



Frequently Asked Questions

The administration of St. Paul's Music Conservatory in Council Bluffs, IA was asked the following questions relating to starting a parish/school/mission based school of music. See their responses below.

STAFFING



How many music instructors do you have? *We have 12 instructors.*

In addition to instructors, what staff members should we plan for? *A financial administrator/treasurer and administrator. The administrator could also serve as one of the instructors.*

How do you recruit instructors? *We recruit instructors primarily by developing relationships within the community and drawing upon the contacts we make. We haven't advertised for instructors but rather have hand-selected those we know are qualified and share our mission and values.*

What is your retention rate for instructors? If it is high, to what do you attribute that success? If not as high as you wish, what do you wish you could do differently? *Our retention rate is high due to the fact that most of our instructors have strong roots in the community/congregation. Our two original instructors are still with us after 10+ years.*

How are instructors and other staff members paid? How often? How much? Are the instructors employees of SPMC or are they independent contractors? *Instructors are independent contractors, each receiving a 1099 at the end of the year. They are paid monthly through the fees collected from students. Instructors set their own fees, provided that they are within the typical range of our community (between \$18-\$30 for a half hour lesson). Most families prefer to pay monthly at the beginning lesson of each month. The instructor keeps a log of student attendance/payment and submits it to the financial administrator at the end of the month. The conservatory keeps a small portion of the lesson fees (\$3 per lesson) for administrative purposes.*

Do you have contracts with your instructors? *We do not, although instructors are expected to abide by all policies as implemented by the conservatory board.*

For what special sorts of talents should we be looking (besides the ability to teach an instrument)? *A strong Christian faith is a must, as well as the aptitude to mentor students both personally and spiritually.*

How do you involve non-musicians in running SPMC? *The financial administrator does not need to be a musician. Board members do not necessarily need to be musicians, although all involved need to understand/appreciate music and SPMC's mission and vision.*

Who handles phone calls, emails, and office work for SPMC? *Our financial administrator also serves as the church secretary. As secretary, she often serves as the first point of contact with calls and inquiries. Calls and inquires that need further attention are forwarded to the conservatory administrator or the director of outreach. (Who are St. Paul's two pastors.)*

Does SPMC have specific hours when it is "open"? Are instructors expected to come at specific times when SPMC is "open" or do instructors specify when they are available to teach (which might be any evening or weekend)? *Each instructor is given a key to the building. Lessons are coordinated by the instructors at times that mutually meet their schedules as well as those of their students. Currently, most lessons are given between 3:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. on school days and 8-noon on Saturdays. When lessons are being taught after church office hours (after 4 p.m.), the entry doors are magnetically locked, and access is gained through an entry code.*

Who maintains the SPMC website? *We have developed a relationship with 316 Strategy Group of Omaha. We hired the group to build our website about two years ago, and they have since helped us with problems that arise. With the current development of a new church website, maintenance may eventually shift to the builder of that site.*

STUDENTS



What steps have you taken to attract students? *Our best method of recruitment has been by word of mouth referrals and social media, especially Facebook. We also maintain a visible presence in the community by providing student performance opportunities in nursing homes, a bakery, a grocery store, museums, a homeless shelter, our Early Childhood Center etc. Our local music store displays business cards for all of our instructors. Business cards have also been sent to our local school music departments with a letter informing them of our services. At key times during the year, we have asked conservatory families and friends to display yard signs with contact information for SPMC. Yard signs are great!*

What is your retention rate for students? If it is high, to what do you attribute that success? If not as high as you wish, what do you wish you could do differently? *Retention rate is high due to high levels of satisfaction and a high retention rate of instructors. Each year, there are always*

some students who don't continue due to their schedules, other activities, etc. However, we have other students who remain with us through their high school years and "graduate" from SPMC to pursue music in college.

How do you determine the amount that you charge students? See question above under "staffing."

