The Owner's Guide to Piano Repair

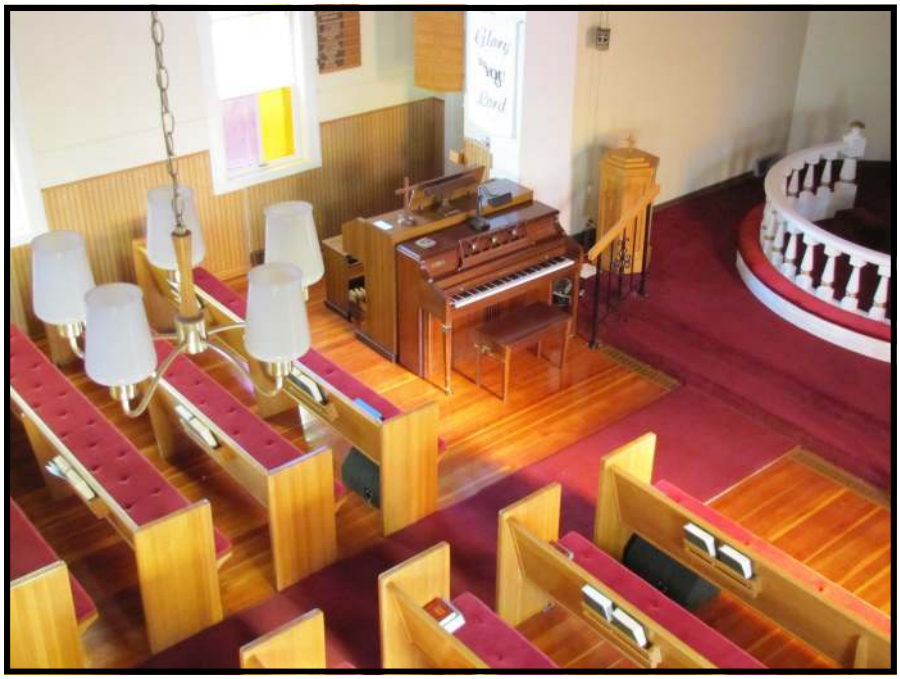


Focus On: Church Piano Maintenance

Information provided courtesy of:

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With music being an integral part of most church programs, taking proper care of the various pianos a church has should be a coordinated effort involving both a qualified technician and the appropriate church members or committees—it's not a job that should be left to chance. The role of the technician is to: 1. listen to the representatives of the church to understand the church's musical needs in respect to their pianos, 2. inspect said pianos to give a plan of action to fulfill those needs, and 3. provide the expertise to accomplish the agreed upon repairs and maintenance. **This brochure is intended to give some general guidelines to serve as a starting point in developing a coordinated maintenance program for the pianos of your church.**



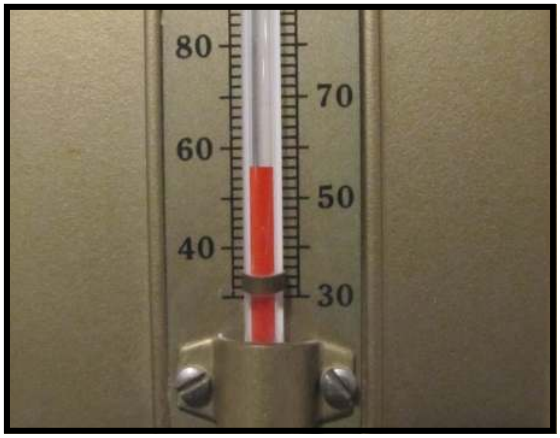
Up front and center.

Most churches have a number of pianos throughout the church building. What specific needs do the various pianos typically found in a church have?

The sanctuary piano:

Whether a church has a large sanctuary with an well designed set-up for a cast of musicians (see cover photo), or a small sanctuary with a simple piano and organ combination (above photo), the sanctuary piano should receive first-class maintenance. This would include a **minimum** of two tunings a year, regularly scheduled regulation, voicing, cleaning, etc. (Regulation involves resetting adjustments in the action originally made in the factory to bring the performance of a piano up to its potential, while voicing involves working with tonal qualities of the piano by precise adjustments to the surface of the felt hammers which strike the strings.)

