

OF PIPES & PEDALS

St. Peter Lutheran Church
Organ Committee Update #1

We invite you to share our journey of learning about our organ, its problems, and possible solutions for the future.

Background

For the last few years, the Church Council and the Voters' Assembly have been made aware that our church organ and perhaps the balcony space need considerable work and/or repair, including the potential to possibly replace our existing pipe organ. Organ deterioration has been occurring more rapidly than many people realize. As we sit in the pews, we do not notice many of the organ's problems because of the skills of our organist. In the fall of 2019, a call went out seeking members of our congregation to serve on an organ committee. A committee was formed from both board representatives and members at large. The members of the committee are:

Don Burdo – Board of Education	Paul Moeller – Board of Trustees
Harry Claus – Member at Large	Rev. Dr. William Morris – Senior Pastor
David Earley – Board of Trustees	Andy Neuenfeldt – Board of Elders
Brian Heinlein – Music Director	Rockwell Scherzer – Member at Large
Brad Hubbell – Congregation Chair	Richard Schultz – Member at Large
Glenn Hubbell – Church Council	Mary Beth Strouse – Member at Large
Rev. Robert Koeppen – Member at Large	Ruth Wardin – Organist
Marilyn Ludgin – Member at Large	

Meeting Summary

The organ committee began meeting regularly in February, 2020. We began by educating ourselves on the workings of a pipe organ. We watched a number of videos about the pipe organ, including how it functions and how it is built. We studied the differences between various types of pipes, including strings, diapasons, flutes, and reeds. We also began reading numerous articles regarding the differences between pipe organs over the centuries. Through our discussions, we became aware of several reputable organ building companies. Our current pipe organ was built by Casavant Frères in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec.

At our second meeting, we met in the balcony to view the construction of our current organ and its limitations. Mr. Heinlein demonstrated some of the tonal problems of the organ, along with the organ's current mechanical failings. We discussed topics such as replacement vs. refurbishing, the costs associated with each, and the need to form a specific goal to direct the actions of our committee. Proposed drafts of a goal were reviewed and discussed. Our committee decided that we were not tasked with the process of financing the project, nor would we limit ourselves to a specific cost for an organ. Rather, we would work to recommend the best long-term solution to the congregation.

In March we discussed notes from our previous music director, Jonathan Mueller, regarding a meeting with a representative from the Casavant Organ Company about our existing instrument. The following main items were generally noted:

1. The organ is in need of much repair.
2. It was an “open stock” or “off the shelf” organ, not at all matched to our balcony and worship space.
3. Even in good repair it would not be considered optimum for our space and worship needs.

As a result, we asked Brian Heinlein to draft specifics as to what an ideal organ would be at St. Peter. The committee also adopted the following goal and guiding principles for us to focus our work:

Suggested Goal

The goal of our committee is to ascertain the condition of the St. Peter Lutheran Church organ. Then, in accord with its strengths and weaknesses, recommend to the congregation repairing and improving, and/or replacing it, possibly to the point of purchasing a new pipe organ.

Historical – Theological Basis for Goal

Since the 1500s, the prominent instrument to accompany worship in the Lutheran Church has been a pipe organ. An organ has excellently served our congregation, choirs, and assisting instrumentalists as we offer our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Its purposes are to lead the singing of the liturgy and hymns, to set the spirit of our worship throughout the church year, and to deepen our appreciation and understanding of the rich musical heritage of the Lutheran Church. We at St. Peter wish to continue in this tradition.

Guiding Principles to Achieve the Goal

The organ that is recommended:

- a. will need to match the size and acoustics of our worship space,
- b. will need the versatility and balance of sound for edifying worshippers through the song of the church,
- c. would be expected to serve the congregation for at least 100 years with proper care and maintenance, and
- d. will provide the best long-term value per dollar of the resources of the congregation.

(Note: The committee planned to have their work completed by the end of August, 2020, but due to Covid-19 and the scope of our work, this goal was not met.)

Our next report will identify the specific problems of our organ, share observations from an organ tour that members of our committee made over the summer, and discuss the need for an acoustical study of our sanctuary. Updates can also be viewed on our website at www.stpeterhemlock.org/organ.