



# **Professional Conduct in Adversity**

## **A Guide for Church Musicians**

**[www.PresbyMusic.org](http://www.PresbyMusic.org)**

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*A Conflict and Closure:  
Professional Conduct in Adversity*

A Guide for Musicians by the  
Association of Anglican Musicians

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PAM publishes periodicals and resource lists, sponsors conferences, and provides professional recognition through a certification program recognized by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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# THE PAM MISSION STATEMENT

The Presbyterian Association of Musicians (PAM) educates, enriches, and engages its membership in humanity's chief end: to glorify and enjoy God forever.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Executive Board of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians (PAM) frequently encounters instances in which musicians, pastors and sessions have come into conflict. Workshops focusing on professional concerns at PAM sponsored Worship and Music conferences are well attended with lively conversation about potential or realized conflict situations.

Persons in this stressful situation often do not find it easy to think clearly and objectively. Responses of musicians range from paralysis to over-reaction.

This publication is intended to help church musicians identify early warning signals that may suggest the onset of dysfunction in an employment relationship, to provide practical recommendations for dealing with conflicts, to help manage the termination process and help church musicians to survive a termination and continue to grow and move forward in ministry and service.

PAM gratefully acknowledges the permission and generosity of the Association of Anglican Musicians in allowing PAM to adapt their booklet, *A Conflict and Closure: Professional Conduct in Adversity* for Presbyterian use. This adaptation of that booklet is offered to the church (musicians, pastors, sessions, and presbyteries) with the hope that it will help further the peace, unity, and purity of the church, as we seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ the Lord.

## SIGNS OF CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Events rarely occur in a vacuum. Although many musicians who are “suddenly” faced with the prospect of termination or radical alteration of their job descriptions contend that the actions of their church came “out of the blue. In actuality this is rarely the case. Below are a number of questions which, depending upon the answers, can indicate whether a musician’s relationship with the church is healthy or heading for trouble.

### **A. Has there been any unexplained reduction in your levels of contact, cordiality or communication with the pastor(s) of your church?**

During particular seasons of the church year there may be a reduction in the frequency of communication among staff members. However, if this pattern continues, there is cause for concern. It is important that the musician recognize changes in the nature of the employment relationship and act quickly to determine the root causes for these changes. A church musician should make time for, and request regular private meetings with clergy for discussions of job performance and other issues related to the church in order that small problems do not become major concerns.

It is equally important that the church musician conduct regular “reality checks” to make sure that what he or she is saying, whether to clergy or to lay persons, is being comprehended and understood as intended. The vocabulary of the conservatory or of the seminary is not necessarily the vocabulary that is best calculated to convey clear and ready meaning to choirs, parents or even supervising clergy. In any relationship, but particularly in the relationship of shared ministry, it is vital that persons who communicate with each other agree upon a common vocabulary and common ground upon which to meet.

Problems and conflicts do not improve or go away simply because they are ignored, denied or avoided. Failure to confront them only permits them to fester and contributes to a build-up of hostility and frustration. Failure to confront these problems can trigger arguments over apparently insignificant problems.

**B. Has there been any increase in the apparent or expressed level of dissatisfaction on the part of your pastor with your performance or the church music program?**

The regular review of job performance by supervisors is an integral part of the employment relationship. Constructive criticism offered orally and privately in the dialogue central to such review should be welcomed by the church musician. When a supervising pastor cares enough about any issue to communicate directly to the musician about it, the musician may assume that it is an important matter, regardless of the merit or taste of the suggestions or criticism involved. Those with whom we work must know that we take their concerns seriously.

When the nature of criticism changes, the church musician should take note. For example, when the Pastor publicly criticizes the musician for taking all the hymns so fast that no one can sing them, it is a clear signal that communication between pastor and musician is breaking down. The net result of that breakdown, where persons talk at, rather than to and with, each other, is conflict.