Have any of your students done something special with their music after "graduation" from SPMC? One of our former students is pursuing a B.A. in music at the University of Kansas. Another recent graduate received a scholarship from Augustana college and plans to be active in music in whatever church she is part of in the future. Several students are currently serving as church musicians in their respective congregations, even though some are only 14 or 15 years of age!

Do most students continue to enjoy playing even after they "graduate" from SPMC? Yes!

Do you have one person who is responsible for scheduling or do students schedule with their instructors? Students schedule with their instructors.

How is that scheduling done? The instructors inform students of times that they have available and work with them to find an agreed upon time. Communication is primarily by phone or text message.

Do students pay their instructors or do they pay SPMC? How often do they pay (eg, weekly, monthly) Students pay SPMC. Most pay monthly at the beginning of each month, although some pay weekly.

Do you have a policy handbook (eg, expectations, missed lessons, payments, etc)? Yes.

Do students sign contracts? Strictly speaking, no. Students fill out a student information form. The most recent version of the form includes a question acknowledging receipt of the policy handbook and absence policy.

How are missed payments handled? Missed payments are handled on a case by case basis by the conservatory administrator.

Do you make music scholarships available to students who would like to study but don't have the financial means? This is something that we'd like to develop further. In the past, we've had a small amount of money available but currently do not have a formal music scholarship system.

Do you have age limits for students? What is the age range of your students? No. Most students are between 5-18 years of age, although we also have students in their sixties and seventies.

Do you have limitations on which students play in worship or what/when they play? All music selections must be approved by the pastors and/or the director of music. Most typically, students play during the offering or Communion distribution. Selections are normally taken from our Hymns of the Season Piano Book series or other arrangements from hymns found in Lutheran Service Book itself.

Do you provide instruments (besides pianos and organ)? No. Occasionally, we'll have offers of pianos or other instruments that people are willing to give away or sell. We publicize such offers through our administrator, teachers, and bulletin board. We do however have relationships with local music stores that have various specials or programs for getting kids into instruments.

How many students do you serve in an average week? *We serve around 100 students.*

What payment methods do you accept and how? *Currently cash or check, although we would like to explore card and other electronic means.*

Did music students from St Paul's tend to leave their existing teachers to take lessons at SPMC (we're thinking about how many of our current young people already take music lessons, often with teachers they like)? *Our counsel to students would be not to leave teachers they are already established with. In our case, we naturally and gradually grew primarily with students who hadn't studied before.*

To what extent have non-members become members or attenders of St Paul's as a result of SPMC? *We have examples of students who have been baptized as a result of their connection with us through SPMC! Other students develop a deeper connection with the congregation than they would without the conservatory.*

FACILITIES



What facilities are needed?

No specific facilities are needed other than those used for regular worship and educational opportunities. Certain facilities may be more ideal than others but are not necessary in the beginning.

How many teaching spaces might be needed?

As many as are required. Care should be given to utilize space efficiently within the congregational setting. A studio lesson can be given virtually anywhere.

Is the SPMC area separated from the church office area?

No. The space is dual purpose.

Do you have suggestions of how space might be designed to minimize disruption to other work at the church?

Yes. Each case should be taken on an individual basis. Every church is different and therefore every scenario will be different. We are very blessed to have been able to design and build 4 professional music studio rooms within one of the education wings of our church.

What special needs should we consider when designing/building/remodeling a facility to accommodate a music conservatory?

First you have to ask yourself how you will be using the space. What are your goals, unique purposes? It would be wise to use your space "as is" for a time until you get a better sense of how you want this outreach to look and act.

How have you equipped teaching rooms to block sound?

We have created professional studio spaces with sound deadening technology. (Double thickness sheetrock, sound channel, soundproof caulk.) While this is a great benefit, it is not a

necessary first step. One of our members is a church architect and designed the spaces. We can give you his information as a referral.

How many pianos would you recommend having available?

Start with one. Build from there. We have 6 studio spaces with 5 pianos. Last year we had around 110 students.

What other factors should we take into consideration when planning facilities?

