



Middlesex Chapter American Guild of Organists

- February 2026 -

Dean's Column

Hi All,

It is fascinating to hear organists tell “their story” about what led them toward playing the king of instruments. This was evident at our “PreEpiphany” Party in January. Discussion included the answers to questions such as: Who put the bug in our ear to pursue the organ? What/who led us to the instrument? What arrangements were made for lessons, practice and service performances? This subject is something that organists have in common, however, we don’t often get the opportunity to share our “story” with each other.

To that end, beginning with this newsletter, a new column, “Meet the Members” will be featured. In it we’ll discover our musical journey as well as hobbies, interests, and any other noteworthy information that members wish to share with each other. The idea of this column was borne from observing conversations at our social get-togethers. Besides chatting about what’s new, telling our “story” was always an [exciting] topic of discussion. Please think about sharing your story with our membership.

Another addition to the MCAGO Newsletter concerns related events other than chapter events. If you are aware of an event that might interest our members and friends, please let me know.

Finally, our next event, “Organ Plus...” Members’ Recital, opens the door for performance on instruments other than organ. Participation is open to all members and friends of the chapter. (By the way, if you are reading this and not a chapter member, you are a friend of the chapter.) If not already receiving this via email and enjoy the newsletter, please send me a request and you’ll be put on our mailing list.



PreEpiphany Party: Friday, 1/2/2026

Pictured (l. to r.): Chun Tong, Nick Gatto, Chris Deibert, Joe Suchocki, Father Mike, Karl Geiger, Emily Sensenbach-Gopal

Soli Deo Gloria,

Joe Suchocki

Upcoming Chapter Events

March 1st, 3pm, 2026: First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen -

“Organ Plus...” Member’s Recital: Featuring music performed on solo instruments, voices, organists, and pianists. The performers include members and friends of the chapter. This is an excellent opportunity for musicians to share their talents with chapter members and friends. Accompanists (piano/organ) can be provided if requested. Performers are requested to prepare approximately 10 minutes of music (depending on the number of performers). **If interested, please contact Brenda Day by February 8th at (732) 822-2086 or brenda@daysmail.net.**

April, 2026 (date TBD): Organs of Princeton Organ Crawl. Members will visit, learn, and play fine instruments of which the Princeton-area has to offer. Members will be treated to lunch at a nearby eatery after the event.

June 14, 2026, 3pm: Dean’s Picnic. The last event of the 2025-2026 season provides another chance for members and friends to get together in a relaxing BBQ atmosphere.

Other Notable Events

Sunday, February 1, 7:00 PM: Candlelight Concert Series of First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen -

"Songs My Mother Taught Me"

Join us as we honor Black History Month with this celebration of African American history through song!

Lebanon Valley College Assistant Professor of Voice, Jonathan Walker-VanKuren, brings African American spirituals into the spotlight through this solo recital, "Songs My Mother Taught Me." Mr. Walker-VanKuren brings the stories behind these songs to life and focuses on their important place in the classical music repertoire. This recital will be in collaboration with Tyler Canonico-Dilley, piano.

Tickets are available by suggested donation in advance or at the door.

Adult General Admission: \$22

Senior Admission: \$15

17/Under: FREE

To purchase in advance: https://www.paypal.com/ncp/payment/G3NV9JSS8CW8N?fbclid=IwY2xjawPeFYtleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETFINKtuOFRRreXNEWXJkTFJjc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHn8J-4TB7gjPNFmokXk5KghNs06UdlwOsXQ6UW9MOUmVQs1HUTofW9k0ZuTI_aem_ENQCgf1Sd0xNwKKN0wc6Ww

Do you have an event that you wish to share with us? Send information to jsuchocki@optonline.net.

Don't forget about our chapter's OSG - \$500 toward organ lessons for young pianists 18 yrs and younger

Middlesex Chapter Organ Study Grant

<https://mcago.org/organ-study-grant/>



“Meet the Members” - Joe Suchocki

Born in Jersey City and raised in Atlantic Highlands, both of my **parents** worked; Dad was a State Trooper in the NJ State Police and Mom was a telephone operator with “the phone company”. The oldest of 3 with a younger brother and sister, piano began at 4 years old when a neighbor, **Mrs. Larson**, discovered my ability to “play by ear”. My parents bought a huge, old, heavy upright for \$10, which cost less than it cost to move to our living room. Piano lessons began and lasted until 6th grade when I started organ lessons. My grandfather once told me “If you play well, you might become a church organist someday”. He had high regard for the position. I wish I could go back and tell him that I did exactly that!

