be prepared to provide training in this area.

Involving a third person whom you both respect can assist in resolution. Be clear whether you want mediation or arbitration.

Mediation is a voluntary process where the mediator or mediators structure face-to-face dialogue between parties who are seeking to resolve disputes and address broken relationships. The key principle of mediation is that the parties themselves decide the outcome. The mediators do not determine the outcome, as an arbitrator does.

The mediator's task is to provide a structure and safe environment for dialogue and negotiation. Sometimes mediators are called conciliators (as in Clergy Discipline Measure). Basically mediators are either:

- insider-partial; or
- outsider-neutral.

Insider-partial mediators have an informal and existing relationship with the parties. Outsider-neutral mediators have a formal role and no direct relationship with the parties.

The mediator's role normally includes:

- helping the parties to articulate their own needs and interests;
- clarifying the areas of disagreement;

- helping the parties generate options to address these issues; and
- documenting any agreements reached.

In a more transformative approach, the mediator's role is also to:

- help the parties to express their own feelings and experience;
- understand the other's feelings and experience;
- encourage the parties to take responsibility for their own contribution to the past; and
- assist healing and reconciliation in the relationship.

The use of a mediator moves us back from confrontation to conciliation. Such temperature-lowering moves can be achieved by a mediator, even when they have been already dismissed by the parties.

There is a Christian mediation service called Bridge Builders, run by the London Mennonite Centre, address in appendix 1. They also run courses in mediation skills.

Arbitration is where the person hears the facts and makes a decision, regardless of whether the parties agree. It is a judgement. Arbitration works on the basis of a commitment by both sides to abide by the arbitrator's decision.

For arbitration, you need to consider the principles of natural justice, explained later.

Involving a third party to advise, mediate or arbitrate should not be used as an excuse to spread gossip or dissent. Avoid anything which can lead to factions being created in the church. Once formed, they are difficult to disband.

Complaints about you

The above explains what to do if you are the complainant. If someone complains about you, you should see how far they follow the process explained above, and seek to ensure compliance. Too frequently a complainant charges into confrontation without even considering concession or conciliation.

You should not be alarmed at having a complaint made against you. Members of professional bodies, such as doctors, lawyers and accountants, expect at least two complaints against them during a professional career. If the complaint proves unfounded, you have the benefit of having been cleared and affirmed in your conduct. But remember you are entitled to have any complaint considered properly.

If you are having difficulty in having a complaint against you handled properly, it is advisable to find a lawyer quickly. Using a lawyer and even starting legal proceedings does not commit you to suing someone, but it has two great advantages:

- it demonstrates that you are taking the matter seriously, which can itself have a powerful moderating effect; and
- it provides a sure basis should the problem end up in court.

Even if the dispute does end up in court, the judge will usually expect the parties to have made some effort to resolve the matter themselves. There are recognised forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), most notably mediation and arbitration, which the courts promote. In employment law hearings, an employer or employee who has failed to follow a discipline or grievance procedure or who has otherwise behaved unreasonably could find that prejudices their position and can be reflected in any compensation awarded.

Once it becomes apparent that you have a dispute which could end up in court:

- keep detailed contemporary records of what happened and when;
- note what efforts you made to resolve the matter amicably;
- avoid retaliation, rudeness or anything else which may prejudice you;
- apologise for any slip-up, however trivial and regardless of whether you receive any apologies in return;
- continue doing your job normally;
- avoid gossip about the matter. It is reasonable to discuss the matter with your partner and adviser, but not with everyone else.

If you wish to stay in post, it is worth building up a file of notes relating to everyday business. The minister may argue that relations have broken down to the point where working together is impossible. Producing a folder of routine notes about hymn lists and church trivia can be effective. How can a minister say he cannot work with you when he clearly is working with you?

It is worth noting that the quality of the worship and music need not suffer in a dispute. In the 1990s there was a long protracted and bitter dispute at Lincoln Cathedral, yet many who attended commented on the beautiful worship. God calls us to be obedient, not necessarily to be in the right mood. God blesses obedience, which can often sort out any bad mood.

