



Amplification of organs



This note is intended to assist parishes and Diocesan Advisory Committees who are considering the use of amplification in a church building in order to address identified organ sound distribution issues

Is amplification appropriate?

The natural projection of organ sound into a building will result in the instrument being louder in some places than others, but usually audible throughout the building for most uses. The natural decay of sound in remote parts of a building is not, in itself, a reason to amplify organ sound, as an equal spread of sound would be artificial. If the organ is adequate for most events, amplification is probably unnecessary because some people might actually prefer to sit where it is quieter.

When the building is so large or the acoustic so difficult that this hinders good singing it may be more appropriate to consider a separate pipe section in the nave, located near the majority of the congregation.

Boosting the sound of a pipe organ with microphones to reinforce its volume may occasionally be appropriate if the organ does not speak well into **any** part of the building (for instance, where it is hidden in a chancel chamber) or where needs have changed since its installation (for instance, an instrument remote from a relocated choir).

Technical considerations

The purpose of an organ amplification system is to improve the distribution of sound, not to make it louder. Done well, it is not obvious that the organ is being amplified. The wide range of pitch and tone produced by an organ requires a system with different characteristics to systems used for amplifying speech or musical instruments in a band. An organ amplification system therefore needs to be addressed separately from other sound system issues, as well as taking account of loop system users.



The microphone(s) used to pick up the organ sound should be arranged to amplify only the organ. It should be set up so that the original organ sound can be heard with the amplified sound and should preserve the musical balance of the instrument. Once set up it should not need adjusting on a regular basis.

The amplification system should be connected to dedicated speakers, rather than using speakers associated with an existing sound system. Careful thought needs to be given to the placement of the speakers to ensure that the amplification is focused in areas where the existing sound from the organ is unsatisfactory.

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