A written criticism or instruction often suggests that a record is being kept for purposes of building justification for subsequent action in a personnel file. While a memo about the hymns for Holy Week is basically innocuous, a memo giving a church musician precise instructions on how the Holy Week music is to be played and setting specific restrictions on volume, tempo and the like takes on a decidedly different character. In all circumstances where criticism

is becoming public and documented, and is occurring outside the agreed upon channels in the employment relationship, the musician should determine what has impaired the communication process.

**C. Are there any rising political or theological factions in the congregation whose needs and agendas are in conflict or competition with the music programs?**

The church musician shares with the clergy the responsibility for feeding and nurturing all of the faithful in the institution in which he or she is employed. Respect for all persons, regardless of musical taste or achievement, is a prerequisite for successful music ministry. Musicians can expect the same respect from hiring institutions and the persons they serve. The musician working agreement with the hiring institution should clearly express the occasions and opportunities which will be available for the musician to exercise his or her skill and training to best advantage. Such occasions should be monitored and discussed as part of the musician regular job performance evaluation.

The training of the church musician affords a unique position to educate, mold and form the musical sophistication of the church members. If a church musician uses skill and training as an instrument of intimidation, rather than of education, the only likely outcome will be anger and resentment. It is vitally important for the musician to make sure that what is perceived about what he or she is doing is what is intended. Musicians should be aware that the visibility of the church music program renders it more susceptible to “scapegoating” by groups in a congregation who are unhappy with matters completely unrelated to music but choose the music program as the most accessible target for hostility. An environment of open communication is essential throughout the church to ensure that differing perspectives are respected and encouraged peaceably to co-exist. This communication is the responsibility of all church leaders.

## **D. Is there some other musical competitor who wants your job and may be working to undermine your position in the congregation?**

In a perfect world, this would not be a problem. We do not, however, live in a perfect world. PAM and the American Guild of Organists have specific ethical guidelines that address this type of conduct by musicians. The session and pastor(s) should be educated by church musicians as to the ethical standards applicable to church musicians and about conduct which breaches such standards. Church musicians should be unhesitating in taking other musicians to task when there is real evidence of improper conduct. Generally, reliance upon the grievance mechanisms of professional organizations will be more productive than undertaking personal action in this regard. There are potentially legal remedies available as well, particularly if the musician holding the position coveted by another musician is under a contract or employment agreement with the church.

## **E. Is there any general or fundamental incompatibility between you and the Pastor(s)?**

Experience teaches that both clergy and musicians may ignore overt danger signals that should provide clues to potential trouble in an employment relationship. Also, persons can change with time and it is not inconceivable that a musician who has stayed with the same pastor for ten years finds that the pastor has changed, thus changing the relationship. Musicians themselves change with time as well.

A significant area of incompatibility may be between the respective theologies of the musician and pastor concerning the role of music in worship. A musician may feel passionately that music in worship is for the glory of God and, as such, should always be the best, most exalted and highest quality offering possible. A pastor may feel, with equal passion, that music in worship primarily serves an enabling function for the worship of the faithful and that music needs to meet



people “where they are.” If the musician’s and pastor’s concepts do not precisely coincide, potential for conflict exists. This, as in all other aspects of shared ministry, is an area in which loving compromise, open communication and focus on common goals can permit the expression of both ideals.

When a musician investigates a vacant position, he or she will seek conversations with persons who know the reality of that post. When interviewing for a position, the musician should encourage serious discussions about the theology of worship.

Minor differences may be resolved by an agreement to disagree and to avoid subsequent conflict over the issue. Major incompatibilities will require someone to change. In the best of situations, the change will occur on all sides, with everyone giving a bit and receiving a bit. However, this is not always a possible solution. The musician, pastor, and session must remember that decisions regarding worship are made collaboratively between all three parties.(W-1.4000) The session and pastor have authority over certain parts of the worship enterprise. (W-1.4004-4006) The Directory for Worship also presumes that there will be regular conversation between the pastor and the musician, with the session responsible for seeing that these conferences take place Appropriately and on a regular basis. (W-1.4005b)

## **F. Are you in a congregation that is between pastors?**

A church musician is particularly vulnerable in the period of time in which a congregation is between pastors. During this interim time, the musician may be faced with direct supervision from lay members of the parish or may be afforded greater control over worship, music and liturgy than would ever be the case when an installed pastor is in place.