A contemporary record while issues are fresh in your mind is given great reliance by the courts. Such a record should be free of opinions and record:

- date, time and place;
- who was present;
- what happened, in sequence;
- what was said by whom, quoting exact words or summarising their meaning;
- noting any explanations anyone offered for their conduct; and
- noting the consequences.

(If you doubt the value of making such records, make one record of a contentious incident and then recollect the incident six months later before re-reading your note.)

Natural justice

A disciplinary hearing must comply with the laws of natural justice. This not only requires that justice is done, but that it is seen to be done.

This is a principle which has developed over the years in court cases. Its main provisions are:

- the judge must act fairly, in good faith, without bias, and “in a judicial temper”;
- each party must have opportunity of adequately stating his case in the presence of the other, and to correct or contradict evidence from the other;
- someone may not be a judge in his own cause, and must declare any personal interest in the matter before him;
- a person must know in advance of what he is accused;
- each side must have sight of all documents referred to.

The right to hear, comment and contradict the other side means that one party may cross-examine the other.

In addition, natural justice can demand that a person is entitled to legal representation. Tribunals have the right to permit or deny such representation, where denial is acceptable in disciplinary cases which need a quick decision.

Human rights

Quite separate from the principles of natural justice is the developing law of human rights. You must note that human rights and natural justice are separate sets of legal rights, though they can overlap.

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights is now given the force of British law by Human Rights Act 1998.

Article 6 of the convention starts: “in the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law.” The rest of the section largely relates to criminal matters.

Disciplinary matters

If faced with disciplinary proceedings, consider your rights as required by:

- employment law, contract law and canon law (see chapter 3);
- natural law;
- human rights;
- any disciplinary and grievance procedure in your contract.

Avoid letting the matter be decided by another minister. Ministers with regional responsibilities, such as archdeacons, may like to believe that they are

unbiased, but we have yet to hear of an archdeacon supporting an organist against a vicar. An archdeacon can be formally required by a bishop to resolve a parish dispute. In such cases, the archdeacon should be assisted by a lay person with knowledge of an organist’s role. An organist should not attend a meeting with just the minister and archdeacon (or equivalent) present.

The ideal chairman is a lawyer or magistrate from another church who knows neither the minister nor the organist, and whose appointment as mediator is supported by them both. The Clergy Discipline Measure (set out later) sets up tribunals to hear complaints against clergy. A chairman of such a tribunal is an obvious person to approach. For a serious allegation, such as where a cathedral organist could lose his job, there should be at least two other members. Never allow clergy to be a majority in any panel. What must always be avoided is a tribunal where the employer is accuser, witness, judge, jury and executioner. This is bad law.

A chairman and any panel members may reasonably want payment for their services. It is advisable to agree the fee in advance. The chairman can decide who should pay that fee as part of his judgement.

If the rules of natural justice have not been followed, any decision may be declared void. An order of certiorari can be obtained from the High Court to quash or suspend the decision.

Court action

Legal action must always be absolutely the last resort when every other option has failed.

The court you use depends on the nature of the problem. There are likely to be three choices:

- employment tribunal, to claim unfair dismissal;
- County Court, for compensation as an amount of money; and
- High Court for an injunction.

You do not need to use lawyers in any tribunal or court, and their use at tribunals is discouraged. However you must know what you are doing. British justice is said to grind slow but exceedingly small. There are strict rules of evidence and procedure which must be followed. You can always use a lawyer to advise you rather than to act for you. If you are a member of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, they may be able to provide legal advice.

Although business people often use tribunals, courts and other procedures for resolving disputes and remain in a working relationship, you should not expect that degree of magnanimity in the church. If you go to court, the almost certain outcome is the ending of any working relationship, and one or both of you leaving.

County court

This section gives an introduction to suing through the courts. This must always be the very last resort.

