

The New LDS Organist

A Guide through the First Months

This course of twelve lessons is designed to help pianists adapt their skills to the organ as soon as possible. Lessons 1-5 and 10-12 are for everyone. Those who must begin playing for church meetings very soon might consider themselves in “shortcut mode” and skip lessons 6-9. These four lessons are for those who can spend the time required to refine their playing to a higher level before beginning to serve as an organist.

The lessons are distributed free over the Internet as audio podcasts. The lessons vary in length between seven and thirty-five minutes plus pause time. Organists with MP3 players can download the podcasts from iTunes and take the lessons at the organ console. The lessons involve listening to instruction, trying out new skills at the organ, and playing simplified hymns. Those without MP3 players can hear the lessons through their computer. Those without computers can study the lessons in written form.

All of the materials needed throughout the course can also be downloaded free over the Internet (in Adobe pdf format). In addition to the many useful handouts, the book contains over twenty-five simplified hymns that can be used in those first weeks of service.

Instructions on how to access the course can be found online at <www.organ.byu.edu>. Those familiar with iTunes can simply search for “new lds organist” podcast and download it. A table of contents follows.

Course introduction for priesthood leaders (written form only)

- Desired outcomes and overview of the course.
- What might be expected of a new ward organist going through this course.
- Needs of the organist who is going through this course.
- How to encourage the organist to continue training.

1. Welcome to Organ Playing!

- Challenges facing pianists who are new to the organ.
- Distinguish between shortcut mode and polish mode.
- Course summary; how to make the most of the course.
- Introducing the organ console.
- Registration: get to know some of the main sounds of organ stops (principal, diapason, and octave 8, 4, and 16).
- A challenge to make three commitments.

2. First Steps in Pedal Playing

- Knowing when the feet should play.
- Organ shoes.
- Position at the organ for good pedal playing.
- Registration: 8', 4', 2', and 16' pitches; basic pedal pitches; chorus registration as a basis for hymn playing; building for clarity.
- Playing repeated notes with the toe of each foot (including notation), alternate toes, heels.
- Playing very simple pedal lines in combination with two simple manual parts.
- Pedaling in polish mode.

3. Playing Prelude Music that Invites the Spirit

- Play prelude music in a manner that will help the congregation to begin worship.
- How to build a repertoire of prelude music—find playable hymns or other appropriate music.
- Registration: flutes, strings (incl. celestes), hybrids; mutations, soft solo combinations, tremulant
- Draw a single viable registrational combination, branching out to others as able.
- Set the volume (expression pedal[s]) appropriately.
- Play the music with confidence (either manual only or with pedal).
- Know when to begin the prelude, and create a smooth transition as the prelude ends and the speaker begins.

4. Effective Hymn Playing—An Overview

- Play in a manner that will “invite the spirit of the Lord, create a feeling of reverence, unify us as members, and provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord.”
- Learn when and how to become involved in choosing the hymns.
- Work effectively with the director.
- Registration: building for richness.

5. Hymn Playing in Shortcut Mode—Playing Hymns Right Now

Shortcut mode—play hymns in any form as well as you can.

Knowing when shortcut mode is necessary.

For each hymn, whether in shortcut or polish mode:

- Prepare one viable registrational combination.
- Play an effective introduction.

For each hymn prepared in shortcut mode, either:

- Choose one of the options listed under “Hymn Playing in Polish Mode” below, or
- Play all four parts directly from the hymnbook.

6. Hymn Playing in Polish Mode—Playing Single Lines in Legato Style

Polish mode—play hymns in any form to a polished level (legato, independent lines).

Begin learning to play in polish mode with very simple forms.

Repeated notes: do not tie them at this stage.

Options at this stage, applying Manual technique 101” below:

- Soprano only.
- Soprano in octaves.

Manual technique 101—listen for legato. Techniques emerge as a natural result of good listening skills.

Registration: chorus mixtures.

7. Hymn Playing in Polish Mode —Playing Two Independent Legato Lines

Describe two-part hymn playing—soprano and one other part (alto, tenor, or bass).

Repeated notes: learn to deal with common tones between soprano and alto.

Options for two-part hymn playing:

- One organist (sa, st, or sb), or
- Two organists (sa and tb).

Registration: chorus reeds.

8. Hymn Playing in Polish Mode—Playing Three Independent Legato Lines

Describe three-part hymn playing—soprano and two other parts.

Options and sources for three-part hymn playing:

- Trios with simplified left hand and pedal (arrangements: soprano/new left-hand part/new bass part).
- Trios from hymnbook (sop/tenor/bass), from a list of selected hymns.
- Trios with new middle part (arrangements: sop/new left-hand part/bass).

Registration: manual/pedal balance, couplers.

9. Hymn Playing in Polish Mode—Playing Four Independent Legato Lines

Describe four-part hymn playing in its most common forms:

- Notation on two or three staves.
- The normal arrangement (s/a/t on Great, bass in Pedal).

How to learn a four-part hymn, including score preparation.

Options for four-part hymn playing (written arrangements):

- 2 or 3 staves with simplified left hand and pedal.
- 2 or 3 staves with simplified pedal.
- 2 or 3 staves with generous tying.
- 3 staves with 7- or 15-step plan, no text.

Registration: using the combination action.

10. Hymn Playing—Deciding When to Tie Repeated Notes

The nature of the problem.

Introducing several approaches to making these decisions.

The main principles behind the “rules” and “guidelines”.

“Rules” for those working in both shortcut and polish mode.

“Guidelines” for those wishing to go further at this stage.

Registration: dynamic expression via the expression pedals.

11. Playing Postlude Music Appropriately

Exploring statements in the *Church Handbook* pertinent to postlude music.

Registering postlude pieces.

Choosing music to play for postlude.

Specific questions that are frequently asked about postlude playing.

Registration: solo combinations.

12. Continuing Your Organ Training

Cases for excellence in service as an organist, against staying too long in shortcut mode, and for continued organ training.

Options for continued training, and challenge to commit to some form of continued study right away.