Where the departure of a pastor has been the result, directly or indirectly, of conflict and strife in the congregation, the unrest and anger generated by such conflict may become refocused on the musician or the musical program of the institution. The period between pastors is an excellent opportunity for factions within an institution to vie for control. A musician may be drawn into, and subsequently become a casualty of, such battles. A prudent musician will avoid being drawn into the conflict.

The departure of a pastor for happy reasons can still be the occasion of risk for the church musician. Well-intentioned lay persons may demand pro forma resignations from institutional staff to afford a new leader “a clean slate” with which to work. Such resignations are not required of lay staff by the Book of Order. Prudence suggests that provisions governing this situation be included in the musician’s employment agreement.

A musician working without a written employment agreement may find it useful to work out a “bridge” contract with the institution pending the installation of a new pastor. The provisions for this agreement would be the same as for any regular employment agreement for the musician, except that it will need to address specifically the term of the musician’s employment after the arrival of the new pastor.

It is important to remember that all non-ordained staff of a local congregation are hired by the Session. (G-10.0102n) While an incoming installed pastor may have a great deal of influence regarding the hiring and retention of the staff, particularly the non-ordained staff, it is ultimately the Session’s responsibility.

## **G. Are there problems in the music ministry in the congregation?**

It is generally expected that problems in job performance will be honestly identified and dealt with by the musician, particularly when discussed in performance reviews. Musicians should recognize that it is no sign of weakness to discuss problems in their programs with clergy and other program staff. Such discussions not only foster the sense of shared ministry in a congregation but afford the musician support and an assurance that he or she is not working in a vacuum.

Some of the factors that may suggest that there are problems in a congregation's musical program are:

1. reduced attendance and/or participation by volunteers;
2. repeated comments from clergy, lay staff or members of the congregation that the musician's programs do not support the other ministries of the church.
3. insubordinate or "seditious" choir members or parishioners with an ax to grind;
4. recognition that the musician would rather avoid conflict than confront a problem situation forthrightly in the context of ministry, i.e., running from a problem, or hiding from the problem, rather than meeting it with direct communication and a sincere desire to seek a solution.
5. resistance to change by participants in musical programs arising from unhealthy loyalty to or nostalgia for prior musicians or other staff persons.

## **H. Budget considerations**

Economic trends affect the income of religious institutions just as they do for workers and professionals in commerce and business. Churches are not immune to economic pressures and when revenues are declining in an institution, music programs are vulnerable to budget cuts. The session

may be tempted to cut program costs and reduce musicians' salaries. Some think that church music can be done by volunteers as well as by paid staff. When budgets need to be cut or resources reallocated, the music program is a tempting target. Many in the congregation may not understand the musician's job.

A church musician can help everyone understand his/her work by the simple expedient of keeping an accurate daily log of activities, tasks performed, practice undertaken, calls to volunteers, etc. being done. This log should include all time spent by the musician on behalf of the church, including time at home at a piano keyboard, time spent listening to recordings of new music for choirs, time spent reviewing single copies, library and administrative tasks.

Thus, the musician will be able to answer with precision the question "Just what do you do with your time?" The musician may also surprise him- or herself, as well as the church, by the amount of time that is actually spent in performing the job, justifying salary increases or allocation of some duties to other staff.

The fairness and appropriateness of institutional perceptions and actions are widely and vigorously debated. However, these perceptions and actions represent the reality with which church musicians must deal. Accordingly, the church musician should consider the following factors as potential warning signs:

1. Are congregational revenues declining?
2. Has music been funded by trust or investment funds that are in a reduced income state because of current interest or return rates?
3. Does a reduction in your music budget reflect dissatisfaction with your program?

4. Is your position being redefined into a form you would not accept, whether by reduced time and compensation or increased duties with no increase in compensation?
5. Do your pastor and session understand the relationship between the hours of service required by your position and the money allocated to compensate you?
6. Do your pastor and session have a true understanding of what it takes in time, skills and effort to do your job?
7. Is your salary or budget being cut to allow addition of other clergy or staff?