The county court is appropriate when you want compensation in money terms up to £15,000. It is fairly simple to fill in a form to initiate proceedings. Claims above £15,000 must be made in the High Court where proceedings are stricter, and where it is usually advisable to have legal help. A financial claim through the courts can also be made using the website www.moneyclaim.gov.uk. This service has a telephone helpline as well as on-line guidance.

You must identify who you are suing. This is usually the minister. You are the claimant. The minister is the defendant, though the court or tribunal is likely to join the PCC (or equivalent body which pays the organist) as co-defendant.

There is a fee to pay for issuing the summons. This is added to your claim, and is paid by the other side if you win. The latest fees apply from 1 April 2003, and depend on the amount for which you are suing.

Maximum claim Court fee

£300 £30

£500 £50

£1,000 £80

£5,000 £120

£15,000 £250

The county courts provide useful explanatory leaflets, particularly leaflet EX301. Every court has an office which can provide free assistance in completing the forms. You find it by looking up "courts" in the telephone directory. The court cannot advise on the merits of your claim, for which you can get assistance from a solicitor, the Citizen's Advice Bureau and other sources.

The claim forms N1 are available free from the county court office. They can also be downloaded from the website www.gov.uk. The claim form comes with guidance for completing the form. You must complete three forms (you may photocopy an original), one for the defendant, one for the court and one for yourself.

You may claim for:

- financial loss you have suffered;
- interest on that loss;
- compensation for distress and inconvenience;
- the court fee; and
- other costs reasonably incurred, such as legal advice.

You should calculate all figures, though it is acceptable to put in an estimated maximum.

You may start a claim in any county court in the country, though a case may be transferred to a more suitable court, such as when the defendant lives in another area.

There is no such thing as the "small claims court". There is a small claims procedure in the county court. This procedure is simpler but is limited to £5,000 claim. Otherwise claims are allocated to tracks. This outlines how the case is managed by the court.

A summons is served regardless of the merits of the case. The defendant has these options:

- pay the amount in full, which ends the case;
- admit the claim but dispute the amount; or
- dispute the claim.

If a partial offer is made, you may accept it, which ends the case. Otherwise the case is listed to be heard before a judge. This may be in some months time. This hearing is private and informal, usually round a table in a small room at the court building.

If you bring the case, you have the job of proving it. If there is no clear evidence either way, you lose. Evidence is decided on the balance of probabilities, such as when facts are disputed.

If you win, you get a judgement, which must be enforced. If you lose, you receive nothing and lose your court fee and other expenses. The defendant may claim costs from you.

Either party may appeal. This will usually be heard by a more senior judge in the county court. Further appeals against decisions may then be made to the High Court, Court of Appeal and House of Lords.

Scandal

Scandal and embarrassment can hit anyone, however innocent. You may be aware of an accusation about to be made against you which could reflect on your suitability. In such a situation, you should disclose the matter to the minister first. This applies regardless of whether the accusation is true or not. If the failing is one which does reflect on your suitability, such as an allegation of child abuse, there may be implications such as investigation or even suspension, but these are lessened by voluntary disclosure. For other allegations, a minister who already knows the issue is in a better position to defend you. Such disclosure is also likely to improve your relationship with the minister.

In general, the best policy on scandal is "all or nothing". You and the minister either say nothing to anyone (and that does mean saying nothing, not revealing the juicy bits and blanking out other parts) or you tell people everything. Churches do not always have a good reputation for keeping confidences or even avoiding idle speculation. If you have a drink problem or your wife has left you, you may feel very embarrassed about anyone knowing. However probably no-one else will be. If you say you have retired "for personal reasons", don't be surprised if the parish gossip is that you are on drugs, abusing children, insolvent and about to be locked up.

Resignation and retirement

There are many situations when an organist may properly resign without there being any problem, such as retiring, moving house, moving to another church, or simply deciding that your time there has finished. Always give plenty of notice, tell the choir yourself, and fix a date as soon as possible.

Never agree to stay until a successor has been found. You may stay there for ever. Having a firm leaving date concentrates the mind and helps the choir and congregation mentally to adjust to your departure.

