

Explaining the AAM Application for Membership

by Victor Hill

For all of my thirty-three years as a member of AAM, I (along with many others) have been challenged regarding our application for membership, usually because arguably similar organizations operate as “send us your check, and you’re a member.” I offer here a rationale for why AAM uses the procedure we have established.

Voluntary organizations have procedures for membership that are rooted in the expectations they have of their members. I can illustrate from three specific societies to which I belong. 1. Some organizations are, by their very character, self-limiting. The small (about 150 members) Charles Williams Society is devoted to the work of this writer and thinker, whose name is hardly a household word. Only a person who has a serious interest in his work will even consider requesting membership, and the presence of *Charles Williams Society* on one’s c.v. carries no prestige (though it might occasionally serve to put individuals in contact with one another). One seeks membership in this society only because of a dedicated interest in this writer.

2. Other organizations have very specific purposes and goals, but no specific expectations of their members. One need not even be a mathematician or a teacher of mathematics to join the Mathematical Association of America; they will happily take dues from anyone who can afford to pay them. Of course the Association has journals and meetings, but these are intended for those who wish to take advantage of them; members who never read journals or attend meetings are just “along for the ride” (albeit a rather expensive one!), and their membership has little intrinsic importance except as it supports the Association financially.

3. Still other organizations, of which AAM is one, were established with specific expectations of their members; in our case, we look for persons who are active members of the Anglican communion or non-members working in a church or church-related institution of the Anglican tradition *whose musical ability and interest enables them to contribute toward the aims, standards, and objectives of the Association* (see our By-Laws). We are thus looking for people with certain commitments, not warm bodies who can pay the dues.

Because of the expectations that AAM has of its members, applicants are asked to answer two simple questions: why they seek membership and what they hope to contribute to the Association. The Board is not looking for any specific words or phrases here, merely a written indication that the applicant has thought about why membership matters to him or her and how the applicant is prepared to support the Association and its work. If this

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much writing seems onerous, the potential applicant is not likely to be much committed to the work of the Association, which is what the Association expects members to be.

The nominating and supporting letters are ancillary to the applicant's own statements; they should confirm the interest and willingness of the person to meet the expectations that the Association has of members, which is *active participation in the elevation, stimulation, and support of music and the allied arts in the Anglican communion, especially with regard to liturgy*. Persons who have difficulty in finding writers for nominating or seconding letters have consistently been helped by our Communications Officer, who provides names of members in the geographical area whenever possible.

Thus the application process is never intended to keep persons out of AAM; rather, it is designed to welcome into membership those who are eager to be active in and committed to the work of the Association.

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