## **I. Is the music program “too” successful and making clergy or staff look inadequate by comparison?**

It is a regrettable fact of human nature that jealousy can undermine any personal or professional relationship. In an institution in which some programs are faltering or have become completely dysfunctional, a successful music program can attract unfavorable attention because it forces comparison between that program and other aspects of the institution's operations. The musician can become the focus of anger, suspicion and hostility from supervising clergy or other staff whose job performance, for whatever reason, does not appear to be achieving the same level of results.

When a music program significantly outshines other programs in a congregation, the musician should be aware of the potential for trouble and be especially attuned to the need for close communication with clergy and staff so that a sense of teamwork is fostered. It is vital for the musician to seek to integrate music with the overall ministry of the congregation, rather than having the program function as a separate and distinct aspect of the congregation's ministry.

## **J. Are there issues in your personal life which affect your relationship with the pastor, the session and/or the congregation?**

A number of intensely personal factors may affect the manner in which the job performance of a church musician is perceived. These include age, marital status, sexual orientation, substance abuse, political affiliation and the state of the musician's physical or emotional health.

It is beyond the scope of this document, and certainly beyond the ability of PAM, to resolve or even to explore fully the vast range of debate that such issues present. A church musician must remain sensitive to the currents and tides of issues in the institution in which he or she is employed. A church musician must constantly assess the extent to which his or her actions, conduct or job performance may come into conflict with deeply held beliefs, political agendas or other objectives of one or more groups within the congregation, or of the congregation itself.

*The questions listed here along with other suggestions are offered with the hope that any and all conflicts can be addressed and resolved. Most often they can be. Resolution takes hard work, open communication, flexibility, and perseverance, all in keeping with faithful Christian discipleship.*

*The result can be better working relationships which grow out of greater understanding and deeper respect among colleagues. The community of the church of Jesus Christ calls for no less .*

## ON THE BRINK OF TERMINATION

Despite sincere efforts, conflicts are not always resolved, even with hard work. Sometimes, church musicians will find themselves in a position where it appears that termination is imminent. In such situations, a resignation may have been requested, or a musician may have been advised that, by a certain time, new employment should be obtained. Addressing the following questions may help the musician survive the shock and stress of termination so that she/he can move forward with health and confidence towards the next stage of a professional career.

### **A. Personal risk assessment--is the fight worth the prize?**

It is natural and instinctive for any person to wish to fight to keep that which the person believes rightfully belongs to them. Yet, any fight or conflict carries risks. Some conflicts, arising over moral, spiritual or personal welfare and safety issues, have to be fought regardless of the risks involved. Rarely, however, are the issues involved in termination as clearly defined in absolute terms.

A musician considering whether to fight to keep a job must undertake a complete analysis of the risks that attend such a conflict. Legal counsel may be retained to help with risk assessment. Issues for consideration include:

1. Personal risks: these include financial, invasion of privacy, potential embarrassment, consumption of time and energy, and if legal action is taken, financial resources as well. The musician must decide if he or she has the will and stamina to see the fight to the end.
2. Professional risks: these include an unfavorable reference or employment history, acquiring a reputation as a “trouble maker,” general publication of unfavorable reports concerning professional competence and job performance and even the

public questioning of your moral fitness to be employed by a religious institution. The musician risks a working relationship with the congregation if the musician wages such a fight and prevails.

3. Program risks: Division and conflict may destroy completely any good work previously done in the congregation.
4. Risks to institutional integrity: In some instances, a fight for a job may entail direct conflict between the musician and significant political factions within a congregation. If the musician is popular, respected, well-loved and of long standing in an institution, a real threat exists that the institution could be severely damaged or further divided by such conflict.

This list of considerations does not mean that it is necessarily inappropriate or even damaging for a church musician to make a stand for fairness in the employment relationship or to seek to keep a position that is, for wrongful reasons, being taken away. It may require the assistance of personal legal counsel for a church musician to evaluate the potential risks and benefits of fighting to keep a job. Every such situation shares common factors with other such situations, but also presents unique factors which could make comparisons with other apparently similar situations unhelpful. It might also be helpful to seek out conversations with trusted church musicians and/or pastors to ensure keeping perspective.