In other situations, be reluctant to resign or retire as a solution to a problem. There have been too many instances of organists resigning over disputes that should have been easily settled (or not have arisen in the first place). Sadly many of these organists are then lost to the church completely, which is a significant factor in the general shortage of organists.

The organist usually has a trump card in resignation, as there is such a shortage of organists. However this is not a card which should be played just to get your own way on a trivial issue. Threatening to resign is rarely constructive as, at best, it only means you are tolerated under sufferance with a poor working relationship. You either resign or you do not.

If you really must threaten resignation, be prepared to resign if required. Never make a promise or threat unless you intend to carry it out.

Resignation is probably appropriate if:

- you are having difficulties with the minister which no other church officer is having;
- there is a breakdown in relations between yourself and the choir; or
- there is a breakdown in relations between yourself on one side, and the minister and other church officers on the other.

Resignation is not appropriate if there is simply a problem between yourself and the minister. You should first attempt to resolve the problem as suggested earlier, involving others as appropriate.

Sometimes it may become obvious that the particular skills you have as organist are not what is needed at the church, without there being any fault in either you or the church. Sometimes it is necessary for two Christians to part to avoid conflict. The dispute between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41) is widely seen as a biblical example of this.

If there is a breakdown in relations which justifies your resignation, the reason or blame for the breakdown is immaterial. Apportioning blame is futile for “square peg in a round hole” situations.

For retirement, there can be no set age limit. Many organists remain competent at 90 while others are incompetent at 30. As the years pass and turn to decades, it is easy to get stuck in a rut, not move with the times and be unaware of the gradual deterioration in your ability.

The loyal servant who simply plods on past his sell-by date creates huge problems for organisations. To sack someone is ungracious, yet to ignore the

problem is to allow the music and worship to deteriorate. We recommend the driving licence model — at the age of 70, you offer resignation to the minister in a way which he can easily accept. If he declines, make similar offers at least once every three years.

If you feel constrained from doing this, at least seek advice from a trusted and knowledgeable friend. Have the grace to accept when your work is done and leave before you deteriorate too much. You will probably find plenty of work as a retired organist without the effort of a regular commitment.

Retirement should always be when you are still able to carry on.

Practicalities of leaving

Leaving as organist, for whatever reason, can be an emotional experience for the organist, minister, choir and congregation. Many organists may not realise how much their musical contribution has meant to people. Indeed it is almost certainly true that in life generally we do not realise how much we all mean to each other.

Accept any farewell gift with good grace, even if you throw it away afterwards. Attend any farewell function to which you are invited, and consider holding your own. A packet of crisps and bottle of wine after choir practice can suffice. A farewell helps people cope with the finality of your departure. It also helps people put aside any negative feelings, helps keep relationships sweet and allows everyone to move on.

If you leave in less than happy circumstances, resist the temptation to issue any statement, or otherwise to bad-mouth the minister, choir or church. Be gracious but not dishonest. Explaining that “I believe it is time for me to move on and wish you all well” is preferable to any statement of self-justification and attacking others. Saying that you believe you are not the right person for that church is better than attacking the church for not being the right place for you.

After you have left in unhappy circumstances, it is possible that you may be scapegoated or demonised in some way. The extent to which you have shown good grace will restrict this from happening. When two people face difficulty, blaming an absent third person is a convenient way of not blaming each other. Comments in private conversation should be ignored anyway. However you do not have to tolerate untrue or malicious comments made publicly, particularly if this will hurt your reputation. If necessary, write a letter (or ask a solicitor to) asking for such statements to be retracted or corrected.

Once you have left, in happy or unhappy circumstances, it may be advisable to have a quarantine year when you do not go back to the church. This helps you accept the break, helps those you leave behind to accept that you have gone, and helps your successor to become established.

Never criticise your successor. It is reasonable still to be interested in what happens to a choir or church after you leave, and how your successor gets on, but this must not be done in any way which undermines your successor. Contact from former choir members is no problem if purely social. However do not get involved in any advice or comment about the music or other current issue unless your successor asks you.