I started organ lessons in the fall of 6th grade after **Father Lease**, pastor at St. Agnes church, phoned my parents to ask if I might be interested in lessons. He learned through conversation with teachers at St. Agnes school that I played the piano. The arrangement we had was that I would play the early 7:45am Sunday Mass and Monday night Novenas and the church would pay for my organ lessons. Lessons began with **Mr. Weber**, whom I found to be strict but the perfect teacher for me. My first services began in the latter half of 6th grade. My biggest fear was missing cues during a service to start or stop playing (it still is).

In the fall of 7th grade, I was promoted to play the “choir Mass”, and became the choir director while in high school. Education continued at Montclair State College as a music education major, while continuing as organist/choir director at St. Agnes. Upon graduation from Montclair I taught vocal music at North Brunswick Township High School for seven years. While working on the high school’s spring musicals, the matchmakers at school introduced me to Debbie O’Connell, who said “yes” when asked for her hand in marriage. We wed in 1981 and raised two beautiful girls, Meghan and Kathryn. After 7 years in education, I ventured out into the world of IT, learning how to code in assembler and COBOL, and remained in IT for 27 years. My tenure as organist/choir director/Music Director at Our Lady of Peace began in 1988. I retired last year after 37 years. Having Sundays free, I’ve been enjoying visiting local churches to hear what other organists are playing. I’ve also enjoyed working as a substitute organist.

I have always been a part-time organist/choir director throughout my teaching and IT careers. In addition to playing the organ on Sundays, I played in a band called the ‘Supertonic’ from 1974 until the mid 1990s (Musicians got the pun, and non-musicians thought the name sounded like some sort of cocktail!), Juggling church, the band, and the full time IT job consumed a lot of my time, but my grandfather always said “work hard when you’re young so that you won’t have to when you’re old”.

Other hobbies are vegetable/herb gardening, river and ocean cruises, crossword puzzles, boating, salt water fishing, target shooting, and photography. Oh, and I play in a band for non-profit gigs in a band known as “The Vino Brothers”. I also am an active 4th degree member of the Knights of Columbus at Our Lady of Peace.

Had it not been for the mindfulness and encouragement of Mrs. Larson, Father Lease, the nuns at St. Agnes, Mr. Weber, and especially my parents, I’m not sure what I’d be doing now. Thank you angels! I also am thankful to have such wonderful colleagues in the Middlesex Chapter AGO! As a member of the chapter since 1990, I feel privileged to continue to learn and grow organ skills with such a wonderful group of talented and affable people! Moving forward, I will continue to look for ways to encourage young pianists to learn about the “king of instruments” through the chapter’s Organ Study Grant.

Chapter members, please consider sharing your story in a future newsletter. Send via email to Joe Suchocki – jsuchocki@optonline.net

Chapter Trivia:

Can you name this MCAGO blast from the past?



[answer to December's "Chapter Trivia" – Middlesex Chapter's 75th Anniversary Celebration – October 23, 2023
*(l to r) top row - Father Mike Krull, Joe Suchocki, Nick Gatto; middle row - Emily Sensenbach-Gopal, Debbie Suchocki, Nancy Cliff;
 bottom row - Li Chen, Albert Chen, Brenda Day, Martha Nowik*



Middlesex Chapter AGO Executive Board

Dean:	Joe Suchocki	jsuchocki@optonline.net
Sub-Dean:	Jody Velloso	drjodydokter@gmail.com
Secretary:	Emily Sensenbach-Gopal	esensenb@hotmail.com
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Member-At-Large:	Brenda Day	Brenda@daysmail.net
Member-At-Large:	(vacant)	

Do you have an event or other pertinent information that you wish to list in future newsletters? Email the info to jsuchocki@optonline.net