



Middlesex Chapter American Guild of Organists

- March 2026 -

Dean's Column

Hi All,

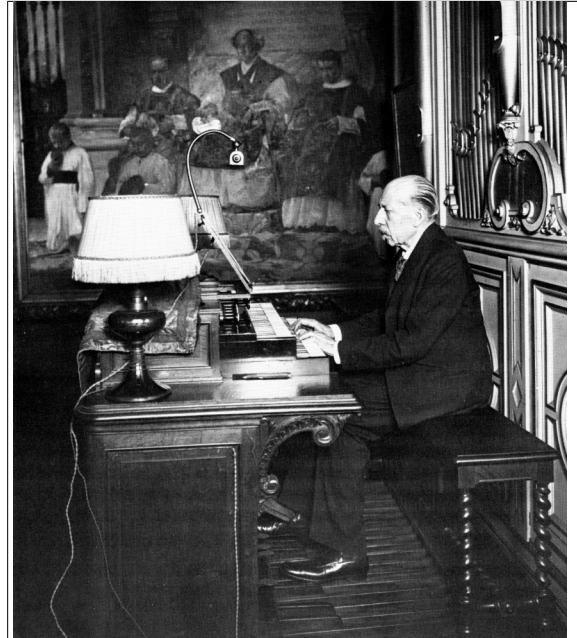
Being a recently retired church musician has afforded me the unique opportunity to hear the incredible music being offered by colleagues at different churches each Sunday. Organists do not get the chance to do that very often. That's what makes our chapter's next event, "Organ Plus..." so special. We get to experience an excellent performance by several of our chapter members and friends!

While traveling recently I found myself wanting to visit every church I saw. Is it just me, or do other organists marvel at seeing churches, large and small, and wonder about the instrument that is installed within? Years ago while in Germany, I happened to be visiting a large church and, by luck, heard what sounded like an organ lesson being taught. The sound reverberated against the stone walls of the huge space and made simple registrations sound magnificent. What a joy!

It just so happens that the Middlesex Chapter's April event will afford us the exceptional opportunity to visit several churches in Princeton. This "hands-on" activity gives us a chance to closely examine these fine instruments! Many thanks to Shea Velloso for putting this amazing event together for us. Lunch at a local venue will be provided for chapter members, too!

Soli Deo Gloria,

Joe Suchocki



Octogenarian **Charles-Marie Widor** (b. 2/21/1844) at the nine-stop Cavaille-Coll organ in his apartment at the Palais Mazarin, the Institut de France

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
Treasurer:	Mary Ann Fraser	Maryannfraser31@gmail.com
Chaplain:	Reverend Michael Krull	frkrull@aol.com
Member-At-Large:	Brenda Day	Brenda@daysmail.net
Member-At-Large:	(vacant)	

Upcoming Chapter Events

Sunday, March 1st, 3pm, 2026: First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen - “Organ Plus...” Member’s Recital

Saturday, April 18, 10am, 2026: 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.

Sunday, 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

Lenten Concert Series – 30 minute concerts - Wednesdays at Noon

First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, 270 Woodbridge Ave., Metuchen, NJ
Livestreamed on FPC Website and FPC Facebook Page

March 4, Ethan Draper – Organ

March 11, Jordan Klotz – Organ

March 18, Lyndon Ji – Piano

March 25, Eleanor Rees – Piano

admission is free – Info: contact Jordan Klotz, Director of Music Ministries
(732) 491-2266 | jklotz@fpcweb.org

April 18, 2026, Organ Recital, Christopher Deibert, St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral, Metuchen

May 1, 2026, Anna Lapwood, Boardwalk Hall Arena, Atlantic City

May 16, 2026, Mozart Festival – 2 Symphonies (Paris and Haffner), plus a surprise concerto, St. Francis Cathedral Orchestra, St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral, Metuchen

Do you have an event or other pertinent information that you wish to list in future newsletters? Email the info to Joe Suchocki – 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” – Nick Gatto

The journey which led me into the world of Catholic liturgical music is a rather unconventional one. I did not learn the organ at a young age, nor did I even start playing piano until I was 11 years old. My musical life began by starting oboe lessons when I was about 9 years old, and a student at Saint Bartholomew School in East Brunswick, New Jersey, my home parish. I often joke that, when it came time for me to pick an instrument to play in the band, I wanted to be a non-conformist, but unfortunately, I was a small kid so any large instrument could have gotten up and played me. So, oboe it was! Luckily, I had access to a wonderful teacher, as my older sister was taking flute lessons from a music teacher who's primary instrument was actually oboe. I studied with the same teacher, Mrs. Patricia Hunt, from then all the way through high school.