Clergy discipline

All the denominations have their own system of discipline over ministers.

In the Church of England, discipline is under:

- Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 for conduct; and
- Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963 for doctrine, ritual and ceremonial.

The latter measure has never been used for that purpose. Indeed the last “heresy trial” in the Church of England was in 1871. (This was the last of a long series of court cases between high and low churchmen. One earlier case was *Holy and Ward v Cotterill* [1820] in York Consistory Court which held that it was illegal to sing hymns of human composure such as *Hail to the Lord’s Anointed*, which Cotterill had edited. The Archbishop of York intervened so that this low church un-Anglican practice of allowing the congregation to sing hymns has been legally tolerated from 1821.)

Any complaint an organist has against an Anglican minister will be dealt with under the 2003 Measure, which takes effect in 2005.

Clergy Discipline Measure 2003

This provides a tribunal system for dealing with allegation of misconduct by Church of England clergy.

The Measure is designed to assist both lay and ordained church members. Lay people have an efficient system of dealing with grievances against clergy. Clergy may use the Measure to deal with troublesome parishioners who can be told to “put up or shut up”.

Scope

The Measure applies to all who are ordained and allowed to minister in the Church of England. It thus includes vicars, curates, chaplains, retired clergy, bishops and archbishops, deans and canons, clergy in secular employment, overseas clergy allowed to work in England, non-stipendiary ministers and even clergy barred from ministry. The Measure applies to the whole of the Church of England, except the Isle of Man, Channel Islands and Diocese in Europe.

Procedure

To start a complaint, the procedure under the Measure is as follows:

- the complainant writes to the relevant bishop;
- the registrar of the diocese checks that the complainant is allowed to make the complaint and that there appears to be substance in the complaint;
- the registrar passes his views to the bishop, who may dismiss the complaint or decide to proceed;
- the bishop’s decision is passed to the complainant and the clergyman accused;

- if the complainant is dissatisfied with a bishop’s dismissal of the complaint, the complainant may ask the president of the tribunals to review the matter. The president may uphold the bishop’s decision, or reverse it if “plainly wrong” and direct the bishop to deal with the complaint;
- where the bishop decides that there is complaint (or is directed to do so), he has 28 days to decide what to do between these five options:
 - do nothing;
 - leave the complaint on file;
 - attempt a reconciliation;
 - agree a penalty with the clergyman; or
 - order a formal investigation;
- if a bishop decides to do nothing, he must notify the complainant, who, if dissatisfied, may request the president of the tribunals to review this. The president may overrule the bishop;
- if a complaint is left on file, no further action is taken, but if a further complaint is made within five years (or a shorter period decided by the bishop), the original matter is also considered.

The complaint may be made in an ordinary letter. There is no form to complete. A complaint which is frivolous, vexatious or malicious is rejected. The complaint should be made within 12 months of the alleged misconduct.

The Measure defines who may make a complaint. In general, this includes “any other person who has a proper interest in making the complaint”.

Misconduct is defined in para 8(1) as:

- (a) doing any act in contravention of the laws ecclesiastical;
- (b) failing to do any act required by the laws ecclesiastical;
- (c) neglect or inefficiency in the performance of the duties of his office;
- (d) conduct unbecoming or inappropriate to the office and work of a clerk in Holy Orders.

Conciliation

One of the five options available to a bishop in dealing with a complaint is to direct a reconciliation between the clergyman and complainant. This is likely to be widely used, particularly when the complainant is the organist, so we give below the detailed provisions of the Measure as contained in para 15.

The bishop invites the complainant and clergyman to make representations on the matter. If the complainant and clergyman can agree who should be conciliator, that person is appointed. A bishop must be satisfied that the conciliator will be impartial.

A conciliator must make a report to the bishop within three months of his appointment. A conciliation may fail for any of these reasons:

- either the complainant or clergyman refuse to take part;
- the complainant and clergyman cannot agree on a conciliator;
- the conciliator fails to achieve conciliation.