## **B. Where will support come from if you decide to fight for your job?**

*The musician must ask and answer:*

1. What level of support is there for the musician in the congregational programs over which the musician has control, i.e., from choristers, parents, etc.?



2. What level of support does the musician anticipate from the session?
3. What level of support does the musician anticipate from other program and/or ordained staff?
4. What level of support does the musician anticipate from the congregation?
5. What level of support does the musician anticipate from organizations and structures outside the congregation?

### **C. Reality testing--what usually happens versus what you hope for**

In the course of crisis intervention, assessment of likely support for a church musician in an employment conflict tends to be somewhat more optimistic than ultimately results. Certain basic operative facts need to be kept in the forefront of the support and risk analysis process:

1. Presbyteries do not, as a matter of course, interfere with staff decisions in congregations.
2. Sessions tend to support incumbent pastors no matter how long or short a time they have served in the institution.
3. Congregational indignation is short-lived and generally ineffective to reverse staff decisions made by pastors and sessions.
4. Encouraging dissension within the membership of a congregation is most often counterproductive, especially when it occurs after adverse decisions have already been made.

Considerations of fairness and justice notwithstanding, these factors reflect the realities of job conflict in the religious institution. There will usually be a greater willingness on the part of the institutional membership to sacrifice an employee in the interest of maintaining the semblance of unity and order within the institution.

## **D. What are the church musician's best options for surviving conflict?**

### **1. Written employment agreements**

The first line of defense for conflict management and survival of the church musician is to insist, at the outset of employment, upon a written employment agreement that makes specific provisions for regular review of job performance, mechanisms for the amicable resolution of conflict and which details the means by which employment may terminate and the responsibilities of both the musician and the hiring institution upon the occurrence of that contingency. (Note: State laws vary with respect to employment contracts and employment agreements.) If the church has written personnel policies, the musician should be thoroughly familiar with them.

### **2. Regular job performance evaluation**

The second line of defense against job conflict is an insistence upon regular job performance evaluation by the session and pastor. If change in the musician's job performance is needed in order to meet the needs of the institution and the musician is willing to make such changes, the process should be carefully detailed and a timetable should be worked out for the reasonable implementation of all requested changes. A committee of representative persons may help ensure fairness in the process.

If it is apparent that the only resolution of the job conflict will be the termination of the church musician, the adage that "the best defense is a good offense" is well taken. This is not to suggest launching a broadside attack upon the hiring institution or individuals in it. Instead, the musician whose employment is manifestly and irrecoverably in jeopardy should seek to gain some measure of control over the process of termination by cooperating with the institution to work out a plan for constructive transition.

This plan should be agreed upon between the musician and the leadership of the institution. It should set out specific goals to be achieved in the closure of the musician's tenure, both by the musician and by the institution. The agreement should establish a specific timetable for closure of the employment relationship and the financial terms for severance. This plan should also involve the oversight of a representative committee to monitor and evaluate the progress and fairness of the closure.

## **FOLLOWING TERMINATION**

When a church musician has been terminated, for whatever reason, shock and grief on the part of the musician are natural and inevitable consequences. Knowledge that the phenomenon of grieving will occur does not necessarily mitigate the harshness of its effect. That knowledge, does, however, help a person to plan for support. Failure to deal with the grieving process and to test reactions against unpleasant realities may result in a complete personal and professional paralysis.

### **A. Stages of grief**

Grief occurs in discernible and differing stages. These stages have been described with great lucidity and insight in the book *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross:

#### **1. Denial and Isolation**

This stage of grieving presents considerable danger to the church musician, as it occurs at the onset of the grieving process and will usually be coincident with the initial aftermath of the news of termination. This is a point in time in which the musician must necessarily make a number of difficult decisions concerning whether to contest a termination decision, how best to negotiate conditions of severance and how to smooth the road ahead for the next career move.