Do not worry about facilities too much initially. Identify a teacher, identify a student and begin. Your steady progress in missions, evangelism and outreach will help you understand better what to do with your facilities.

FINANCES



What start up costs might we expect?

Zero. Don't overthink. You already have four walls a roof and instruments. You don't need to put any initial funds into teaching lessons. Just start teaching. If you have the luxury, start up funds could always be put into good instruments and spaces. (We recommend Boston studio upright pianos. They are roughly \$8,000 each. However a good piano that holds a tune is always a first place to begin. No electronic pianos!)

What ongoing costs should we expect that we might not think of?

Instrument upkeep and utility costs. The beauty of the parish based music conservatory is that you already have most of what you need as a church, school or mission. You just need to start doing it.

Is a portion of each lesson payment retained for SPMC or do the teachers retain the entire amount?

Teachers are contracted workers each getting a 1099 at the end of the year. We provide the space, the instrument (if piano or organ) as well as promotion of the teacher's studio. All the teacher has to do is show up and teach. For these benefits, \$3 of each studio lesson fee goes to SPMC to cover various costs and programs. Teachers have the right to charge as low as the lowest average price per lesson in town and as much as the highest average. (Approximately \$18-\$30)

Who oversees your finances?

SPMC has a financial secretary, Rosemary Paul and St. Pauls treasurer.

How do you obtain funding to continue SPMC's work?

The parish based music conservatory needs no funding. It is a readymade revenue generator (\$3 lesson fee). There is no overhead (teachers are contractors). Resources are primarily already being used for other purposes in most contexts. Also, having a conservatory and engaging in active mission work through music causes you to become "grant ready" depending on how you see your relationship with your congregation, community, circuit and district.

CURRICULUM & PROGRAM



What is included in Christ Academy (St. Paul's Education night) ?
In what ways is it coordinated with the conservatory?

Christ Academy is the ongoing education night for St. Paul's congregation and community for nursery through adults. At Christ Academy there is much interfacing with goals of the music conservatory. First, many, many lessons are taught on Christ Academy nights to members. Children have rotations in music where hymns of the season are taught, the same hymns they play in their lessons. Speakers come and present often, in the area of music raising the musical IQ of the congregation.

Besides SPMC's graded books for pianists, what instruction books do you recommend for other instruments?

Teachers should be at liberty to teach from resources they are most comfortable with. For piano that is Faber, Alfred, Bastian etc. We have had Suzuki teachers and others with their own direction. Some teachers don't use standard lesson books. The manner of teaching depends on the individual teacher and what the student's unique goals are. SPMC resources are meant to be a complement to the standard lessons books used in any given studio. They are also the intentional means of outreach between teacher and student every lesson.

Do students purchase their instruction books?

Yes.

Do you have recommendations about what instruments should (or shouldn't) be taught?

No. Do whatever is natural in your context. We started with piano and guitar and added as the needs arose. Now we teacher organ, guitar, voice, piano, strings, winds and brass.

What is a typical weekly schedule?

Teachers set their own schedules and have their own key to the church/conservatory. Lessons are taught at SPMC Mondays through Saturdays and they will vary throughout the year.

Do you offer instruction year round?

Yes. Note, the conservatory allows the individual teachers to set their own schedules. In our context this is very important. Our conservatory has a certain number of dedicated, music degree seeking individuals, who will practice hard year round. In other cases, we are introducing individuals to music lessons. We don't want to overwhelm the students, so we do not set up scheduling from the top down.

Do you have regular recitals?

Yes. We have a conservatory Christmas and Spring recital. We also host the citywide music festival for our entire community, a huge outreach. Additionally, we encourage every studio teacher to host individual recitals at area nursing homes and other residential facilities as performance opportunities and a service to our community.

How do you determine which students should be in private and which in group lessons?

The individual teacher will determine this. He or she may do this for a variety of reasons including schedule and ability. Most of our lessons are individual.

For what instruments do you offer group lessons?