While some churches are fortunate enough to have climate control systems which keep temperature and humidity constant year-round, other churches must keep a careful eye on utility bills by heating (or cooling) the sanctuary (and other parts of the church depending on usage)—leading to swings in temperature and/or humidity which affect tuning stability.



For sanctuary pianos in a church where temperature and humidity tend to vary, more frequent maintenance may be expected. If the heat is turned up on Sundays, then dropped back down during the week, expect to double the frequency of tunings. Obviously, if the savings in utility bills are significant, an increase in the budget for piano maintenance might be well justified.

Having a humidity control system designed specifically for the piano may also be helpful. The installation of a specialized system will help iron out swings in pitch and should make tunings more stable as well as lessen other humidity-related problems. (This type of system is also useful for other pianos of a church.)



Another specific need of the sanctuary piano might be that of a dedicated amplification system, especially when the piano is teamed with other amplified instruments and vocalists. Even a quality grand, such as the sanctuary piano featured on the cover of this article, can be drowned out when a praise band with full percussion and electric (or amplified acoustic) guitars are added to the mix.

Having a quality microphone and sound system is of course vital to provide effective amplification of a piano. Correct placement of the microphone in relationship to the piano is the area where your technician can be of most service.

Of course, having top-end maintenance won't give satisfactory results if the sanctuary piano itself is not up to the challenge of filling a large room with sound. Ordinarily, the best piano the church has is in the sanctuary, but if that piano is not providing quality sound and performance, an upgrade might be worth considering. (The topic of piano acquisition will be touched upon later in this article.)



The balcony piano:

Depending on the set up of the church (more specifically, where the choir sits), the balcony piano may be used just as frequently as the piano on the main floor of the sanctuary. If that's the case it should be maintained to the same high standards as its main floor partner, starting with the scheduling of regular tuning, regulation and voicing

Unfortunately, aside from tuning, balcony pianos oftentimes are more likely to be neglected when it comes to essential maintenance—a result of not being so directly in the spotlight of the congregation. A thorough check-up and itemized list of needed repairs would be the first step to take (if maintenance has not been a high priority in the past), followed by the scheduling of recommended repairs and maintenance. The good news is once a neglected piano is brought up to speed, a normal maintenance plan should be enough to make sure the piano remains in top form.

The basement piano:



For a basement piano which serves an important purpose, such as choir practice, a once or twice a year tuning should be considered the minimum level of maintenance. If other issues have not been attended to for some time, a thorough inspection should be done, with an itemized list of repairs drawn up for consideration.

Unfortunately, the church basement is often the end of the road for church pianos which don't have a defined purpose. For such pianos, neglected maintenance will often result in a piano which is played rarely, if ever. Sometimes these pianos are indeed not worth fixing, but other times tuning and a bit of maintenance are all that's needed to bring the piano up to the condition where it might be enjoyed. Remember that a piano almost certainly won't be played if it is badly out of tune—get a neglected piano tuned up and put into good condition and it's much more likely that it will be used and enjoyed.

Fellowship hall pianos:



Since fellowship halls (and parlors) of many churches are used for places of socialization, having a well-tuned piano on hand for occasions in which music is called for is sure to be appreciated.

Appropriate use of an available piano should be encouraged. The more frequently a piano is used, the more likely church members will be to plan on including music in their activities. (One way to encourage use is to keep an open hymnal or songbook available on the piano at all times, along with a printed note to the effect that the piano has been tuned and is meant to be enjoyed.)



Classroom pianos:

Sunday school rooms or classrooms often have a piano intended for use on a regular basis with the children of a church.

Although young children may be just beginning to appreciate music and develop their musical ears, they will be more likely to enjoy music played on a piano which is in tune than on one which is not.

Overview of maintenance needs:

Each church is unique, and the amount of use pianos have in worship and social activities will vary greatly from one church to the next, but as a general rule it is safe to say that a church which makes an effort to have its pianos tuned and kept in good repair will be more likely to see them used and enjoyed.