If conciliation is achieved, that is the end of the matter. If it is not achieved, the matter is referred back to the bishop, who must choose one of the four remaining options.

Penalty by consent

In many cases, it is expected that the clergyman will agree that he has done wrong and be willing to accept a penalty. This avoids the delay, stress and possible embarrassment of a hearing.

If for any reason, penalty by consent fails, the bishop must order a formal investigation.

Formal investigation

A formal investigation may be ordered by the bishop or president of the tribunals, possibly after other attempts to address the concern have failed.

The bishop directs the “designated officer” to set up the investigation. The designated officer works in the legal office of the National Institutions of the Church of England. This designated officer tells the president of the tribunals whether he considers there is a case to answer. If he decides there is no case to answer, that is the end of the matter.

Any hearing is in private unless either:

- the clergyman requests that it be in public; or
- the tribunal decides that the interests of justice require it in public.

If held in public, the tribunal may exclude such people as it thinks fit from attending. The verdict is always given in public.

The disciplinary tribunal comprises five people, all of whom must be communicant members of the Church of England, namely a legally qualified chairman plus two clergy and two lay people.

There are six penalties which range from prohibition for life to a rebuke.

Summary of procedure for maintaining good relations with clergy

Avoiding problems:

- have an appropriate attitude yourself;
- get to know the clergy at a personal and social level;
- agree a common agenda;
- show respect to clergy and expect mutual respect;

- find ways in which you can deliver the church’s agenda;
- be appreciative and supportive to clergy;
- avoid making criticism, however justified;
- always remember that the choir is part of the church;
- ensure that your self-confidence is not mistaken for arrogance.

When things go wrong:

- identify the underlying problem;
- distinguish between fallibility and fundamental problems;
- do not exaggerate the seriousness of problems;
- admit your own mistakes;
- be sympathetic for untypical conduct indicating stress;
- see banter as harmless fun, and ensure it is;
- never lose your temper — come back later if necessary;
- do not resign just because you have a problem with the minister;
- consider resignation if you have problems with the wider church.

When there is a fundamental problem:

- get support from a friend, preferably a fellow organist;
- avoid dramatic gestures like walking out;
- do not let a problem be treated as a pastoral issue;
- find out if other church officers have the same problem;
- if they do, press the churchwardens (or equivalent) to deal with it;
- if not, consider the points listed below.
- distinguish between “bruises” and “wounds”, and ignore former;
- consider each complaint separately;
- ask what is wanted for each complaint.

When there is a fundamental problem between organist and minister:

- first consider concession, simply register a protest and then leave it;
- if concession is inappropriate, try conciliation, talking about it;
- be careful about giving examples in dealing with problems of attitude;

- concede your failings before addressing the minister's failings;
- for serious breakdowns, allow for recriminations to come out;
- keep conciliation meetings separate from other meetings;
- use a conciliation meeting to address all problems;
- start conciliation by trying to see things from the other person's perspective;
- conciliation ends when you both agree on what to do about the past, and how to go forward together;
- do not even consider confrontation until conciliation has failed.

If the problem moves to confrontation:

- if conciliation has failed and the issue is not being taken seriously, make the problem worse by "upping the ante";
- carefully read your contract, particularly on grievance procedures, and know your rights under the law;
- consider inviting a third person to assist you in resolving the matter;
- do not let that third person be a clergyman — find an independent person with appropriate mediation or legal skills;
- consider mediation first, then arbitration;
- mediation will move you back to conciliation;
- if going for arbitration, ensure terms of reference are clear and the principles of natural justice are followed;
- keep detailed contemporary records of everything that happens;
- avoid retaliation, rudeness, anger and anything else which undermines you;
- continue to do your job properly, regardless of how you feel;
- keep records to show that you are doing your job properly;
- avoid gossip;
- for clergy misconduct, consider the disciplinary proceedings;
- only use court action as a final resort when absolutely everything else has failed.