We don't have group lessons right now. These could be done however, for most instruments depending on the situation.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH



What is the oversight, support, and financial relationship between the church and conservatory?

The conservatory is a Board of our Church that is overseen by the Board of Elders (especially as it relates to music for the church.) However, a parish based music conservatory could be operated in the area of evangelism, education or missions as well.

Does SPMC maintain a separate office staff? Phone? Email?

No. Our Associate Pastor is the Administrator of the

Conservatory, our Financial Secretary is the Church's financial secretary. We overlap when it comes to phone and email. We have a separate phone number and email address but calls and messages come in through both.

OTHER



In what ways has SPMC become involved in the Council Bluffs community?

SPMC students play in many local entities. Nursing homes, churches, schools, homeless shelter, museums, grocery stores, bakeries, etc. etc. Anywhere we are welcome we play. We have supported local school's music departments, taught church's organists, networked, collaborated and partnered all over the community. SPMC hosts the citywide music festival for the Council Bluffs Music Teacher's Association which brings over 1,000 people through our

church/conservatory each year. SPMC has picked up our church and placed it right in the lap of the community, making it a household name.

Did you see a demand for a music conservatory before you started? If so, what signs indicated the demand? If not, what prompted you to expand beyond keyboard and guitar?

Yes, this is why we went forward. The piano and guitar lessons were offered as a gift and blessing. When the demand heightened, we had to get more serious. This was a blessing. It helped us grow bit by bit and not bite off more than we could chew.

What concerns did you have when you started? Did they turn out to be valid concerns?

No concerns. Some congregational members may have not understood why we were teaching music lessons in the church. Now they understand!

Discuss community outreach through the conservatory.

In the end, missions, evangelism and outreach are the primary reasons why we operate the Music Conservatory. While music education is indeed important and even vital, we do not want to lose sight of our primary goal of proclaiming the Gospel and reaching out through this system. Everything we do is evangelical and intentional. It is said regularly, "The Parish Based Music Conservatory should be the center for music development in every community." That means that our conservatory is here to show mercy and love and charity in relation to the support and development of music no matter what the entity. With this in mind, our conservatory has played a large role in supporting our local public school music departments, nursing homes, churches and other entities. In a very real way, we provide what the local public schools may lack in their music departments. In fact, some of the schools announce at their concerts that if students want to continue to work on their instrument in the summer, contact St. Paul's Music Conservatory. Also, recently we hosted a benefit concert for a local underfunded public school music department. The outreach, engagement and linkage that is created by these shows of kindness and collaboration cannot go unspoken. THE PARISH BASED MUSIC CONSERVATORY TAKES YOUR CHURCH WHERE YOUR CHURCH COULD OTHERWISE NEVER GO!

What do you know now that you wish you knew when you started this journey?

I know that our synod should have been encouraging every LCMS congregation to have a parish based music conservatory years ago.

What mistakes did you make that we should avoid?

Don't overthink. Don't get too technical and picky about every detail. Don't establish policies for the sake of policies. For a while our board gathered and got bogged down in micromanaging. Once the board sets policies it should get out of the way and take on a supporting role. With a good administrator and good teachers, there is not a lot a board needs to do but enjoy!

What did you do right that we should emulate?

We hand pick teachers. Don't advertise for teachers. Our teachers must be confessing, conservative Christians who are passionate about what we are doing. Ideally, we'll take as many LCMS members as possible. (About half of our teachers are our members.) We have rarely, if ever, had a problem with a teacher.

Would you begin SPMC if you had it to do over again?

Yes.

How might we make use of your development services and how is the cost for that arranged?

We are in the middle of establishing a synodical RSO that will take this work from SPMC and expand. For now, Pastor Sherrill is our development guy. He and Pastor Frank have been happy to serve congregations through meetings, phone conversations, SKYPE, personal visits and presentations. If travel is involved, just covering expenses is all we ask. If you would ask for more involved support, then an honorarium will be suggested at this time. More information will be forthcoming through the upcoming RSO.