As far as coming to the piano, I had always wanted to learn, but I never actually had a piano in the house on which to practice. (I was once gifted a small Casio electric keyboard as a Christmas gift when I was little.) Oddly, my start on the piano was borne out of tragedy- When I was about 11 years old, as the daughter of close friends of my parents had died in a terrible car accident. These friends knew that I was interested in learning the piano, and one day decided to have the piano that their daughter played delivered to our house. From then on, I was finally able to start learning the piano more seriously, and took lessons all the way through high school.

When I started my freshman year as a Music Education Major at The College of New Jersey, I had chosen to be an oboe major (since I felt like I was better at it at the time), but I had still used my piano skills on occasion, mostly accompanying friends in juries or recitals whenever I asked. Not really wanting to become a public school teacher, however, I decided to apply for graduate school. I was fortunate enough to attend Carnegie Mellon University starting in the fall of 2000, studying with the phenomenal principal oboist of the Pittsburgh Symphony, Cynthia Koledo DeAlmeida.

Upon completion of my graduate degree, I had worked as a freelancer and taken some professional orchestra auditions, but, like many musicians starting out in "the real world," I was largely unemployed. I had put my accompanying skills back to use in 2003, as I returned to my alma mater of The College of New Jersey as a staff piano accompanist, a job I started through sheer luck! I happened to have been visiting a friend in the Music Building one day, when one of the vocal professors told me that her regular studio accompanist had just moved away, and asked if I might consider accompanying some studio classes and some voice lessons. In need of some steadier income, I wound up working in the music department of my alma mater for 20 years, learning vocal pedagogy techniques through sheer osmosis.

When I came back to New Jersey after graduate school, however, I also returned to attending mass at my home parish of St. Bartholomew Church. The organist at the time was a very talented musician named Mitch Weisiger. We immediately hit it off and found that we worked well together, and he, along with the pastor at the time, Monsignor Michael Alliegro, offered me an interesting opportunity- If I came and played oboe at church on Sunday mornings with him, he would give me free organ lessons. (He knew I was a decent pianist, as I would occasionally work as a substitute for him, covering the masses on piano whenever he went on vacation.) The rationale was that, if I got good enough at the organ, I could also cover funerals and weddings for both him and other organists in the area when needed. I wound up taking to the organ like a duck to water and would take every opportunity I could to practice on the mammoth 95-rank Walker Digital organ that was (and still is) in the church. Eventually, I got a job as the "8am Mass organist" at the nearby St. Thomas Catholic Church in Old Bridge, and when my teacher, Mitch Weisiger left to take a position at a large Methodist church in Georgia in the Summer of 2004, I wound up taking over all organ-playing duties at St. Bartholomew Church!

Over the next several years, I often tried to take advantage of any opportunity I could to accompany choirs, learning not only various choral rehearsal techniques and pedagogical concepts but also increasing my knowledge of Catholic sacred music and liturgy. When St. Bartholomew's previous Music Director retired in 2010, I was appointed as the successor in that position. For the last 15-plus years, I have been honored and blessed to serve the parish community where I grew up, with a wonderful choir full of fantastic people, a very supportive congregation, and great pastor in Fr. Thomas Walsh. Through all of this, I still manage to maintain a freelance oboe-playing career, performing with several orchestras in New Jersey and surrounding states and also with a fantastic woodwind quintet called "Quinception." I currently live in Edison with my wife (Andrea), son (Brendan), and Australian labradoodle (Neville).

Chapter Trivia:

Can you name this MCAGO blast from the past?




[answer to February's "Chapter Trivia" – "The Afternoon Show" with Bernard Spigner and Racquel Williams - WCTC 1450 AM: February 5th, 1999 (l to r) Joe Suchocki, Bernard Spigner, Chris Deibert, Brenda Day, Ron Thayer



Friends of the Middlesex Chapter: Please consider supporting our chapter by joining us. Follow this link or QR code for further information:

**The Middlesex Chapter of the American
Guild of Organists presents:**



**Hear the pipe organ with
instrumentalists and singers as our
members and their guests perform**

ORGAN+

Sunday, March 1

3 p.m.

**First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen
270 Woodbrige Ave.
Metuchen, NJ 08840**

Free and open to the public