This is also the time in which the musician will need the loving support of friends and colleagues, yet will, because of denial and the tendency towards self isolation, be least likely to seek out that support. As difficult as it may be for the musician, no significant decisions should be made about professional matters in this stage without seeking the advice of personal legal counsel and/or trusted friends and colleagues.

It has been observed in termination situations that potential for achieving mitigation of the disastrous impact of termination upon the musician has been lost in the first twenty-four to thirty-six hours after notice of termination has been given. This underscores the importance of making adequate contingency plans for coping with worst case circumstances so that the outcome of a termination situation does not rest, by virtue of surprise and default, completely in the control of the terminating employer.

## **2. Anger**

Grieving involves anger provoked by the loss. Anger may be directed towards the external agency viewed responsible for the loss, towards self and towards the job lost. When employment is lost, an immediate and natural reaction is to be angry with the employer for taking away one's job or for imposing conditions on the employment that were, in the estimation of the employee, impossible to fulfill or so unreasonable as to make the termination inevitable.

Many persons have doubts and insecurities concerning whether termination could have been avoided if more effort was applied to the job performance. These doubts may lead the musician to assume an unreasonable and disproportionate amount of blame and responsibility for the conflicts leading to termination and the consequences of the termination itself. Finally, the musician

may focus anger on the nature of the job itself or the failure of the profession he or she has undertaken, feeling failed and abandoned by a calling to which he/she has been faithful.

### **3. Bargaining (action and reaction)**

Out of frustration and a sense of being powerless to make any headway against the terminating institution, the musician may seek to Abargain@ with the situation in angry and destructive ways. Whether couched as an effort to achieve Ajustice@ or simply as a last vain hope to regain what appears to be lost, much of the activity that occurs at this stage takes on the nature of rage, tantrums or passive aggressive efforts to enlist parties external to the conflict to assist in the fighting of the musician's already lost battle.

No matter how unfair, unjust or arbitrary the actions of others may be, we must insure our actions and our reactions to others focus on the redemptive and resurrective possibilities that are at the foundation of our faith. Walking in the way of Christ means our actions at his time should promote the concepts of love and justice by which we want all our employment relationships to be governed.

### **4. Depression**

The clinical effects of depression are well documented and in general currency in modern knowledge. They include sleeplessness, constant tiredness, dramatic reduction in the ability of individuals to cope with stress and adverse circumstances, difficulty in thinking clearly in abstractions and a general lassitude with respect to making decisions and performing actions.

All of these are conditions which will interfere with the terminated musician's ability to make clear judgments and right decisions for future actions. The tendency towards depression in this context underscores the value of seeking support and counseling

from professional colleagues, counsel and even mental health professionals. Avoiding the instinct towards isolation at this stage of grieving may also provide significant mitigation of the effects of depression.

## **5. Acceptance**

Acceptance of reality is a first step towards receiving the gift of grace. It is an essential prerequisite for the enabling of healing and for an adequate closure of an employment relationship. It is also the ultimately liberating step for the grieving individual. The denial of reality through the maintenance of anger, grudges and ill will imprisons and wounds only the individual who maintains the state of denial, not the persons towards whom the anger may be directed. The Gospel is filled with teachings that illustrate the healing power of forgiveness, not only for the forgiven but for the forgiving. The worth of a person can only be defined through a vertical relationship with God, not through the perceptions of other persons with whom an individual may have horizontal relationships through employment or otherwise.

## **B. The practical implications of termination**

Even while dealing with the personal and spiritual implications of termination, the church musician must not ignore the practical aspects and consequences that will accompany an unplanned or unanticipated change in employment. A number of questions need to be addressed regarding the individual's decision whether to contest termination or how best to manage the process of closure. These questions include:

### **1. Financial implications of termination**

What are the musician's current financial obligations? How will those obligations be met in the absence of salary? What resources will be available until new employment is obtained?



How are the musician's needs addressed by any proposed severance package? Does a new job mean relocation to a new city or state? Do the musician's personal circumstances render it impractical to leave a present location, sell a house, etc.?