When pianos are left untuned year after year, it is often perceived that they are not playable. A common opinion many folks have is that a piano which is badly out of tune from years of neglect can't be tuned again.

Fortunately, this is almost never the case. With some effort, even a long-neglected piano can be brought back to life. Bringing all the pianos of a church into good playing condition and keeping them there is always a good investment!

What other general issues are there for the music or finance committees to consider related to the church's pianos?

Mobility issues:



Pianos often need to be moved from point A to point B in a church environment, so auxiliary casters (or dollies) can be of real benefit. Not only do dollies make moving a piano on a carpeted surface easier, but they also protect many hard-surface floors from being marred by the small metal casters that the typical piano comes equipped with. Again, your technician can be of assistance here, with both purchase and installment of this type of equipment.

Donation of pianos:

Instruments which are given to a church can be both a blessing and a curse. If a church is strapped for cash and in need of a piano for a specific area, having a quality piano given to the church as an donation can of course be an answer to a prayer, especially in a situation where the piano is a new one purchased after careful consideration of available makes and models and the location for which the piano will be put into use.

On the other hand, an older instrument which is given to the church may be in poor condition and needing numerous repairs, or not be well suited for the location which the giver has in mind, or (worse still) not needed at all. Many churches have more pianos on hand than they actually need, largely because once a piano is donated, getting rid of it (ever) can be a delicate issue.

If possible it is a good idea to have your technician inspect any piano being considered for donation before it is actually delivered to the church. Then, the technician's findings can be considered by the appropriate committee and a thoughtful decision can be made.

Disposal of unwanted pianos:

For pianos which are currently housed by a church and are unwanted, it is a wise idea to announce the desire to "look for a good home for the piano" in order to avoid hurt feelings, especially when the identity of the original donor is not common knowledge. (If someone's mother or grandmother originally owned the piano and it was given in memorial, better to find out before the piano is removed than after.)

To avoid future problems of this nature down the road, a brass plaque

affixed to the fallboard with the name of the donor (or at the very least, a card taped to the inside of the case) is a good idea—both for the fact that it recognizes the generosity of the gift, and also for helping future committees take into account whether living relatives of the donor are still church members.

Purchase of new pianos:

If possible, any purchase of new instruments should be a joint decision made up of those church members most likely to have strong opinions—the church pianist, the pastor, interested members of the music, finance and worship committees, and also your regular technician.

Having a qualified technician's opinion is invaluable, especially when it comes down to deciding between brands and models. Every store's salesman will try to give the impression that the brand (or brands) the store is selling will best fit the bill (a piano salesman is, after all, in the business of selling pianos), but a technician can tell you (from a standpoint of someone who has actually worked on the various brands of pianos), which specific pianos will sound and perform the best, and which pianos will also hold up the best over time.

When trying out pianos in the store, realize that the sound of an instrument in a showroom setting may differ from how it will sound in the room it is intended for. So, if the showroom is small, but a large sanctuary is the destination for the piano, look for an instrument with a bigger sound that will fill the target space.

After your search committee has settled on a brand and model and has actually selected the exact piano you want, be sure to get the serial number of that specific piano and insist that the piano you've tried out and chosen is the one that is delivered. Stores will at times deliver a crated instrument of the same model when it's more convenient, and the replacement piano may or may not play and sound just the same.

Getting the ball rolling:

If all that is needed is a simple tuning on one or two pianos, a person in authority simply needs to contact a qualified technician to perform the service. However, if an overall maintenance program for a church's pianos is long overdue, an initial meeting and discussion of interested members of the church would be an extremely helpful first step. If that is the case, refer to the preliminary work-up supplement for helpful tips that will make the process go more smoothly. Once this initial set of steps has been taken, at that point call in your technician to assist in providing a plan of action to get your church from where it is now, to where you would like it to be in terms of the maintenance of its pianos.



The beautiful sound of a well maintained piano adds to the inspiration of the service.

"In business to bring your piano to its full potential."

Please advise me when you wish to have this repair professionally done.

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