OF PIPES & PEDALS

St. Peter Lutheran Church
Organ Committee Update #2

This is the second in a series of updates from the organ committee discussing our journey of learning about our organ, its problems, and possible solutions for the future. These reports can also be found on our website at www.stpeterhemlock.org/organ.

At our last organ meeting in March before the Covid stay-at-home orders put our organ discussions on hold, our committee reviewed a list of problems with our organ as identified by Irene Beethe, Bob Schluckbier, Ruth Wardin, Jonathan Mueller, Brian Heinlein, and representatives from the Casavant, Buzard, and Scott Smith organ companies. The following list was compiled:

Mechanical Concerns

- The control system that allows an organist to preset different combinations of sounds is no longer functioning. Attempts to repair it have been unsuccessful. Without this system, it is difficult for the organist to quickly change from one set of sounds to another.
- The leather in the windchests and other areas is over 40 years old. The organ is in need of a complete and comprehensive overhaul.
- A reoccurring cipher, a pipe that plays on its own, is getting progressively worse, indicating beginning problems with the valves in the windchests and failing leathers.
- The blower for the Swell division has made unusual sounds, indicating potential problems in the future.
- Key tops are coming unglued and pedal bushings are worn out. Both need refurbishing or replacing.

Tonal Concerns

- There are very few bass sounds in the instrument. The lack of large bass pipes results in a weak foundation sound to the organ and overbearing, dominant upper tones.
- The mixtures are too shrill and strident. This was the “in thing” for a short time when our organ was built.
- The number of reed stops in our organ is inadequate for the size of our church and our needs. With only one reed available on the keyboards, it is often too soft to be used as a solo stop and too loud to be used as an accompaniment stop.

Functional Concerns

- Due to pipe construction, some pipes do not stay in tune even after they have been tuned.

- The organ is not adequately sized for our church. Ordinarily, a larger instrument with a larger palate of sounds appropriate for liturgy, congregation singing, and choir accompaniment would have been built.
- There are no “in-between” (loud and soft) stops to accompany different sized congregations and choirs.
- To compensate for its size, the organ plays very loudly in the balcony in order to reach the congregation below. Since the pipes speak directly into the ears of the choir members, they are overwhelmed by the organ’s volume during the singing of hymns and liturgy.
- Accessibility problems make tuning pipes difficult. There are no walkways to get inside the organ due to the compact nature of the organ design.
- The placement of the organ console in a fixed location in the center of the balcony places limits on the flexibility of the balcony configuration and usage. It also makes it difficult for choir members (especially children) to see the chancel during the service. Having a moveable console that could be turned to face different directions or moved to the side of the balcony would allow for greater flexibility for balcony musicians.

Our next report will share observations from an organ tour that members of our committee made over the summer, and will discuss the need for an acoustical study of our sanctuary.