## **2. Professional implications of termination**

Does termination from the position attach any stigma to the musician? How can management of the termination situation result in improved prospects for the musician in other jobs? Is the musician's professionalism equal to the task of maintaining status quo at a minimum in all programs underway at the employing institution during a period of transition and closure?

## **3. Personal implications of termination**

How will the musician deal with the feelings of failure and inadequacy that termination will bring? How will the musician deal with the anger at what will almost certainly be perceived as unfair and unjust actions on the part of the employing institution? Will the musician have access to counseling to assist in working out constructive approaches to the problems and conflicts that the termination situation creates? How will the emotional roller coaster of termination affect intimate relationships, spouses and friends?

# **C. Severance and legal issues**

## **1. Provisions of the employment agreement**

In the event that termination occurs while the musician is working under a written employment agreement, it is likely that the provisions of that document will control the process of termination. If the agreement is silent as to termination, severance and dispute resolution, the musician will generally have little if



any ground upon which to challenge adverse actions taken by the employing institution.

## **2. Advice from independent counsel**

Consulting with independent personal legal counsel can have a number of benefits for the musician who is being terminated from employment. The attorney can, of course, provide advice concerning the legal issues of the termination and what recourse the law may be able to offer the musician. The attorney will also be an advocate for the musician while not being so emotionally involved in the termination process that objectivity and independent judgment are clouded. An attorney may be able to assist the musician in negotiating a severance package that is fair and just or which will significantly mitigate the financial disaster of termination.

## **3. Severance compensation**

Even in terminations where healthy process has not been followed and anger and hurtful actions have been allowed to cloud underlying reasons for conflict and render reconciliation impossible, most religious institutions find it appropriate to offer some form of severance package to terminated church musicians. Ideally, severance is governed by contract through the written employment agreement.

A terminated musician may be pressed for an immediate decision regarding tendering a resignation or acceptance of termination with severance. A musician may be threatened with a withdrawal of any severance benefits if the musician consults with counsel or even takes time to reflect on events before making a decision. For all of the reasons noted in the discussion of grieving above, it is crucial for a musician confronting termination not to make any immediate decisions when given notice of termination and not to yield to pressures to make an immediate decision concerning severance.

## **D. Role of PAM**

An obvious question for a PAM member confronting termination will be “What help and support will PAM give me during this traumatic time?” The answer to that question is a continually evolving one, but certain basic principles have become clear to the Executive Board over the years of its existence:

### **1. Support versus intervention**

Intervention seeking to mediate disputes between employing institutions and musicians is not effective unless it has been solicited by both the musician and the institution.

In most instances the Executive Board has found it to be helpful to focus on proactive measures to encourage conflict ventilation and resolution before termination becomes the only possible outcome. The Executive Board has also assisted terminated musicians in focusing on the need for achieving damage control and minimizing adverse professional impact on the musician.

### **2. Education**

Through its conferences, its Journal, (Reformed Liturgy and Music), annual meetings and the resources of the membership, PAM provides extensive opportunities for the education of members in areas of professional concerns, conflict resolution and professional conduct. PAM is willing to provide, through its Executive Board, consultation to hiring institutions who were experiencing difficulties with their musicians and wished to explore avenues of professional growth and dispute resolution with their musician, rather than simply terminating the musician.

The resources of PAM are available to every member and to the institutions served by the members. PAM has been instrumental over the years, in educating congregations concerning written

employment agreements, fair termination provisions, pro forma resignations and compensation packages. It is a challenge to every member and to PAM to continue this educational effort in the areas of dispute resolution and professional handling of the closure of employment relations.

It is also, on occasion, the difficult task of the Executive Board to educate a terminated musician concerning the actions and inactions which have placed the musician into unemployed status. It has consistently been the philosophy of the Executive Board that it would not reflexively take the side of a musician in a conflict situation merely because the musician was a member of the Association and requested support. While insisting that procedures associated with termination and severance be fair and just, the Executive Board has never hesitated to acknowledge proper PC(U.S.A.) authority or to encourage terminated musicians to accept their rightful share of responsibility for adversely resolved conflicts. At the same time, the Executive Board has striven to educate those musicians in skills and techniques that would help them to avoid similar problems in the future.

### **3. Employment networking**

The employment service offered by PAM (operated through the Association's Office in Louisville, Kentucky) is an invaluable resource for members who need to find new employment. The scope of the services affords access to full and part-time employment opportunities. Any member who feels a need at any time to explore employment opportunities is welcome to use this service for a small fee.

### **4. An ear for listening, a shoulder for crying**

PAM offers compassion and help through its Professional Concerns Committee. Members of this committee are available to receive telephone calls and letters from members who are

in troubled situations. The Committee exists to serve the membership, and is available to listen to the problems of members and to attempt to help members in troubled circumstances sort out their options and responsibilities. The membership of the Professional Concerns Committee represents a wide range of experience and expertise.

## **E. Easter triumph, Easter joy**

As Christians, we are people deeply ingrained with resurrection theology. We look, as a matter of faith, for triumph in adversity and for redemption, by God's grace, of even the most evil situations. Even at the grave, we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The termination of a church musician's employment, wrongful or justified, fairly or unfairly done, presents to the musician opportunities by which the adversity may be redeemed and triumph realized. Did the termination of a musician result in a complete reappraisal of professional and interpersonal skills by the musician, leading to further training and significant changes in outlook and approaches to job performance? If so, there is resurrection. Did the unfair termination of a musician and the resulting hurt and division in the employing institution cause the leadership of the institution to reassess and change the means by which it maintains its employment relationships? If so, there is resurrection.

Termination presents dual and seemingly contradictory challenges to the musician. No one can safely or in faith permit self worth and esteem to be determined by perceptions of others or to be diminished by the wrongful actions of others. On the other hand, Christian individuals are obliged to accept responsibility for their actions and to learn from adversity, using the knowledge and experience gained from what seems to be death to bring forth new life and hope. If a musician accepts and lives these challenges through a termination, then, again, there will be resurrection.

## FOR FURTHER READING:

*Halverstadt, Hugh F.*, “Managing Church Conflict”  
Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY

*Fisher, Roger, Ury, William*, “Getting To Yes”  
Penguin Books, New York, NY

*Leas, Speed B.*, “Discover Your Conflict Management Style”  
The Alban Institute, Mount St. Alban, Washington, DC

*Leas, Speed B.*, “Moving Your Church Through Conflict”  
The Alban Institute, Mount St. Alban, Washington, DC

# CODE OF ETHICS

## **For members of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians:**

1. All individuals shall be eligible for membership and participation in the Presbyterian Association of Musicians. The Presbyterian Association of Musicians - its National Office, Executive Board, and Chapters - shall not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, age, religious affiliation, gender, marital or familial status, sexual orientation, disability, or medical condition. All members of PAM are entitled to enjoy the privileges and are expected to accept the responsibilities of membership. Members shall be considered equally for PAM offices and participation in PAM activities. Members shall abide by the Code of Ethics, the Guidelines for the Employment of Church Musicians in Presbyterian Churches, the Constitution of PAM and the bylaws of their local chapters. Churches posting open positions on PAM's online job listings agree to abide by the non-discrimination standards stated above, and to base employment decisions solely upon professional competence and availability. PAM will consider issues of accessibility when choosing sites for its activities. PAM will endeavor to make printed materials accessible to members with visual disabilities.
2. PAM members shall strive to promote good working relationships within this organization and within their employing institutions. PAM members shall observe both the spirit and the letter of the Code of Ethics in their dealings with PAM, with individual members, with musicians under their supervision, and in their relationships with employing organizations. Members shall address differences of opinion within this organization through appropriate channels,

including its Executive Board. Members shall address differences of opinion with employing institutions (local church) through appropriate channels, including its Personnel Committee, as provided by their individual employment agreements.

3. PAM members shall respect the legal rights of others. PAM members shall respect the property rights of composers, authors, and publishers by being aware of and complying with the copyright laws and attendant procedures regarding performance, reproduction, and performing rights. PAM members shall respect the employment rights of others by being aware of and complying with all laws and procedures pertaining to immigration and work permits.